

# Yankees knock Twins out of the running

By Dave Campbell  
Associated Press  
Sports Writer

MINNEAPOLIS - A big home run by Ruben Sierra, a clutch 11th-inning hit by Alex Rodriguez and the New York Yankees are headed right back where most people figured - playing the Boston Red Sox for the AL pennant.

Sierra's three-run homer in the eighth inning tied it. Rodriguez doubled, alertly stole third base and scored the go-ahead run on a wild pitch by Kyle Lohse to lift the Yankees over the Minnesota Twins 6-5 on Saturday.

With this 3-1 win in the first-round playoff series, New York returned to Yankee Stadium - where the AL championship series opens Tuesday. Curt Schilling is likely to start for the Red Sox against Mike Mussina, both on ample rest.

The Twins led 5-1 behind ace Johan Santana before another New York rally. The Yankees came from behind for all three wins in this series after setting a major league record with 61 comeback victories during the regular season. Nine of those were from deficits of four runs or more.

For the second straight year, New York handed Minnesota a first-round playoff elimination in four games and advanced to the AL championship series to face Boston.

The Yankees won that matchup with Red Sox last October on Aaron Boone's homer in the 11th inning of Game 7. Boston was 11-8 against the Yankees this

year.

Winning pitcher Mariano Rivera, who blew a rare postseason save chance in the eighth inning of Game 2, retired all six batters he faced to finish a stalling performance by the Yankees bullpen. After Javier Vazquez allowed five runs in five innings, Esteban Loaiza and Tom Gordon each threw two scoreless innings.

Lohse pitched a perfect 10th and started the 11th by handing Derek Jeter his fourth strikeout of the afternoon, but Rodriguez laced a double down the left-field line and stole third base on unsuspecting catcher Pat Borders - who didn't throw.

Then Lohse bounced a pitch to Gary Sheffield that skipped past Borders, allowing Rodriguez to race home with the winning run. That wild pitch silenced the Metrodome, where fans thought their AL Central champions would do better this year against the AL East winners. The Twins were on the verge of a two games-to-none lead Wednesday night when closer Joe Nathan failed to hold a one-run lead in the 12th inning.

The three-time champion Twins missed several chances to score in this game and head into another winter unsure how many players they'll be able to afford next year.

Light-hitting Henry Blanco's leadoff homer and Lew Ford's two-out, two-run double broke it open against Vazquez in the fifth, giving the Twins a four-run cushion.

Santana was in the same situation last year, needing a strong

performance to keep the Twins' season going. He gave up six runs and failed to survive the fourth inning, and the Yankees won that series in four games to advance to the ALCS.

Throwing on short rest for the first time in his major league career, Santana - who put at least one runner on in each of his seven shutout innings against New York in Game 1 - clearly wasn't strong.

Seventeen of his first 34 pitches were balls, and the veteran Yankees smartly and patiently worked the count deep against the 25-year-old left-hander.

Santana, who went 13-0 in his final 15 regular-season starts and led the league in strikeouts and ERA, did just what he was asked to do: He left with the lead and let the bullpen do the rest.

Grant Balfour pitched two perfect innings, and Sierra's homer was New York's first extra-base hit. But the first three Yankees reached against Juan Rincon in the eighth, with Bernie Williams driving in Gary Sheffield with a single to make it 5-2.

One out later, Sierra crushed a 2-2 pitch into the folded-up seats in right-center field as Jeter and Rodriguez jumped up off the bench in celebration. After John Olerud's double, Joe Nathan replaced Rincon - who slammed his cap in disgust upon reaching the dugout.

Notes: @ CF Torii Hunter made it look like he lost Rodriguez's third-inning flyball in the Metrodome ceiling before easily catching it in medium center field - forcing Jeter back to first. Both Hunter and Jeter flashed big

