

RAYS CLIPS



August 19, 2010

Tampa Bay Rays complete three-game sweep of Texas Rangers with 8-6 win

By Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer

Evan Longoria racks up three hits and four RBIs as the Rays beat the Rangers 8-6 to complete a confidence-building sweep of a potential playoff opponent.

ST. PETERSBURG - Evan Longoria says he comes to the ballpark feeling a certain amount of pressure to produce, to find a way - offensively or defensively - to help the Rays win.

"Every day," he said, smiling.

That's what comes with being a three-time All-Star, a face of the franchise and, more recently, the cleanup hitter. And though Longoria had battled a slump for much of the past month, he has picked a great time to put it all together.

Longoria racked up three hits and four RBIs Wednesday, including his first homer in three weeks, as the Rays beat the Rangers 8-6 to earn a confidence-building three-game sweep over a potential playoff opponent in front of 19,413 at Tropicana Field.

"We were functioning on all different cylinders," manager Joe Maddon said. "When you draw it up in the beginning, this is what it's supposed to look like."

Tampa Bay got a strong seven-inning outing from right-hander James Shields and boasted typically sharp defense. But to have Longoria pick up eight RBIs in a series in which the entire lineup seemed to click can mean a lot to the Rays (74-46), still tied with the Yankees atop the AL East.

"I go into slumps or times when I'm getting the pitches I know I can hit and I'm not hitting them," Longoria said. "Then you get into a series like this last one, where it seems like every time I swing the bat, I'm hitting it on the barrel, and it's finding a gap or finding a hole.

"This was a big series for me; hopefully I can continue."

Longoria had plenty of help. There was Shields (11-11), who went seven innings for the second time in his past 10 starts. Like his dominating performance against the Yankees two weeks ago, the key was his fastball command and ability to repeat his delivery.

"He's gotten his confidence back," B.J. Upton said. "When he's that way, he's a very good pitcher."

There was the top of the lineup, which was at the top of its game. Upton had two hits, including a homer, and both Jason Bartlett and Carl Crawford reached base twice. The 1-through-4 hitters scored 18 of the team's 24 runs in this series.

"Our offense has been hit or miss now and then," Bartlett said. "So it's nice this time of year to get things jelling."

And to have Longoria there to clean up. Maddon said the difference has been hitting "his pitch" instead of taking it or fouling off. As a result, Longoria, who entered the series with four RBIs in his past 14 games, doubled that total in the sweep, and his 16th homer snapped a 19-game drought.

"When your big guys become your big guys at the right time, it definitely changes the complexion of the night," Maddon said.

The Rays acknowledged that Texas was without some key players, such as Michael Young and Nelson Cruz.

"We'll be better equipped the next time we see them," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "They beat us, I make no excuse for that. Just so happens that sometime down the line, we see these guys again, then come ask me that question and see what happens. Stay tuned."

Joe Smith can be reached at joesmith@sptimes.com.

Rays vs. playoff contenders

Yankees

(current
AL wild card)

6-5

Twins

(AL Central
leader)

5-3

Rangers

(AL West
leader)

4-2

Tampa Bay Rays get swagger back in sweep of Texas Rangers

By Gary Shelton, Times Sports Columnist

If Tampa Bay's series against the Texas Rangers was a playoff preview, fans can start dreaming big. Times columnist Gary Shelton is impressed.

ST. PETERSBURG

This is who they can be. This is what they can do. This is how they should play.

For three games, the Rays were everything you ever wanted. They hit. They pitched. They ran the bases. They played defense. They closed out games. They raised a pretty good opponent like a piñata and spent three days whacking at it.

Pretty much they reminded the world why they have the best record in baseball, along with the Yankees.

This was the Rays at their best, at their most complete. Put it this way: If their series against the Texas Rangers really *was* a preview of the playoffs, then the Rays' response can be summed up like this:

Bring it on.

For three days, the Rays took the Rangers' lunch money. They outscored the Rangers 24-11. They hit .327 with three homers, two triples and eight doubles. They got three fine starting performances from David Price, Matt Garza and James Shields. They got two fine finishing performances from Rafael Soriano. They coaxed Evan Longoria's bat out of a coma and B.J. Upton's out of the morgue.

They came from behind to beat Cliff Lee. They shut down the dangerous Josh Hamilton, holding him to a 1-for-10 series. They grabbed a piece of first place. They got back Carlos Peña. They managed not to lose Jason Bartlett despite Bartlett lowering his helmet like Mike Alstott at the goal line.

And they won.

And won.

And won again.

So, how has *your* week been?

In other words, the Rays have rarely been more impressive. It was the first time the Rays have swept a first-place team since May 2008. It ran the team's record against the Yankees, Twins and Rangers - the rest of the AL playoff field if the postseason began today - to a combined 15-10.

"It says that if we put together all aspects of our game, we're pretty dangerous," said Shields, whose own performance suggested he isn't as close to losing his spot in the rotation as some fans would suggest. "When we hit and pitch the way we did this series, we're hard to beat."

And if this really was a playoff preview? "It's too early to talk about that," centerfielder Upton said, "but I like our chances."

Of course, the challenge for the Rays will be to keep it up. For a team that has won as consistently as this one, the journey has been fairly inconsistent. There are too many sub-.250 hitters in the lineup, and the hitting fades in and out, and Shields has struggled.

That's why this series was so important. It suggests the Rays may be at their best at the most important time of the season.

Take Longoria, for instance. It had been 19 games (and 75 at-bats) since he had a home run. In his previous 22 games, Longoria had hit only .214 and had only nine RBIs.

Against the Rangers, however, Longoria seemed to find his stroke. He was 7-for-12 with eight RBIs and five extra-base hits.

Upton? He was fairly dangerous himself. He hit .385 against the Rangers, and over his past nine games, he's hitting .357. His overall average is still only .243, but that's as high as it has been since May 1.

Just to be fair, it should be mentioned that the Rangers limped into Tropicana Field. They played without Nelson Cruz. They played without Ian Kinsler. They played the last two games without Michael Young.

"If this were the playoffs, I guess we'd be moving on," Longoria said, grinning. "We were pretty good in all aspects. But we know if we play them again, they'll be a different team. Still, if we can play like we did, it's going to be a fun stretch run."

Looking back, maybe that's why this series looked so good. There have been so many moments when things haven't looked smooth or powerful or dangerous. Just wondering, but has a team that won 74 of its first 120 games ever had so many grumbling fans?

A series like this can change things. Ask yourself: When is the last series where the Rays looked this good. Maybe back in April, when they beat Boston four times in a row, back before the Red Sox were so beaten up. But in that series, the Rays hit only .204. And again, it was April.

"I think everyone at this point understands that the games are really starting to become big," Longoria said. "These home series are becoming even more important. We need to win when we're at home."

The key, of course, is the hitting. The Rays are going to play good defense. They're going to get good starting pitching. The middle relief was wobbly the past three games - the only hiccup in the sweep - but the late-inning relief is deadly.

If the Rays are going to keep it up, they need to keep swinging. If Longoria and Upton can keep it up, the Rays can win the East yet.

And, yeah, it could be a fun stretch run.

Tampa Bay Rays' B.J. Upton extends hot August stretch

By Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG - CF **B.J. Upton** continued his hot month with another big game Wednesday against the Rangers.

Upton's 404-foot solo homer in the fifth extended his hitting streak to a season-high nine games, and manager **Joe Maddon** said it sounded off the bat like it does when he "hits it right."

"It was wonderful to watch," Maddon said. "We want to get him back to that mode."

In Upton's streak, he has done plenty right in hitting .353 (12-for-34), saying it's a product of "making things simple" and not thinking too much.

"I've seen him really grow up over the last month," Maddon said. "I've seen him really mentally take his game to another level, and I really enjoy watching it."

Maddon also said Upton's defense is still among the best, and he's making better decisions on the basepaths. Upton had two steals Wednesday, giving him 35 on the season, and alertly advanced to third on a wild pitch in the sixth, allowing him to score on LF **Carl Crawford**'s sacrifice fly.

"He's getting to the point now where he's in the present tense all the time," Maddon said. "Athletes like that, when they learn to be in the present tense all the time, good things happen."

CLOSE CALL: There was a scary moment for the Rays in the ninth, when SS **Jason Bartlett** slid headfirst into third on a steal attempt and smacked his head on the left leg of Rangers 3B **Jorge Cantu**.

