

Rangers open at home vs Phillies

Written by Administrator
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ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Cliff Lee has pitched in a season opener and a World Series in Texas. Neither of those games was for the Philadelphia Phillies.

The ace left-hander starts Monday for Philadelphia in an interleague season opener that will be his first game in the Rangers' home ballpark since pitching for Texas in the 2010 World Series.

That was a year after the then-reigning AL Cy Young Award winner was Cleveland's opening day loser at Texas, months before being traded and making a World Series trip with the Phillies.

Texas sends first-time starter Tanner Scheppers to the mound instead of Yu Darvish, the ace who is on the disabled list because of neck stiffness but felt good after a 32-pitch bullpen session Sunday.

Scheppers, a converted setup man, will be the first pitcher to make his first major league start in a season opener since Fernando Valenzuela in 1981 for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"I did not hear that stat. I guess there's a stat for everything," said the 27-year-old Scheppers, also not familiar with Valenzuela's unique windup that included looking skyward before delivering the pitch.

The Rangers acquired Lee in a trade with Seattle midway through the 2010 season when they won their first American League championship. He then returned to Philly for a \$125 million, five-year deal in free agency — the Rangers offered about \$136 million over six years.

"It was fun to be in the World Series there. I had a lot of fun," Lee told reporters about his time in Texas before the team broke camp from Florida. "We did some things that had never been done there. They've built off that and been a pretty solid team ever since."

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Texas made it back to the World Series in 2011, when the Phillies lost in the NL Division Series in their last postseason appearance. The Rangers also played in the 2012 AL wild-card game before losing a wild-card tiebreaker last season.

The Rangers, marking the 20th anniversary of their stadium that opened in 1994, no longer will have Hall of Fame pitcher Nolan Ryan sitting in the first row. He resigned as team CEO and sold his ownership stake after last season and is now an executive adviser for the Houston Astros, another team he pitched for and where his oldest son is the president.

There are significant changes in the lineup as well, with free agent addition Shin-Soo Choo leading off and Prince Fielder batting third. The slugger, acquired in a trade that sent All-Star second baseman Ian Kinsler to Detroit, hit a towering homer in his first home at-bat during an exhibition game Thursday night.

Their first real game comes against Lee.

"My focus is not going to be on he pitched for us and he did this, my focus is going to be on what it's always on, when we face a guy of Cliff Lee's caliber, we have to be on top of our game," said Texas manager Ron Washington, beginning his eighth season. "It's going to be a challenge. ... As tough as we know it will be, it's not going to be easy for Cliff either. That's what I'm thinking."

Scheppers last year in his first full major league season pitched in 76 games, the most appearances by a right-hander in Rangers history. He was 6-2 with a 1.88 ERA.

The Rangers had long planned to give Scheppers a chance this spring to earn a spot in the rotation. They certainly had no expectation of him starting the opener, but Darvish and left-handers Matt Harrison and Derek Holland are all on the disabled list.

"I have got little things here and there that are a little different," Scheppers said. "Other than that, just go out and pitch."