

Ben Whone shuts down Ridgefield

From B1

the team," he said. "It was a true team effort. Usually it's three or four kids, but I think that everybody chipped in tonight and it was really good to see."

Also in District I action at Vets Park, Babe Spinola, did not fare as well against Stamford Federal. Led by the superb pitching of Andy Paul, Stamford won 12-0 in only four innings. Paul allowed only one hit and walked only two in his four innings of work.

"[Andy] was on top of his game," Stamford coach Gary Harper said. "He threw well, threw strikes, had good location, and just made sure that he got ahead in the count."

Norwalk coach Matt Hefferan said that he told his team to be aggressive against the quality pitching. "Just swing the bats," he said. "If he throws it over the plate, you've got to hit it."

Stamford wasted no time giving Paul some runs to work with, scoring four in the top of the first inning, two courtesy of a Noah Fine single to left.

Paul helped his own cause in the next inning by bombing an RBI ground-rule double to right center and later scoring on a wild pitch to give his team a 7-0 lead.

Norwalk finally managed a hit off Paul in the top of



Hour photo/BEN GANCOSOS
Chris Winthrop of the Norwalk Babe Spinola Little League all-star team delivers a pitch during Thursday night's 9-10 year-old District I tournament game against Stamford Federal at Veterans Park in Norwalk. Federal won, 12-0, in four innings.

the third, but he quickly struck out the next batter to end the inning.

Stamford put the game out of reach in the bottom of the inning. Dave Lacture led off with an inside-the-park home run and a two-RBI double by Gregory Osbourne made the score 11-0. Osbourne later touched home on a wild pitch to cap the scoring.

Harper was unsurprised by his team's offensive firepower.

"Once in a while we see

this," he said. "We're pretty aggressive swingers and we like to go after the first pitch if it's a strike. If we get the bat on the ball we make pretty good contact."

Hefferan, meanwhile, could only praise Stamford's performance.

"The pitcher was good," he said. "It seemed like everyone was tired tonight. I don't know why, it's a hot summer day. They were just more prepared than we were."

Marut helps Wilton stop Norwalk

From B1

Wilton had a 3-0 lead. That brought up Waterhouse, who promptly ripped an RBI-double to stretch Wilton's lead to 4-0. After another walk Bruno was pulled in favor of Taylor Cohen. Cohen allowed another run on a groundout before retiring the side. However, the damage had been done as Norwalk just couldn't muster anything off of Marut all night.

"We just didn't do the fundamentals well tonight," Norwalk coach Steve Brueski said. "We couldn't get anything going offensively, and our defense and pitching was very spotty."

Cohen pitched effectively for Norwalk in relief, tossing four shutout innings while only allowing two hits. However, Marut continued to shut down Norwalk

on the mound. He allowed one out two out base runner in the bottom of the third before striking out Zach Ruther to end the frame.

Norwalk got its first hit of the game in the bottom of the fourth on a two out double by Bruno but Marut retired the next batter to end the inning. Norwalk tried to get something going in the bottom of the fifth inning after putting runners on first and second with one out. Pinch-hitter Tommy Fullam walked and Joe Reddock hit a ground ball to shortstop. No out was recorded on the play as Fullam was ruled safe at second base. Yet, as he did all game long Marut calmly retired the next two batters and ended Norwalk's scoring threat.

In the bottom of the sixth, Bruno singled with two outs for his second hit of the game and Scott Merritt

was hit by a pinch before Marut got Matt Mola to groundout to second base to end the inning. Marut retired Norwalk easily in the bottom of the seventh to put the finishing touches on his complete game.

Wilton will try to keep rolling this weekend as it plays Brideport in a three-game series. Norwalk will look to bounce back in a huge three-game series against Zone IV power Trumbull.

"The win would have been nice to have tonight but I would much rather get a loss out of the way before this weekend," Brueski said. "Hopefully we got the letdown out of the way before playing Trumbull."

Norwalk and Trumbull, two of the top teams in zone IV, will square off in a doubleheader on Saturday in Trumbull.

Rays turning AL East upside down

Take control of first place after sweep of the Boston Red Sox

By FRED GOODALL

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Pennant fever is alive in the oddest of places.

Ticket lines are longer, television ratings are rising and the young, budget-minded Tampa Bay Rays are in first place in the AL East, looking down on the big-spending Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees.

"First-place Rays halfway to history," read one newspaper headline. Three days later, the surprise owners of baseball's best record awakened to "Lowering The Broom," "How Sweep It Is."