Bartlett stayed on the ground for a couple minutes and was attended to by Maddon and assistant athletic trainer **Paul Harker** before getting up and staying in the game. Bartlett scored on a sacrifice fly by 3B **Evan Longoria**. Other than being sore, Bartlett felt fine afterward and hopes it won't linger into today.

"I wanted to lay there at first, because obviously it hurt," Bartlett said. "But then I wasn't sure what happened. As I gathered myself I felt like I could get up. I was still dizzy when I was getting up, but it kind of wore off."

It has been a rough series for Bartlett, who also collided with Rangers 2B **Andres Blanco** in Tuesday's game while trying to advance to second base.

"I've been lucky," Bartlett said, smiling. "I'll have to wear a football helmet out there."

MEDICAL MATERS: Maddon said RHPs **Jeff Niemann** and **Wade Davis** did well in their bullpen sessions Wednesday, passing another test in their rehab from right shoulder strains. Niemann and Davis will throw in a simulated game Friday in Oakland, with target return dates of Aug. 23 and 25 in Anaheim.

"The thing I'm always looking for especially when they're coming off a little bit of a shoulder is how you finish," Maddon said. "Are they going to reach out there and finish without guarding? I saw no guarding whatsoever. Honestly, I told them both it looked as though you were warming up to pitch today."

WALK THIS WAY: **Ben Zobrist** drew three walks, giving him 11 on the six-game homestand. His 43 since June 23 lead the majors. Maddon said he feels Zobrist is having a better approach, hitting the ball hard while laying off borderline pitches, and looks more like he did last year during his All-Star season.

"I think earlier in the season, I was just too aggressive, trying to hit everything," Zobrist said. "So I'm trying to look for my pitch and stay back, and make sure I see the ball. If I don't see what I'm looking for, I'm letting it go. And they're not throwing strikes."

MISCELLANY: OF **Matt Joyce**'s RBI single in the seventh off **Darren Oliver** was his first hit off a left-handed pitcher this season (1-for-15). ... Rangers OF **Josh Hamilton** went 1-for-10 in the series, with his only hit a single. ... Crawford has a nine-game hitting streak that began Aug. 9, the day he moved to the No. 3 spot in the lineup. ... The Rays won their 900th game in club history (900-1,161).

Tampa Bay Rays news and notes

By Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer

The dish

Rays at Athletics

When/where: 10:07 tonight; The Coliseum, Oakland, Calif

TV/radio: Sun Sports; 620-AM, 680-AM (Spanish)

Probable pitchers:

Rays: RHP Andy Sonnanstine (3-1, 4.10)

a's: RHP Trevor Cahill (12-5, 2.50)

Watch for ...

Sonny day: Sonnanstine has filled in admirably in two spot starts, giving up a combined four earned runs over 101/3 innings and picking up a win Saturday against the Orioles. He is 2-3 with a 6.39 ERA in seven career appearances against the A's.

On a roll: Cahill has won three of his past four starts and is coming off a hard-luck loss at Minnesota, giving up one run in seven innings. He got roughed up in his only start against the Rays on April 24, 2009, allowing seven runs in 22/3.

Key matchups

A's vs. Sonnanstine

Kurt Suzuki 6-for-10

Jack Cust 2-for-12, HR

Coco Crisp 3-for-10

Rays vs. Cahill

Carlos Peña 1-for-2, HR

Evan Longoria 1-for-2

Jason Bartlett 1-for-1

Defensive play of the day

Sean Rodriguez doesn't get many starts in rightfield, but he made arguably the play of the day, saving a run in the third by leaping into the wall for a spectacular catch on CF **Julio Borbon's** drive. "I just went up and got it," Rodriguez said. "And found it in my glove." Said RHP **James Shields**: "It was huge. I was kind of joking around with him a little bit, I told him (6-foot-9 RHP **Jeff Niemann**) would have caught that in his chest."

Quote of the day

"We couldn't stop him from the first game on."

Rangers manager **Ron Washington** on Rays 3B **Evan Longoria**, who went 7-for-12 with five extra-base hits in the three-game series

Number of the day

14-6 Rays record against the AL West, second best in the league after the Twins (15-5), including 7-1 at home

ROCKING THE PLAID: The Rays model the custom-made "BRaysers" that will be mandatory dress on their West Coast trip.

The prom was lovely, but Seymour Breines had already danced his last dance

By Lane DeGregory, Times Staff Writer

Among hundreds of senior citizens at the Trop's special senior prom, Seymour Breines remembers another.

ST. PETERSBURG - When they came to get Seymour, he was still shaving.

On the table in front of him: a black plastic comb and a bottle of Old Spice.

"You about ready, Seymour?" asked Rob Goldstein, who works at Menorah Manor nursing home.

Seymour Breines, 94, nodded. He ran his right hand over his cheek, checking for stubble. "Ready," he declared. But he grabbed the comb and pulled it through his snowy hair.

Everything had to be perfect for the prom.

• • •

It started as a joke. A Pepsi commercial about bright ideas. In the ad, Rays third-baseman Evan Longoria suggests holding a senior prom for senior citizens.

"I don't know about that one," says Detroit's Johnny Damon.

But the Rays staff decided to do it.

For Wednesday's game against the Texas Rangers, the staff booked an oldies band and a Frank Sinatra impersonator; bought boutonnières and corsages for all the seniors; crowned a king and queen of the prom; and offered group discounts for everyone over 55.

More than 2,500 seniors ordered advanced tickets.

Seymour Breines, and six other residents of Menorah Manor, had been waiting weeks for Wednesday.

• • •

Breines rolled himself right up to the rail in section 224, leaned out of his chair and looked over right field. "Oh my," he said. "This is beautiful."

While James Shields threw practice pitches, while Joe Maddon marched into the dugout, all through the National Anthem, Breines stared silently at the field.

"You okay, Seymour?" asked an aide.

Breines turned and blinked. As if he had been somewhere else and was struggling to return.

"Fine," he said slowly. "Fine. It's just ... This is all bringing back so many memories."

• • •

Seymour Breines grew up in the Bronx, in an apartment next to the old Yankee Stadium. He lived on the ground floor. But for every game, all the boys in the building would climb onto the roof.

From six flights up, he watched his idol, Babe Ruth.

"I thought those were the best seats in baseball," he said. "But this is even better."

While other seniors walked around checking out the fake Frankie, posing for photos beneath a balloon arch, Breines stayed glued to the game. It wasn't until an aide pinned a silk rose onto his Rays shirt that he even remembered about the prom.

Sure, he said. He remembered his prom.

It was in 1934. He rented a black tuxedo. He had never worn a tuxedo. His date was Helen. "She was a real nice girl." He picked her up in his Model T Ford.

He took her out for Chinese food. He had never tried Chinese food. In the gym of Textile High, in the Bronx, they danced to a jazz band. "Just slow stuff, nothing fancy." After he dropped her off that night, he cried.

"I should have tried to kiss her," he said 76 years later. "I cried because I didn't even try."

The next year, the year after Breines graduated, his mom sent him to the kosher butcher for two lamb chops. There, he saw the most beautiful girl in the world. Her dad was the butcher. Her name was Judy.

He married her at the rabbi's house on Long Island. "We were both 19. I didn't have any money," he said. "And she didn't mind."

They had a daughter, a son, then another girl. Breines built airplane parts, managed a crew of 100 riveters. He and Judy retired to Florida in 1973; moved into Menorah Manor's assisted living in 2005.

They were almost 90. But most Saturday nights, he still put on his suit; she still got "gussied up." And they would drive to the Gulfport Casino to go dancing.

"That woman loved to waltz," he said.

• • •

After the seventh inning stretch, staff from Menorah Manor were ready to go. The seven seniors protested. So the workers compromised: Okay. They could stay until the end, but then they had to get back to the nursing home for dinner.

They wouldn't have time to take everyone down onto the field for the post-game prom.

A couple of the women looked disappointed. But Breines just smiled.

He wasn't going to dance anyway. Even if he could, he said later, he wouldn't. After dancing with the same partner for 71 years, he didn't want to have to break in another.

He hasn't danced in four years. Not since his wife died.

"Besides," he said, wheeling himself out of the stadium, "I never liked dancing all that much anyway.

"I just liked holding her."