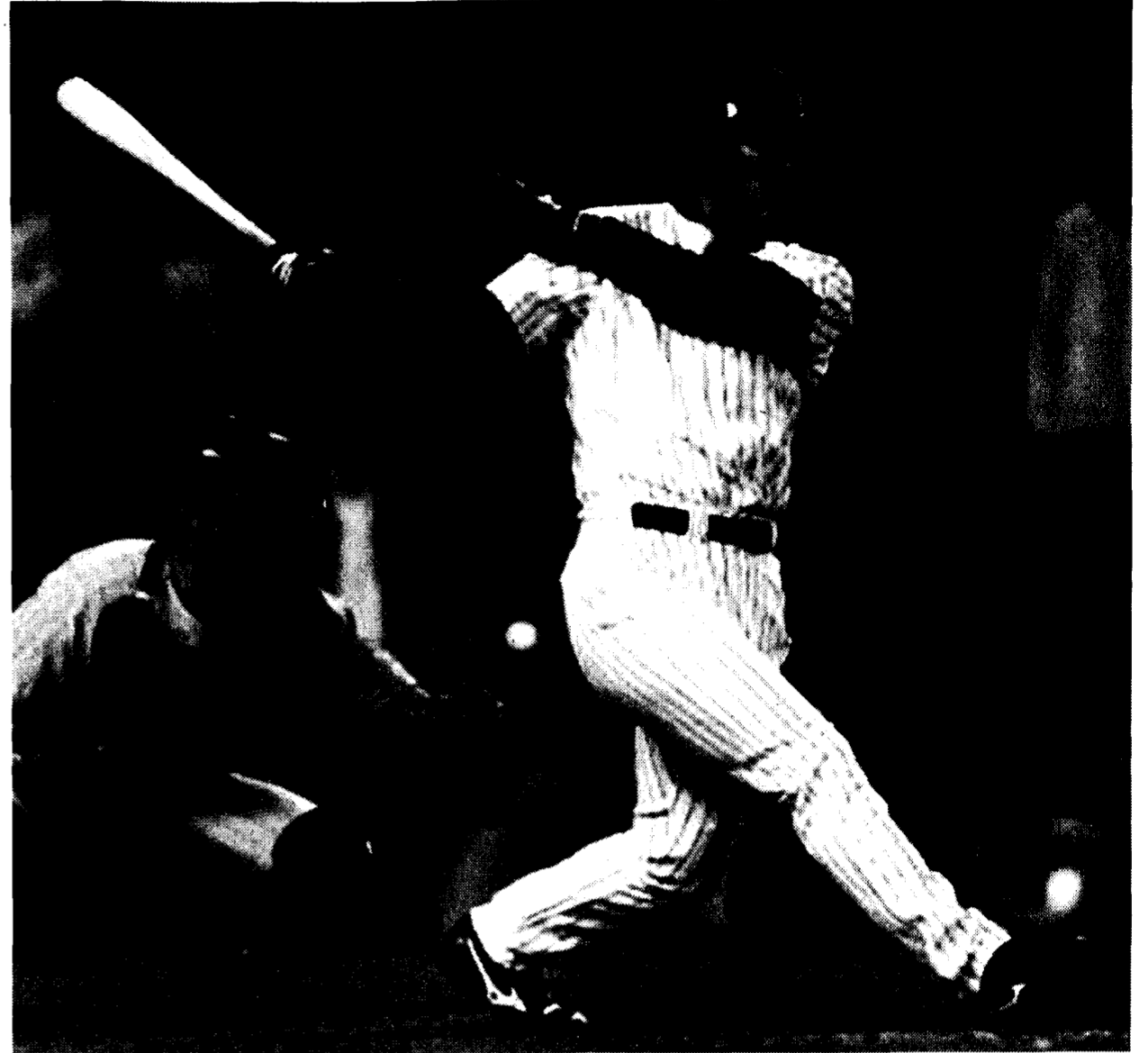


Photo by Mike Segar, Reuters. Courtesy of Yahoo Images

Japanese player Hideki Matsui of the New York Yankees hits the game-winning sacrifice fly against the Minnesota Twins, in the 12th inning of Game 2 of their American League Division Series, at Yankee Stadium in New York, October 6, 2004. Twins catcher is Henry Blanco. The Yankees won 7-6 to tie the best-of-five series at one game apiece.

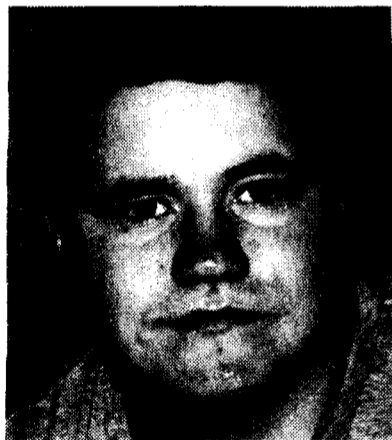
grins as they retreated. ... In the fourth, Sheffield searched for Justin Morneau's fly ball and made the same arms-out, palms-

up motion Hunter did - only this was no decoy. Miguel Cairo spotted the ball sailing over Sheffield's head and ran all the

way from second base to pick it up as Hunter scored to put the Twins up 2-1.