"It's a really good feeling," manager Joe Maddon said after Wednesday night's 7-6 victory over Boston gave the Rays (52-32) their second home sweep of the Red Sox and a 3 1/2-game lead in the division. "We've worked to get to this point, to earn that right to have that feeling, so now we have to maintain it."

The Rays open a series at Tropicana Field on Friday night against Kansas City, hoping to build on what has created this stunning turnaround: consistent pitching, improved defense and a knack for producing just enough offense.

This team has not only escaped the cellar and climbed into playoff contention. It is proving it can compete with baseball's elite.

By rallying from a three-run, seventh-inning deficit to hand the Red Sox their fifth straight defeat, the Rays became the first team to sweep two series of three or more games from Boston in the same season since the Yankees in 2001.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Tampa Bay is the first team other than New York or Boston to lead the AL East this late in a season since 2000, when Toronto led on July 6 before finishing third.

"I'd be surprised if they're not in the hunt the whole way," Boston's Mike Lowell said, noting the Rays are getting solid pitching from a young rotation headed by Scott Kazmir, James Shields and Matt Garza.

"Not to take away from their offense, but without

pitching, you can't slug every night," Lowell added. "Their pitching keeps them in games."

And when the score is close, the Rays feel they will find a way to win.

They are 16-10 in one-run games. And, it's not as if they've been feasting on bad teams while becoming the second club in major league history to have the best record in the majors this deep into a season after finishing with the worst mark the previous year.

Of Tampa Bay's first 84 games, 56 were against teams with winning records at the time, and 69 have been against teams currently above .500. Among the club's seven sweeps, six have come at home, with the AL West-leading Angels and NL Central-leading Cubs among the victims.

"There's a long way to go," center fielder B.J. Upton said.

Yes, but the Rays, who have withstood injuries and suspensions, are confident they can stay in the race.

During a recent visit to Tropicana Field, principal owner Stuart Sternberg said he is open to the prospect of making moves before the trade deadline to bolster the roster.

"It's got to be something that's right. We're still long-term greedy, which is a motto from one of my old businesses, and what that means is that you can't completely mortgage your future," Sternberg said. "But by the same token, you don't necessarily get a lot of opportunities to take a real good cut at a fat pitch, so to speak."

The Rays began the season with an opening-day payroll of \$43.8 million, second lowest in the majors.

Although attendance has lagged much of the year, it is picking up with the team in contention. The three-game set against Boston drew 101,305, the highest figure for a weekday series since the club's inaugural season in 1998. Wednesday's sellout of 36,048 was the fourth at Tropicana Field this year.

After averaging 17,671 for the first 32 home dates, the team has drawn 28,820 a game over the last 14. Figures are up 38.5 percent overall, the largest increase in the majors.

On the field, the Rays have thrived despite not having an obvious pick for the All-Star game.

Kazmir and relievers J.P. Howell and Dan Wheeler



AP photo
Matt Garza and the pitching staff are one of the reasons why the Rays are in first place in the AL East.

have had strong first halves. Catcher Dioner Navarro merits consideration and rookie third baseman Evan Longoria has had a major impact since being promoted from the minors.

Longoria drove in three runs Wednesday night, joining Fred Lynn (1975) and Devon White (1987) as the only rookies in the past 50 years to have at least 15 homers, 20 doubles and 50 RBIs by the All-Star break.

He made a clutch defensive play to help seal the middle game of the series, then delivered a two-run double during the six-run seventh that helped the Rays overcome a three-run deficit in the finale.

"We felt like we were going to win that game somehow. Why? Just because we've got that feeling about us right now. We believe," Maddon said.

"Our guys are playing with a very high level of ability and emotion. When you get to that level, when you really start trusting and believing ... then you can do things like we did tonight."

Boston's David Ortiz thinks it would be good for baseball if the Rays, 6-0 against the Red Sox at Tropicana Field vs. 0-6 at Fenway Park, can remain in contention for the rest of the summer.

At the same time, the slugger believes the experience of the Red Sox and Yankees eventually will prevail.

"There's a lot of games left. One way or another, (the Yankees) know how to figure it out. We know how to figure it out," Ortiz said.

"I'm not saying that they will drop, but if you go by the numbers, that's normally what happens. The guys with more experience at the end of the year take over."

Lester lifts Sox past Yankees

From B1

New York went quietly after that and lost for the fourth time in five games. A day after the Yankees scored 18 runs, the sellout crowd had little to cheer — Rodriguez, whose friendship with Madonna has made for tabloid headlines, heard scattered boos after striking out.