Rays complete a clean sweep of Rangers

By [TONY FABRIZIO](#) | The Tampa Tribune

All season long, there has been a prevailing belief that if the Tampa Bay Rays could combine their excellent pitching and defense with a lineup that was hitting to its potential, they'd really take off.

They provided a glimpse of what that looks like during the last three days while sweeping the American League West-leading Texas Rangers.

Wednesday, the Rays finished off the Rangers with a strong start by James Shields, a leaping catch in right field by Sean Rodriguez and a 10-hit, eight-walk attack that produced an 8-6 victory that wasn't as close as the score suggests.

In the process, they stayed at least tied for first place in the American League East with the Yankees, who hosted the Tigers on Wednesday night.

"We were functioning on all different cylinders," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "When you draw it up in the beginning of the year, this is what it's supposed to look like."

Evan Longoria went 3-for-4 with four RBIs and hit his first home run in 20 games. B.J. Upton went 2-for-4 with a homer, walk, two runs scored and two stolen bases and stretched his season-long hitting streak to seven games.

Carl Crawford singled and scored twice while extending his hitting streak to nine, and Jason Bartlett scored a pair of runs from the No. 2 spot in the order.

The Rays scored 24 runs in the series, their most in any three-game series this year, while hitting .327 with three home runs, two triples and three doubles. Starting pitchers David Price, Matt Garza and Shields permitted only three earned runs in 20 innings.

And, before a Tropicana Field crowd of 19,413, they won their fifth straight game after a 2-7 stretch.

"It all starts with the pitching," Maddon said. "The pitching has been wonderful, and the defense has been there."

"Now, all of a sudden, the difference is, when you get the offense involved like we have, you really get this vibe to the entire group. Everybody seems more alive because they're hitting now, too."

Said Shields, "That's a pretty good team with a good lineup over there. It all started with Price, and Garza threw well yesterday. And today, we played really good defense. I was able to go deep into the game, and, obviously, we scored some runs."

After giving up six home runs to Toronto and losing 5-0 to Baltimore in his previous two starts, Shields (11-11) was sharp from the outset while giving up two runs (one earned) on four hits through seven innings.

He didn't allow a base runner until Taylor Teagarden singled in the third. Rodriguez, getting his third start of the year in right, kept Teagarden from scoring by chasing down a drive by Julio Borbon and making a leaping, if somewhat clumsy, catch at the wall.

"I was kind of joking with him afterward and said (6-foot-9 pitcher Jeff) Niemann would have caught that at his chest," Shields said. "But he did a great job."

Shields made a mistake in the fifth with a fastball Teagarden hit for a solo home run off the C-ring catwalk and had a couple more in the sixth that led to an unearned run. A wild throw on a pickoff attempt and a wild pitch allowed Andres Blanco to score after he

reached on an infield single.

Longoria's RBI double to the left-center gap in the first inning gave the Rays a 1-0 lead, and his 16th home run of the year in the fourth made it 2-0.

Upton hit a leadoff home run in the fifth, and after Derek Holland (2-2) walked Bartlett and Crawford, Longoria followed with his second RBI double. Pinch-hitter Matt Joyce drew a bases-loaded walk from Alexi Ogando to make it 5-1.

The Rays stretched the lead to 7-2 before reliever Chad Qualls gave up two runs in the eighth. With the score 8-4 heading to the ninth inning, Mitch Moreland hit a two-run homer off Lance Cormier.

Maddon wanted to avoid using setup man Joaquin Benoit and closer Rafael Soriano, but Benoit was called on to get the final out in the eighth, and Soriano came on with one out in the ninth and picked up his 35th save.

When it was done, the Rays had swept a team they could meet in the postseason.

"It's big, but obviously they weren't at full strength," Bartlett said. "Still, it's three W's.

"We faced their top-line pitchers, and we know what to expect."

Bartlett takes a beating

Hard contact in consecutive games had SS **Jason Bartlett** talking about needing football gear after the Rays' 8-6 win against the Rangers on Wednesday.

Bartlett collided with 2B **Andres Blanco** while racing from first to second in the fourth inning Tuesday night, and he jammed his shoulder into 3B **Jorge Cantu's** knee on an eighth-inning stolen-base slide Wednesday.

Safe on the play, Bartlett stayed down for several seconds and was tended to by assistant trainer **Paul Harker**. Though shook up, Bartlett stayed in the game and scored on a sacrifice fly by **Evan Longoria**.

"I wanted to lay there at first because, obviously, it hurt but I wasn't sure what happened," Bartlett said. "As I gathered myself, I felt like I could get up. I was still dizzy when I was getting up, but it kind of wore off."

Bartlett's friend and former Twins teammate **Justin Morneau** suffered a concussion while sliding into second base against the Blue Jays on July 8 and hasn't played since. Bartlett said that although he's sore in the neck and shoulder area he's otherwise OK.

"I hope everything is fine tonight, and I wake up tomorrow and it's still (only) a little sore, and that's it," he said.

Bartlett joked that if the collisions continue, he'll have to start wearing a football helmet.

Walk a mile Ben Zobrist drew three more walks (one intentional) and had 11 in the six-game homestand. He leads the team with 71 walks, and his 43 since June 23 is the most in the majors.

"I'm just trying to stay back and see the ball first," Zobrist said. "I think early in the season, I was too aggressive, trying to hit everything. So I'm trying to look for my pitch and stay back to make sure I see the ball. If I don't see what I'm looking for, I let it go. And they're not throwing me strikes."

Zobrist has 162 walks in the last two seasons, second in the AL to Seffner's **Chone Figgins** of the Mariners (163 entering Wednesday).

Health update Injured RHPs **Jeff Niemann** and **Wade Davis** took another step toward rejoining the rotation next week, throwing bullpen sessions without experiencing any shoulder problems Wednesday. Both will throw simulated games Friday in Oakland.

"I told them both it looked like they were warming up and could have pitched today," Manager **Joe Maddon** said after watching Wednesday. "They were both really upbeat and smiley after they got done, which is also what you look at."

Chance to shine Maddon said RHP **Andy Sonnanstine** is a better pitcher from having gone through the experience of losing his job in the starting rotation and pitching mostly out of the bullpen this year.

A 13-game winner in 2008, Sonnanstine (3-1, 4.10 ERA) makes his third start tonight as an injury replacement in the rotation.

"I think Sonny has learned a lot about himself with all this other stuff going on," Maddon said. "I think he's become a better preparer, mentally and physically. So this may have been a difficult moment for him, but I think he's learned the right things out of it."

Sonnanstine has pitched well in both of his starts. He lost 1-0 to **Brandon Morrow** at Toronto on Aug. 8 (three hits, one earned run 5 1/3 innings) and beat Baltimore's **Brian Matusz** 7-3 Saturday (all three on a homer).

Odds and ends Taylor Teagarden's fifth-inning homer off **James Shields** was the seventh fair ball to hit a Tropicana Field catwalk this season and third to hit the C-ring. Missing injured RHP **Grant Balfour**, the Rays' bullpen allowed eight runs on 13 hits in 10 innings during the three-game sweep of the Rangers.

Tony Fabrizio

Big guy Longoria coming through big-time

By [MARTIN FENNELLY](#) | The Tampa Tribune

That sound is back — the sound a baseball makes when Evan Longoria's bat waves bye-bye.

"It's that deep bass, that guttural sound," Rays manager Joe Maddon said.

And it's back.

It wasn't just the cracking home run Longoria hit Wednesday afternoon at the Trop as the Rays dropped the Rangers 8-6 to complete an impressive three-game sweep, though it was Longoria's first in 19 games, the second-longest drought of his young career. The longest drought came in June and July. You get the idea.

It was more than that homer. His bat made noise all series, the kind of noise the Rays will need from it down the stretch if they're to come out on top of the Yankees or anyone else.

While Rangers Josh Hamilton and Vlad Guerrero were quiet, Longoria went to town, cleaning up from cleanup, going 7-for-12, with five extra-base hits and eight RBIs, complete ownership.

Monday night, he drove in the tying run off Cliff Lee during the Rays' eighth-inning comeback. Tuesday, he came up just a homer short of the cycle and drove in three runs. Wednesday, a homer sandwiched between two doubles and a sac fly, four more RBIs.

"You don't dwell on it," Longoria said. "But maybe I feel just a little better when my head hits the pillow tonight."