## Cap Times staff picks the big winners in NFL

Herb Smith, Staff Writer



Oct. 17  
**Carolina @ Philadelphia**  
Carolina  
**Denver @ Oakland**  
Denver

**Seattle @ New England**  
New England  
**Pittsburgh @ Dallas**  
Dallas

Oct. 24  
**Tennessee @ Minnesota**  
Tennessee  
**NY Jets @ New England**  
New England  
**Buffalo @ Baltimore**  
Baltimore  
**Dallas @ Green Bay**  
Green Bay

Christian Torres, Staff Writer

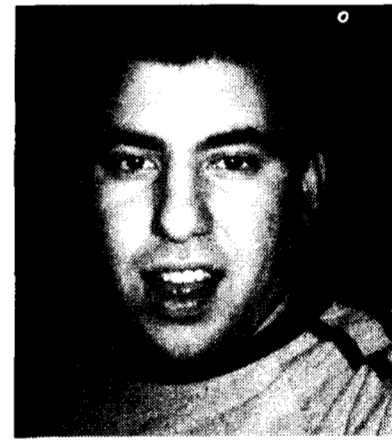


Oct. 17  
**Carolina @ Philadelphia**  
Philadelphia  
**Denver @ Oakland**  
Oakland

**Seattle @ New England**  
New England  
**Pittsburgh @ Dallas**  
Pittsburgh

Oct. 24  
**Tennessee @ Minnesota**  
Minnesota  
**NY Jets @ New England**  
New England  
**Buffalo @ Baltimore**  
Baltimore  
**Dallas @ Green Bay**  
Green Bay

Dan Berger, Business Manager



Oct. 17  
**Carolina @ Philadelphia**  
Philadelphia  
**Denver @ Oakland**  
Oakland

**Seattle @ New England**  
Seattle  
**Pittsburgh @ Dallas**  
Pittsburgh

Oct. 24  
**Tennessee @ Minnesota**  
Minnesota  
**NY Jets @ New England**  
New England  
**Buffalo @ Baltimore**  
Baltimore  
**Dallas @ Green Bay**  
Dallas

## Whalen makes waves in the WNBA

By Donna Tommelleo  
Associate Press  
Sports Writer

UNCASVILLE, Conn. - The Connecticut Sun spent the first month of the WNBA season just getting to know each other. With five rookies and two offseason acquisitions, coach Mike Thibault had a team full of fresh faces.

The team has found some chemistry now and is starting to click.

Rookie guard Lindsay Whalen set a team playoff mark with nine assists and had 11 points, two steals and two blocked shots to lead the Sun to a 68-64 win Friday night over the Seattle Storm in the opening game of the WNBA Finals.

"I think our team has felt all year that they had chance to do this," Thibault said. "And inside our locker room that's all that

counts."

Whalen helped shut down Storm star Sue Bird, who finished with six turnovers and had 12 points on 4-for-11 shooting.

"I think it took us time to gel and time to get to know ourselves on the court as well as off," Whalen said. "We know we're a good team, as long as we play the right way and share the ball we should be in position."

Game 2 is at Seattle on Sunday, and Game 3, if necessary, will also be there Tuesday.

Many of the 9,341 fans in the sellout crowd had watched Bird star at UConn, where she won two NCAA titles. She drew a deafening roar during introductions, but after the opening tip, the Sun took her out of her comfort zone.

"They forced us to do things that we were not necessarily wanting to do or used to doing," Bird said. "More than anything I thought

their transition killed us."

Whalen, who led Minnesota to its first Final Four appearance last season, kept the Sun's transition game in high gear. She also set the tone for the solid



Photo courtesy of Google Images

Lindsay Whalen moves around an opponent, heading for the goal. The rookie player is making history for the Connecticut Sun in the WNBA.

defense which kept Lauren Jackson, the league's leading scorer, in check for most of the night.

The Sun had a Finals-record 15 steals, blocked six shots and had

just enough of a cushion to hold off Seattle's late rally from a 16-point deficit.

The Sun took advantage of their only home game in the beat-of-three game series, drawing a raucous sellout crowd that included Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

"It was live today. It made it easier to play," Sun forward Nykesha Sales said. "There was a lot of energy, a lot of excitement."

Katie Douglas led Connecticut with 18 points on 6-of-11 shooting and made two free throws with 16 seconds left.

"This is such a huge game for our franchise and our team," Douglas said. "We're on a journey to do something special."

Betty Lennox had 17 points for Seattle, and Jackson finished with 16 - six in the closing minutes.

The Sun harassed Jackson throughout the first half, bumping

her off her cuts and doubling up when she got the ball. But Jackson made the most of her few free looks, draining both of her 3-point attempts, and finished with eight points at the half.

"(Jackson) got really involved in the latter part of the game. She got past our guards a little bit," Sun coach Mike Thibault said. "We're going to have to do a better job of that."

Jackson said she's used to being roughed up by defenses but was unable to counter the Sun defenders.

"It was pretty frustrating. It didn't feel like I got involved at all. But it doesn't matter," Jackson said, "because the next game I'm going off."

She has dedicated the finals to the memory of her grandmother, Irene, who died last month.

"I just have to focus on getting in there and being tough inside," Jackson said.