Pettitte (9-6) never looked comfortable and lasted just 4 2-3 innings as his six-game winning streak came ended.

Pettitte shouted at himself as he walked off the mound after giving up two runs in the first inning. He slipped to 15-7 against the Red Sox — even minus injured David Ortiz, the starters in Boston's lineup were hitting a combined .359 lifetime against him.

Almost from the get-go, Pettitte was in trouble.

Dustin Pedroia and J.D. Drew singled with one out in the first and Manny Ramirez hit a grounder that could have been an inning-ending double play. But Jeter's relay skipped into the stands, scoring a run, and Mike Lowell followed with an RBI single.

A sacrifice bunt by Julio Lugo set up Jacoby Ellsbury's bloop, two-run double in the second for a 4-0 lead.

Lugo added a sacrifice fly in the fourth, Lowell had a sacrifice fly in the fifth and Jason Varitek snapped an 0-for-19 slump with an RBI single in the eighth.

Crisp hit leadoff singles in his first two at-bats and scored both times in his first action since serving a five-game suspension for his part in a Tampa Bay-Boston brawl last month.

Notes: Ramirez singled to break an 0-for-12 rut. ... Yankees OF Melky Cabrera singled, ending a career-worst 0-for-19 slump. ... Pedroia extended his hitting streak to 11



AP photo
John Lester allowed just five hits to lift the Red Sox to a 7-0 win over the Yankees Thursday night in New York.

games. ... Injured Yankees OF Hideki Matsui (left knee) felt sore following rehab and probably won't take batting practice until after the weekend.

The Boss to attend All-Star game

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — The Boss plans to be in New York for the All-Star game later this month.

Yankees owner George Steinbrenner said Thursday he will be in attendance for the July 15 game, which is one of the featured events during the final season at the current Yankee Stadium.

"I'm looking forward to it," Steinbrenner said at the Yankees' spring training complex.

Steinbrenner has kept a lower profile in recent years, and turned much of the Yankees' daily operation over to his sons, Hank and Hal Steinbrenner. But he still is involved with his team, normally working in his Tampa office four or five days a week.

Steinbrenner will celebrate his 78th birthday Friday with his family in Florida.

Mets put Castillo on 15-day DL

From B1

gling a little mentally to try to get through it," Manuel said. "So this might help get it out of the way, get healthy and then be ready to go. I think he was ready to get some answers to what was going on."

The Mets, who demoted reliever Carlos Muniz on Wednesday night, purchased the contracts of outfielder Chris Aguila and second baseman Argenis Reyes from Triple-A New Orleans.

Aguila was batting .288 with 17 homers and 43 RBIs in the minors after going 1-for-6 with the Mets last month, while Reyes was batting .290 with 11 doubles, 13 steals and 22 RBIs in the minors.

The moves give the Mets bench help while they wait for outfielder Moises Alou, who turned 42 on Thursday, to return from a strained left calf that has sidelined him since June 13. Alou's target date has twice been pushed back due to poor weather that has prevented him from getting rehab at-bats, and the team scrapped a scheduled weekend rehab stint with Double-A

Binghamton in favor of Alou working out in New York.

Under the revised scenario, team spokesman Jay Horwitz said Alou will be re-evaluated Monday and Manuel said he might be

back before the All-Star break. Alou is batting .347 in 15 games with nine RBIs and has been on the DL three times.

"We didn't want to rush him into playing games," Horwitz said.

Pettitte to be called in Clemens case

By RONALD BLUM

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Yankees pitcher Andy Pettitte could be called to testify in Roger Clemens' federal defamation suit against Brian McNamee as part of the trainer's attempt to dismiss the case.

Clemens contends McNamee defamed him when the trainer, who worked for both pitchers, told Pettitte in 1999 or 2000 that Clemens had used HGH and in 2003 or 2004 that Clemens had used steroids.

Among the assertions McNamee's lawyers made in a motion filed late Wednesday is that Clemens should have known long before the Mitchell Report was released in December that McNamee had made the statements to Pettitte. Because of that, McNamee's

lawyers say Clemens' suit was filed after the statute of limitations had expired.

McNamee repeated many of his accusations against Clemens to baseball investigator George Mitchell and again this year to a congressional committee. Clemens sued McNamee in January.

"It was conscious avoidance on Clemens' part not to understand Pettitte and McNamee were talking about him, and therefore the statute of limitations started to run much earlier than the congressional period," Richard Emery, one of McNamee's lawyers said.

Unless the timetable is altered, Clemens has 30 days to respond to McNamee's motion, which asked that the case be thrown out or moved from Houston to New York.