A lot of heads probably felt better as they Rays winged their way west, where they start a final coastal swing in Oakland tonight. They played three complete baseball games against playoff contender Texas. They scored 22 runs in three games. Carl Crawford is tearing it up, no surprise, but look, when James Shields stops shaking and pitches well, like Wednesday, and B.J. Upton is heating up by hitting one out, like Wednesday, you've got it going.

The math looks good for the Rays. They need only go .500 the rest of the way to win 95 games. One more burst and this could be a 100-win team. It's hard not to like the starting pitching and the back end of their bullpen. But if the season is to be something beyond merely making the postseason, the offense, which has too many ifs in it, has to be propelled by its guys, like Carl Crawford, Carlos Peña and Longoria.

Longoria had been struggling, though he still leads his team with 80 RBIs and 39 doubles — that's how good he is. And you wouldn't know about any slump by his defense, which is still Gold Glove, or his base running (15 steals). But lately you knew it when he was up. Pitches he'd crush were fouled back, or taken for strikes, or he was expanding his zone, or pressing, a stretch of some pretty useless at-bats.

It didn't help that guys weren't getting on in front of him, or he didn't have anyone protecting him in the order — but he still was only hitting .250 or so with runners in scoring position. He can do a lot better.

For three days in mid-August, he did.

Your big guys have to be your big guys, even on a small-ball team.

In this big series, Longoria came up bigger.

Pressure?

"Every day," Longoria said. "I come to the ballpark every day with a certain amount of pressure because I want to win every day, whether it's driving in three runs or making a diving play at third."

There's no telling if Longoria will stay hot. Sometimes, the hits don't happen.

"Then you get a series like this last one," he said, "where every time I swing I'm hitting it on the barrel and it's finding a gap or a hole."

Or the wall. Or the seats.

"When your big guys become your big guys, it definitely changes the complexion of your night," Maddon said.

Let those heads hit those pillows, Rays fans, rest easy.

Longo's bat is wide awake at the moment, and making noise.

East meets West as Rays play the A's

By Bailey Stephens / MLB.com

Andy Sonnanstine's role in the Rays' starting rotation might be temporary, but the right-hander hasn't been pitching like it.

And for manager Joe Maddon, who will send Sonnanstine to the hill for Thursday's opener against the Athletics to open a West Coast road trip, Sonnanstine's approach has made a strong, positive impression.

"The thing that stands out to me is he's fearless," Maddon said. "Here's a guy who hasn't started all year, and he walks right into that Toronto cauldron up there just like he did, comes back down and follows that up with another good start. ... I think this may have been a difficult moment for him, but he's learned the right things out of it."

The results haven't been half-bad, either. In two starts since joining the rotation to fill in for the injured Wade Davis and Jeff Niemann, Sonnanstine has been consistent for the Rays. After eating a tough-luck loss in his first start against the Blue Jays, Sonnanstine allowed three runs in five innings to the Orioles last time out and earned the victory.

Thursday might be his last start for the time being depending on Davis and Niemann's return, but don't expect that to affect his outlook. In fact, it's his mental approach that makes him such a good fill-in for the Rays, Maddon said.

"With Sonny, the one thing I always know about him -- and I don't care what the venue is, who he's facing, whatever -- he's going to be the same cat. He might get beat up, I don't know that, but I know one thing: He's going to go out there and not be affected. I really appreciate that, and that's why I feel good about him getting the starts."

The Athletics have to feel pretty good about the starts they have been getting from their young pitcher Trevor Cahill who will oppose Sonnanstine on Thursday. Cahill has actually been better than his 12-5 record might indicate and is on the verge of breaking Nolan Ryan's streak of 20 starts with at least five innings and no more than six hits. Cahill tied the streak in his last outing in which run support issues became a problem again and the right-hander was forced to eat the loss despite only allowing one run.

He's been especially hot of late, going 2-1 with a 0.38 ERA in his last three outings. Seeing the run Cahill has been on of late, including the possibility of eclipsing Ryan's record, is something that fills A's manager Bob Geren with pride and hope for the rotation's future.

"That's one of those records that's hard to imagine doing," manager Bob Geren said. "It's so rare, and he keeps getting better. We've got to get him some runs. We have the best young rotation in baseball, and they continue to improve and keep pitching well. They're only going to get better. You think back to where they were a year ago, imagine where they'll be a year from now."

Rays: Rays playing better on the road

Embarking on a seven-game West Coast road swing still may not be a picnic for the Rays as they continue to battle it out with the Yanks for first place, but it won't be a reason to panic as might have been the case in years past. That's because the Rays have been playing a much better brand of baseball this year against teams outside of their division and on the road. In fact, Tampa Bay holds the Majors best road record at 35-22. That's partly thanks to encouragement from Maddon, who has made improving against non-divisional foes a priority since Spring Training.

"You look at the Central and the West, we've done better against both of those divisions this year," Maddon said. "Obviously we've only played the Angels once, and they're having a little bit of a down year themselves. Seattle, of course, they're having a bit of a down year. I think from our perspective, I want to believe it's a maturation process on our part, that we're able to travel distances and play better, and we're going to find out."

Athletics: Base crime does pay

The A's have begun picking up some speed on the base paths of late. Oakland stole four bases on Tuesday night and another on Wednesday, bringing it total to a Major League leading 40 thefts since the All-Star break. Oakland now has 105 stolen bases overall, good for fourth in the AL. It's proven to have a strong impact on their offense too, as the club is 43-19 in games when it steals a base compared to 16-41 when it doesn't.

Rajai Davis leads the team with 36 stolen bases, and Cliff Pennington and Coco Crisp have both stolen 18 bags apiece this season. After that high-octane trio, the A's don't have anyone with a double-digit steal total. Davis ranks third in the league, while both Pennington and Crisp rest right outside of the top 10 in steals.

Worth noting

The Rays' win over the Rangers on Wednesday was the 900th in club history. ... Throughout the trip west, the Rays will sport Braysers (Rays + Blazers), which are plaid blazers in Rays colors with a sunburst to give the trip an AL West theme. ... Oakland's starters have allowed one or fewer earned runs in eight of their past 11 games. ... Oakland has won 12 of 14 day games and is a Major League-best 29-12 during the day this season. ... The A's have a Major League-best 2.67 ERA since the All-Star break and are 16-14 in that span.

Crawford speeds to another milestone

By Adam Berry / MLB.com

ST. PETERSBURG -- According to manager Joe Maddon, Carl Crawford's rare combination of speed and power is about as unique as the career milestone he reached against the Rangers on Tuesday night.

The 29-year-old left fielder hit his 100th career triple, becoming just the 24th player since 1871 to attain the milestone in a season he began at the age of 28 and the first to do it since Stan Musial in 1949.

Crawford, the only active player with 100 three-base hits, joined Ty Cobb and George Davis as the only players in Major League history to have 100 triples and 400 steals through their age-28 season.

On top of that, he is just one home run shy of 100 for his career, and his 14 this season put him just one behind third baseman Evan Longoria, known much more for his power hitting than Crawford.

"It's a combination of speed and power. You've got to be able to put a ball in the gap, and you've got to be able to run," Maddon said. "It's a great accomplishment. It's so rare, so unique, and that does speak to that combination. Carl really is unique in that regard. He's unique in today's game in how he's able to incorporate so many tools."

Maddon said that Crawford "smells" triples like few others do. Whereas most might knock a ball into the gap aiming for a double and hoping for three bases, Crawford has a tendency to aim for the triple as soon as the ball comes off his bat.

Crawford is leading the American League in triples this season, with eight. If he holds that lead, it will mark the fourth time in his career he has topped the league in the category. Only eight players have ever led their league in triples at least four times.

After reaching his milestone on Tuesday night, Crawford remained humble about his accomplishments.

"It's nice to be in the company of guys with such names as that. It's something that I didn't set out for, but I'm happy I was able to achieve it," Crawford said. "Whenever you can reach a round number, a milestone like that, it's always nice. I'm really grateful to be able to do things like that."

Maddon, on the other hand, didn't hesitate to heap praise on his All-Star.

"It's still an incredible accomplishment, everything that he's done to this point," Maddon said. "And he's so young, and the thing is, he's becoming a better baseball player on a daily basis. All this stuff is not going to go away. He takes great care of himself. He works very hard. Offseason, in-season, he's a preparer. I'm very happy for him. I thought it was great."

Niemann, Davis remain on track for returns

ST. PETERSBURG -- Jeff Niemann and Wade Davis continued their rehab work by throwing bullpen sessions before Wednesday's game, and manager Joe Maddon said the two right-handers did "real well."

Both starters, who are recovering from right shoulder strains that have had them on the disabled list since the first week of August, remain on track to return on back-to-back days against the Angels.

"The thing I'm always looking for -- especially when they're coming off a little bit of a shoulder [problem] -- is how they finish," Maddon said. "Are they really going to reach out there and finish without guarding? I saw no guarding whatsoever. Honestly, I told them both, 'It looked as though you were warming up to pitch today.' They both were real upbeat and happy and smiley afterward, which is also something you've got to look at. When they react that way, you know they do feel good."

Niemann and Davis will throw simulated games on Friday in Oakland, and Maddon does not think either would need a rehab start before returning to the rotation. Maddon said that the training staff had considered rehab starts after the injuries, but the two have seemingly recovered well enough that they might no longer be necessary.

"If they sincerely are feeling good about themselves and they're throwing the ball easily and the movement's good and there's late life on the ball, then probably I'll feel pretty good. We'll look at all those things," he said.

Perhaps more surprising than the starters' on-pace recovery was the aforementioned "smiley" attitude Maddon saw, particularly from the usually stoic Davis.

"It was brief. I was really paying attention," Maddon said. "I noticed a change in the muscle structure of his face that brief moment. I think he smiled with his eyes."

Rays to don 'Braysers' to West Coast

ST. PETERSBURG -- The Rays will be making their upcoming West Coast road trip in style, thanks to an interesting fashion choice by manager Joe Maddon and the rest of the team.

The players and coaches will be sporting what they call "Braysers" -- plaid blazers in the Rays colors with a sunburst on the pocket -- to continue their trend of themed road trips. Maddon has always been a proponent of the themed trips, but he has been especially excited about this one for months.

"It's high-end stuff. You could see that at Hugo Boss, absolutely," Maddon said of the Braysers. "With my fashionista sense, there it is."

Maddon expressed a desire for matching team blazers earlier this season, and TV broadcaster Todd Kalas helped make the connection, as he knows people in New York who came down to measure the team and brought the fabric. Maddon then organized a team vote, though the Rays didn't vote in favor of the design they used in the end.

"Actually, we voted on something else, fabric-wise -- very close to that," Maddon said. "But they did not have enough, so they came back, gave me a couple other choices and finally I said, 'Let's just do that.' And I'm glad I did, because it really does embody all the different Rays colors."

Tampa Bay's relievers wore the Braysers out to the bullpen before Tuesday's game, much to the fans' amusement. Maddon said that the team will "absolutely" wear them again after this seven-game road trip, but the timing worked out well enough to have them ready for this journey to the West Coast.

Earlier this season, the Rays donned hockey jerseys when they traveled to Toronto and wore all white to Miami. The club had a Western-themed trip last year, as well as a Johnny Cash-inspired trip during which Maddon dyed his hair black.

Bucs TV blackout doesn't scare Tampa Bay area bar owners

By Mark Albright, Times Staff Writer

The Bucs struggled last year on the field - and the sports bar circuit. Bar owners say patrons have paid less attention to the games.

Facing the first Tampa Bay Buccaneers TV blackouts since 1998, local pub owners expect to take a hit in the cash register this fall.

But not a big one.

The hometown NFL team that struggled last year on the field faces a rebuilding year on the sports bar circuit, too.

"We have a couple dozen regulars who will be disappointed, but they'll just watch another game," said Vicki Doble, owner of the Tampa Bay Brewing Co. in Tampa. "Last year I noticed more talking than watching during Bucs games. Some stopped paying attention after so many losses."

Kirk Dreyfus, bar manager at Chammps Americana sports bar in Tampa, said he's seen more people coming in to watch other teams because of the Bucs' crummy record in recent years.

"In my four years here, the Bucs have had only one winning season," he said.

Last year, the Bucs avoided local broadcast blackouts, which occur when NFL teams don't sell out their home games. It seems as though that won't be the case this fall. For instance, Saturday's preseason home opener against the Kansas City Chiefs has not sold out and will be blacked out within 75 miles of Raymond James Stadium. The 10-county blackout includes pay-per-view service including Bucs games broadcast on NFL Sunday Ticket, which is aired in dozens of local sports bars.

"It's ridiculous they're blacking out games, but I don't think it will hurt us much," said Jeff Barrett, manager at Gator's in Treasure Island, which last fall drew 500 to big Florida college games but about 100 for Sunday Bucs games. "People here are especially fair-weather fans who revert to an old favorite NFL team when the Bucs are losing."

Barrett and several sports bar managers would prefer more Bucs wins because local fans who whooped it up during the Bucs glory days tend to spend more.

In playoff years, sports bars were often packed. But since the team's recent extended swoon, more transplanted locals hit the bars to follow their previous home teams with winning records like the Steelers, Saints, Patriots, Colts and Cowboys.

Dave Mangione, a partner in Hatricks, a downtown Tampa sports bar often jammed with 100 Bucs fans on Sundays, agreed that fans will find other teams to follow on TV.

"People are still going to watch their football," he said.

With the Bucs in the NFL's second-worst market for joblessness behind Detroit, the team said its ticket sales plight is as much about local economics as wins and losses. Two of last year's playoff teams, San Diego and Cincinnati, imposed blackouts last week.

Restaurants equipped with NFL Sunday Ticket say their Sunday business is better during the NFL season than the offseason. But the service provides them 14 other NFL games to show when the local team is blacked out.

"We would prefer the home team broadcast because of the spirit it generates," said Neil Kiefer, chief executive of the franchisee that owns all 14 bay area Hooters. "But when the Bucs are on, TV people are more likely to watch the game at home. When the Bucs are blacked out, we offer them games they cannot see at home."

The man in the stands: Todd Kalas is the smiling face of the Tampa Bay Rays

August 17, 2010 at 6:07 pm by [Kevin Tall](#), Creative Loafing

The pitcher throws a curveball out of the strike zone: ball one.

Next he throws a 92 mph pitch, fouled off: strike one.

Finally, [Matt Garza](#) throws a 91 mph, four-seam fastball and the Detroit Tigers' Ramon Santiago swings, sending the ball flying into right field to be caught by the outstretched hand of the charging Ben Zobrist.

Out #3.

Matt Garza has just thrown the first no-hitter in the history of the [Tampa Bay Rays](#). He is mobbed by joyous teammates with congratulations, met first by an [Evan Longoria](#) bear hug and, soon after that, by a man with a microphone: Todd Kalas, the ever-smiling, ever-tanned in-game reporter for Sun Sports and Fox Sports Florida.

For the thousands watching at home, Kalas serves as the direct link between the fans and the team; he gives them the inside scoop before the game, talks to the players afterwards and helps illuminate the outcome. And as the Rays' man in the stands, the self-described "conduit" for a team that's having trouble filling those stands, he plays a role that's potentially as important as that of the guy in the broadcasters' booth. Because, while attendance at the Trop remains problematic, TV ratings for the Rays have skyrocketed: through July, the Rays on Sun Sports are averaging a 5.7 TV household rating in the Tampa/St. Pete market — a 73 percent increase over last year's average of 3.3. That means one in every 18 Bay-area folk is watching, as opposed to 2009's one in every 30, which was itself a jump from the year before.

And that means one in every 18 Bay area residents is watching — and by all accounts, liking — Todd Kalas.

"I don't think there's ever going to be anything that can top that for me in broadcasting," says Kalas of working the World Series with his father.

Yet Kalas is also something of a paradox; Rays fans feel like they have a personal relationship with him, yet they know little about him personally. Is his upbeat demeanor for real? What was it like entering the baseball biz as the son of one of the most famous broadcasters ever? And what if he were to win his dream job?

Kalas doesn't have too many bad days at the office. But having worked alongside the Rays organization for its entire 13 years (in addition to his current duties, he has filled in as play-by-play announcer and color analyst for both the TV and radio broadcasts), he remembers the Devil Rays' hellish opening decade.

"There were a few days there, when our high-water mark was 70 wins for the first 10 seasons, when you're just like, 'Man, I wish I could just have the night free and do my own thing,'" Kalas recalls.

He used to patrol the stands of rival ballparks with a mic flag that said "Rays" on it, making him an easy target for the harassment of Yankees and Red Sox fans. Perhaps it's because these days his microphone is different — emblazoned with "Fox Sports" — that he gets less abuse. Or, perhaps it's something else.

"It's eventually gotten better in the last three years," Kalas explains. "We're getting more respect."

And as host of the Rays Live! pre- and post-game shows as well as in-game reporter, Kalas is getting more and more notice.

"I get asked a lot, 'Hey, what's Todd Kalas like? Is he as nice as he is when he's out and about?'" says co-worker and broadcast partner Brian Anderson. "I'm like, 'Bro, that's it. That's the guy I know.'"

At the July 29 sweep-clinching matinee against the Detroit Tigers, Kalas' first order of business after arriving to the set for the pre-game show is signing a few autographs for some children in attendance.

Anderson, a former Rays pitcher who spent 13 years in the major leagues and serves as pre-game co-host and color analyst for Rays away games, concedes that Kalas just might receive more autograph requests.

"I would have to say at the Captain Morgan Deck, slight edge Kalas, 22-20."

Kalas is always prepared and always working. The evening prior to the July 29 afternoon game, he was reading up on game stories and box scores from across the league; by contrast, Anderson was up until 3 a.m. playing EA Sports NCAA Football 11. But Kalas is quick to come to the defense of his friend and colleague.

"B.A.'s an early riser, whereas I'm not," he explains. "For a day game at 12 p.m., he's probably getting a lot of work done between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. and I'm probably still asleep; or I'm probably just leaving my house at 9 a.m."

While colleagues are hard-pressed to recall anything that is both particularly embarrassing and also true, Kalas happily volunteers the following about what happened while he was working for Vision Cable in Clearwater:

"We had a story about the Buccaneers defense. Back then there were a lot of guys that hit hard on the defense. Over my shoulder, they had a still of the beginning of the video that we were going to roll in; it was about the Bucs defense, set to Janet Jackson's song 'Nasty Boys.' The lead-in was off the cuff, but the start of the video was a shot of a Buccaneers cheerleader who was fairly well-

endowed. So I said, 'Coming up next with a compilation of some of the best hits of the Bucs' season.' 'Best hits' kind of flowed together..."

Well, if you were looking to compile the best tits in Tampa, there are probably worse places to start than the Buccaneers cheerleading squad.

The Bucs were among several organizations Kalas worked with upon graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in broadcast journalism in 1987; others included the Tampa Bay Lightning, New York Mets and Philadelphia Phillies. Now, in addition to his work with the Rays, he spends the baseball off-season calling USF basketball games and college football games for the Sun Belt Conference.

While Kalas would not call himself a workaholic, he laughingly concedes that several ex-girlfriends might disagree. But the off-season gigs are important: they afford him the opportunity to pursue his passion.

"Play-by-play is still my favorite thing to do in broadcasting and where I get my play-by-play fill is in the offseason," he says. "I think I have one more big step. I think the big step would be to find a full-time play-by-play job in the major leagues somewhere. "I would be very happy to be in one organization, one city, just calling games on a regular basis for the rest of my baseball career," Kalas says. "I really think my abilities are at their best when I'm doing play-by-play."

His abilities may well be hereditary. As the son of Harry Kalas, the Hall of Fame voice of the Philadelphia Phillies, Todd virtually grew up at Philly's Veterans Stadium. "Seeing how much he loved what he did for a living made me think that this was a pretty cool gig," Todd remembers.

But he has always tried to stay away from his father's signature calls, in an attempt to carve his own niche. And while being Harry's son may have opened a few doors for him faster than they would have opened on their own, it's always been up to the younger Kalas to keep a job, regardless of how it was secured.

"As long as I'm in the broadcasting game, there are always going to be people who think of me as Harry's son, which is a great compliment," says Kalas.

In 2008, the Kalas men got the opportunity to work across the aisle from each other when their respective teams faced off in the World Series. When Tampa Bay met Boston in Game Seven of the American League Championship Series, the younger Kalas knew more than a championship was at stake because, if Tampa won, it would mean they'd be facing Philadelphia in the Series.

"I have to admit that that was probably the most intense and nervous I've ever been in terms of watching a baseball game, because I knew that if the Rays won, not only were they in the World Series, but I'd be able to share it with Dad," Todd says. "That was the ultimate. I don't think there's ever going to be anything that can top that for me in broadcasting."

Harry Kalas died on April 13, 2009. He was in the press box at Nationals Park, in Washington D.C., getting ready to do what he loved. The next day the Phillies were scheduled to be honored at the White House for their 2008 World Series victory; they postponed their visit and set the day aside to pay tribute to him.

On Friday, April 17, the first home game since Harry's death, Todd and his two brothers, Brad and Kane, threw out ceremonial pitches. Todd threw his to former Phillies third baseman Mike Schmidt, his favorite player growing up.

Though Kalas is thrilled to have his current job, he's reluctant to assign it too much importance. He calls himself "the extra guy" behind play-by-play announcer DeWayne Staats and color analyst Anderson.

Staats disagrees. The job used to be third- or even fourth-tier years ago, but now it's viewed as an emerging position, one of which the broadcast industry has taken note.

"I've always been an advocate of faces on the broadcast because the human face tells a great story, and whether it's a fan's face or a player's face I think that's important. Todd's is an open and friendly face that I think people feel very comfortable with." Anderson says Todd is "almost like a bathroom break."

Say what? Anderson describes how viewers are essentially stuck in the broadcast booth with the play-by-play announcer and color analyst for the duration of the game, with only their perspectives.

"It's like, 'Okay, let me get out of that stuffy room for a minute and go down on the field and let Todd give some good information out there...'"

And Kalas' "extra-guy" role also poses a unique challenge: He has to talk to players post-game who may not always want the attention. Anderson, with more than a decade in the majors and his fair share of ugly press, says Rays players, as closed off as they might tend to be, trust Kalas to report the news rather than make it up for himself.

"I do know that players respect him and feel that they are going to get a fair shake if they're interviewed by Todd."

Mike Griffin, a producer for Sun Sports/Fox Sports Florida, contrasts Kalas with the type of sideline reporters who talk about minutiae like the birthday of a player's mother. Kalas provides substance instead of fluff.

"He's a baseball guy first, so he brings you that baseball knowledge," Griffin says. "To be able to play off of Brian Anderson or Kevin Kennedy or DeWayne... he can play off of what they're saying or add to the conversation without just being an extra piece. He's never an extra piece."

And face it — the fans love him.

Sentiments about what a great guy he is echo throughout Tropicana Field and cyberspace, including a "Tampa Bay loves Todd Kalas" Facebook group.

"Todd has a tremendous sense of humor, self-effacing, and great with the fans," says longtime fan Glenn Klein. "I think he does a terrific job."

Projecting a sense of ease before the camera is key, says Kalas. "You have to be able to communicate like you're just hanging out with a person watching the game." But he's also good in person. "I met Todd while I was with my family in the Checkers Bullpen Café," says Rays fan Abby Moon. "I think he was trying to take a break and get away from the fans for a minute when I asked him to take a picture with me, but he was more than willing to pose and smile."

Staats suggests that Kalas is particularly popular with female audiences. "Any time he's in any kind of a party deck, it's a recurring theme that he's surrounded by 10 to 20 young ladies who are absolutely giddy just to be in his presence," says Staats. "We see that frequently."

Most important, though, is Kalas' palpable enthusiasm for his work, as when he lists his favorite moments on the job (his pre-game interview with Hank Aaron; his post-game interview with Wade Boggs after his 3,000th hit; that momentous ALCS Game Seven in 2008), or his favorite Ray interviewee, Jonny Gomes: "In the history of the team, the best guy on camera, just because he was so off-the-wall." He's also not afraid to express his concerns about attendance and the future of the Trop.

He describes the crowds currently attending games as "nice," but not what should be expected for an American League Championship team, and that at some point the team will end up playing closer to the bridges or maybe even in Tampa to get closer to the center of the population base. While he says the ideal site does not necessarily have to be in Hillsborough County, it is clear he feels that a new ballpark needs to be more accessible to its residents. Kalas loves Tropicana Field and thinks the facility is very underrated, but says it's not in the right location.

"On one side to the east, you have water. To the south you have water. To the north you have Pinellas County, but then you have a lot more people across the other side of the bridge, in Hillsborough... You may lose a few people from Sarasota-Bradenton [if the site changes], but I think the positives by far outweigh the negatives."

Whether or not the Rays move, a question remains for Kalas. With his play-by-play aspirations, how long will it be before he gets snatched up by some other town?

To recap for any heads of broadcasting who may be interested in hiring a talented and professional play-by-play man to call Major League Baseball games, Todd Kalas is not interested. OK, he never said that.

But his fans in Tampa Bay (including this one) hope he's not.

Senior prom for senior citizens

By [Jonathan Petramala](#), Reporter, Bay News 9

ST. PETERSBURG -- What started out as a joke turned into reality for the Tampa Bay Rays and their older fans.

Tropicana Field hosted its first 'Senior Prom for Senior Citizens' Wednesday. The team said more than 2,000 senior citizens showed up to participate.

The concept came from a Pepsi commercial where third baseman Evan Longoria suggests that the team should host a prom for senior citizens.

Even though the event wasn't related to the campaign, the Rays say requests from fans made the joke a reality.

Prom queen, 87-year-old Fay Sanders, remembers her high school senior prom back in 1939...when she was also the prom queen.

"Never gets old," Sanders said, joking she never gets tired of being royalty.

Many other senior fans got the royal treatment. Cindy Rush and her longtime boyfriend George Scott posed for prom pictures under an arch of balloons overlooking the field, wearing corsages provided by the Rays.

Rush was wearing an evening gown while Scott wore a suit.

"This is basically our senior prom, so I said, we're going all the way with this," Rush said.

While there wasn't a big band hired for this prom, the big leaguers provided the entertainment. After an 8 to 6 Rays victory, fans, both young and old, were allowed to go down to center field to dance to the oldies.

Hundreds went down to dance, except the Senior Prom King Bob Todd, who said he doesn't dance.

"Never danced in my life," Todd said. "Not going to start now. That'll get you in trouble."

Rays host Senior Prom for Senior Citizens

[Noah Pransky](#), 10 News

ST. PETERSBURG, [Florida](#) - What began as a joke and evolved into a crazy promotion is finally becoming a reality for the Tampa Bay Rays and their legions of fans eligible for AARP benefits.

The team's "Senior Prom for Senior Citizens" took place Wednesday afternoon at the Rays' 1:10 p.m. game against the Texas Rangers. Although seniors got to dance in the outfield after the game, festivities surprised them throughout the game.

The concept came from a Pepsi commercial where Rays third baseman Evan Longoria suggests to Tigers outfielder Johnny Damon that the team hold the event. And even though Wednesday's promotion wasn't connected to Pepsi's campaign, team officials say fans practically demanded the event after seeing the commercial.

Dick Crippen, a Rays senior advisor and former 10 [News](#) sports director, was the emcee of the event. The music and scoreboard graphics also took fans back to an older era. Boutonnieres and corsages were be provided as well.

Ushers dressed in tuxes and prom dresses while Elvis and Frank Sinatra impersonators entertained.

"Most other day games that we have (in the summer)," said Rays Group Sales executive Dan Newhart, "(are) summer camp days for park and recreational kids. And the way this (event) is looked at now is a summer camp day for seniors."

When told about the promotion during the Tigers' last visit to town, Damon told 10 News that, "if we remember what senior prom was...umm, there could be a lot of 'hanky panky' going around."

One fan told 10 News, "only seniors know how to 'hanky panky.' These kids know nothing!"

Could the Yankees miss the playoffs?

Dayn Perry, Fox Sports

Every story needs a villain, and in baseball it falls to the [New York Yankees](#) to tie the maiden to the railroad tracks while cackling loudly and twisting the ends of that dastardly mustache. Boo! Hiss!

Yankees fans, of course, would rightly object to the notion that their team is the depth and breadth of evil, but non-Yankees fans the world over insist it is so. Call it tyranny of the majority.

Anyhow, the upshot of all this typecasting is that a number of fans want nothing more than for the Yankees to fail. And while we in this space harbor no ill feelings toward the colossus in the Bronx, we do try to give the people what they want.

First, though, the inconvenient reality: The Yankees are almost certainly going to make the postseason. At this writing, the Yankees (narrowly) lead the AL East, are in playoff position by 5.5 games and are on pace for 99 wins.

To put a finer point on things, CoolStandings.com gives the Yankees [a hefty 88.8 percent chance of making the playoffs](#). Only the Rangers and Rays have better odds, and in the case of Texas, that's solely because it plays in a much weaker division. In other words, it would take [a collapse of absurd proportions](#) for the Yankees to miss the postseason.

With all that said, here's how the 2010 Yankees can fail not only to win the World Series, but also to make the playoffs altogether:

- **The schedule** — To date, the Yankees' opponents this season have an average winning percentage of .503. That's good for 14th in all of baseball. The rest of the 2010 schedule, however, is a bit tougher. In fact, the average winning percentage of the Yankees' remaining opponents is .510. That's a slightly tougher slate of games. So that's ... something? Specifically, they still have 28 games yet to play against the Rays, Blue Jays, Red Sox, Rangers and White Sox.
- **Age** — Veteran leadership and savvy have their places, but perhaps the Yankees have too much of a good thing? New York has the fourth-oldest crop of hitters in all of baseball and the second-oldest pitching staff. As the season deepens, as the fatigue mounts, will the Yankees be able to persist? That's a legitimate concern for a roster that's so undeniably old. Core contributors like [Derek Jeter](#) (age 36), [Jorge Posada](#) (38), [Alex Rodriguez](#) (34) and [Mariano Rivera](#) (40) might be feeling the effects of age and a long, hot summer. If their performances degrade over the final six weeks of the season, then the Yankees could stumble.
- **The thinned-out rotation** — [CC Sabathia](#) is a legitimate ace, but after him, the Yankees have no certainties in the rotation. [Andy Pettitte](#) has no clear timetable for his return, [Javier Vazquez](#) is suffering from decreased velocity and perhaps a dead arm, [Phil Hughes](#) has a 4.81 ERA in the second half and workload concerns and [A.J. Burnett](#) has been inconsistent even by his standards.

There's little help within the system, and now that the nonwaiver trade deadline has passed, getting help from outside the organization is going to be difficult. Needless to say, such a weak and suspect rotation raises a number of concerns, particularly given the next category.

- **Shoddy middle relief** — Mo Rivera is the greatest closer of all time, and he's enjoying another superlative season. The bridge from starter to Rivera, however, is a rickety thing indeed.

[Joba Chamberlain](#) has tried and failed to fill the eighth-inning role, [David Robertson](#) has been decidedly ordinary by reliever standards and [Dustin Moseley](#) has been summoned to plug a hole in the rotation.

The Yanks, of course, nabbed [Kerry Wood](#) at the deadline, and he's indeed been excellent as a Yankee. However, sample-size concerns abound. Is Wood the dominant middle man he has been for eight innings as a Yankee, or is he the guy who mostly struggled in Cleveland for the past season-and-a-half?

• **Downward trends** — Here are the 2010 Yankees winning percentages by month: April, .682; May, .552; June, .615; July, .731; August, .438. Is it silly to draw any firm conclusions based on one month of play, let alone one-half month of play? Of course. But to Yankees haters in need of hope, the numbers are a Rorschach — you see in them what you want to see. Thus far in August, the Yankees offense has an OBP of just .312, and that's mostly why they're 7-9 on the month. As the schedule toughens up (see above), the Yankees struggles — such as they are — might continue.

The reality, of course, is the Yankees are almost certainly going to make the playoffs. Once there, however, anything can happen. Let's keep in mind that, between 2001 and 2007, the Yankees made the playoffs each season but failed to win the World Series. In October, expectations are made to be defied, and as much as we like to heap meaning upon the postseason, there's a great deal of randomness and blind luck involved in the outcomes. So the Yankees might indeed wind up with the best record in the regular season, but history has proved again and again that that offers no guarantees.

So take heart, Yankees haters of the world: All is not lost. Yet.

Time has come for fading Dodgers to trade Manny Ramirez

Joe Sheehan, SI.com

Despite last night's 6-0 win over the Rockies, the Dodgers' postseason hopes are almost too small to measure. Eleven games behind the Padres in the NL West and seven behind the Phillies in the wild card hunt, they're left with a 1.6 percent crack at the playoffs, per [Baseball Prospectus](#). That's about a 1-in-60 chance, not far from the odds that the McCourts will reconcile and open a bed-and-breakfast in Santa Barbara.

The Dodgers made a big push at the first trade deadline, acquiring **Ted Lilly**, **Ryan Theriot** and **Octavio Dotel** in an effort to bolster their roster. Those deals haven't been able to prevent a 7-9 August that has featured a number of bullpen meltdowns, with closer **Jonathan Broxton** losing his job last week and his replacements, Dotel included, blowing a 3-1 ninth-inning lead to the Braves Monday night. It's time to be realistic about the '10 Dodgers and use the rest of the month to strengthen the team for the 2011 campaign. You might yet be able to re-flip Lilly, Theriot or Dotel for a minor prospect, and **Vicente Padilla** may have value to a pitching-thin contender willing to risk acquiring Padilla's prickly personality.

The big move, however, would be to deal away **Manny Ramirez**. Ramirez is currently on the DL with a calf injury, and as such has not, cannot, be placed on waivers. Once activated, which should come before the end of the month -- Ramirez took batting practice Tuesday -- he can be placed on waivers. The somewhat anachronistic waiver rules dictate that every NL team has first dibs, and if none want him, then every AL team gets a crack. If no one claims Ramirez, the Dodgers may then trade him to any team. If one team or multiple teams claim him, then the team with the worst record at the time of claiming (with every NL team having priority over every AL team) is the only one that can get Ramirez. The Dodgers have the option of letting him go to the claiming team for nothing except the obligation of paying his salary -- as the Blue Jays did with **Alexis Rios** a year ago, letting the White Sox have him -- or pulling him off waivers and working out a trade, but only with that one team.

Ramirez is not guaranteed to clear waivers. He's making \$20 million this season, but \$15 million of that is deferred money, meaning a team would be on the hook for less than a million bucks in cash this season. Teams that have little interest in or room for Ramirez, such as the Rockies, Cardinals and Twins, may claim him merely to prevent a team ahead of them in the league from improving themselves. This practice was once frowned upon, but is now commonplace.

Whatever Ramirez's foibles, whether attitude, availability or awareness, the man still hits: .317/.409/.516 at the age of 38 in a home park that doesn't do him any favors. There are few teams in baseball that wouldn't be helped by adding that kind of production, even for one month, and the teams eyeing Ramirez would no doubt be envisioning him in their lineup for two. Ramirez's poor

defense, no doubt made worse by the calf injury, hinders his value to an NL team, making him a bit more of a fit for an AL team that can slide him into the DH role.

What are the matches for Ramirez? Well, Tampa Bay has been searching for a decent designated hitter all season and on the heels of the failed **Pat Burrell** and **Hank Blalock** Eras, the Rays -- whose OPS production from DHs ranks 11th in the AL and whose low-BA offense could desperately use a .300 hitter -- have to be looking longingly at Ramirez from afar. He could add as many as 10 runs in September over what the Rays have been getting from the DH slot, which is nothing to sneeze at: it's the rare player who could possibly be worth an additional win, which is the value of those 10 runs, in that time frame.

Of course, Ramirez would have to clear two whole leagues for the Rays to have a shot. Would the White Sox pass on Ramirez? They continue to make do with **Mark Kotsay** and **Andruw Jones** at DH, a pairing that has produced a .312 OBP. The Sox hit for power and, once again, do little else, with a .328 OBP and bottom-three AL ranks in doubles and triples. Ramirez wouldn't have quite as big a projected impact on the Sox' fortunes, maybe seven or eight runs, and unless we learn that he can hit 94 mph fastballs with some movement, may not address the Sox' biggest current need anyway.

The Yankees have long been connected to Ramirez because of his Washington Heights roots, but they seem an unlikely landing spot for him. The Yankees made their big move in trading for **Lance Berkman**, and they need the DH slot held open for **Jorge Posada**. As much as the Yankees desperately need a right-handed bat, the roster-construction issues associated with acquiring Ramirez make it unlikely they would do so.

There are few NL teams that are a fit for Ramirez, making it likely that he'd clear waivers. The Braves could use an outfielder and a bat to replace **Chipper Jones**. However, based on organizational temperament, they seem an unlikely dance partner. The Reds added **Jim Edmonds**, which fills the "aging outfield bat" slot. (It would be funny to see Ramirez have a teammate for whom he could serve as a defensive replacement. **Jonny Gomes** is even worse afield.) The Giants picked up **Jose Guillen**, getting all the negative traits Ramirez brings and about half the productivity.

Ramirez can still help a team get to the postseason...just not his current one. The Dodgers should be aggressive, once they can, about leveraging their best trade chip to make themselves just a little bit better down the road.

Hahn agrees to deal with Tampa Bay

By [Vickie Fulkerson](#) Day Sports Writer

Rays not deterred by ex-Fitch star's recent surgery

The Tampa Bay Rays paid former Fitch High School pitcher Jesse Hahn a compliment this week.

The Rays signed Hahn, their sixth-round selection in the June draft, for a reported bonus of \$525,000, despite the fact Hahn suffered a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his elbow and underwent Tommy John surgery on his pitching arm July 7.

Hahn, a 6-foot-5 right-hander who pitched this season for Virginia Tech, is now at Rays headquarters in Port Charlotte, Fla., where he will remain throughout the offseason to rehabilitate his arm. Hahn signed Sunday, the day before former Fitch teammate Matt Harvey signed for a reported \$2.525 million bonus with the New York Mets.

"That feels good that they have the confidence I'm going to get back to being myself, to being better than ever," Hahn said Tuesday. "I figured after my surgery I was pretty set on signing. I thought they were the best people to rehab my arm.

"I reported to Florida. I'm down here watching games and everything. It's hard watching kids pitch and wanting to be out there, too, but at the same time it's a good learning experience."

Port Charlotte is the home of the Class-A Charlotte Stone Crabs of the Florida State League, managed by former major leaguer Jim Morrison and with former major leaguer Neil Allen as the pitching coach. Hahn has a locker in the team's locker room.

"Meeting everyone," Hahn said has been the most exciting thing of his professional career so far. "Meeting the coaching staff and everyone, meeting new teammates. You never know, you could have a locker next to someone who could be a superstar.

"It's unbelievable."

Hahn, whose fastball has been clocked in the mid-90s, was 5-4 for Virginia Tech with a 3.70 ERA this season, striking out 76, walking 20 and holding opposing hitters to a .257 average.

He pitched for about a month and a half, though, with soreness in his right forearm, pain that would begin to settle in by the fourth inning, he said. He really started to feel it in his last start of the season, when he left an NCAA tournament game against The Citadel after three innings.

After being drafted by Tampa Bay, Hahn was sent to see high-profile surgeon Dr. James Andrews in Birmingham, Ala. Andrews, who has consulted on surgeries of prominent athletes such as Tom Brady, Brett Favre and Albert Pujols, performed Hahn's surgery.

Hahn will be sidelined for a year.

"I just have to progress slowly, listen to what they have to tell me," Hahn said. "But it's a lot of time to wait."

The lasting impact of concussions

Jeff Passan, Yahoo Sports

Justin Morneau(notes) took batting practice Tuesday. He hit four home runs. His head still hurt.

"I haven't made it through a day yet without symptoms," Morneau told reporters in Minneapolis, and that makes 41 in a row dealing with the after-effects of a concussion suffered July 7 when he slid into the knee of Toronto's John McDonald(notes) trying to break up a double play – 41 days of pain, of fear, of hoping he doesn't turn out like someone he knows well.

On July 5, 2006, nearly four years on the dot before Morneau's concussion, Corey Koskie gave chase for a harmless pop-up. He twisted and turned, the ball's loop-de-loop spinning him to the ground. It looked so benign. It felt that way, too, until nine days later, when Koskie took batting practice for the first time, felt dizzy, went to his hotel and never returned to a major-league field.

"It felt like somebody was punching me in the middle of my brain and it was exploding out," he said in an interview with Yahoo! Sports on Tuesday. "I felt like I got hit by a Mack truck. I thought I was going to throw up. I was getting these waves of nausea. It was miserable."

After years of neglect due to ignorance, professional sports organizations are beginning to recognize that concussions – in simple terms, the brain rattling against the skull; more technically, the premature death of brain cells from trauma – are not only a threat to players' health but the sports themselves. A group of Boston-area doctors concluded in a study released Tuesday that the after-effects of concussions can lead to considerable degeneration in a person's brain function that manifests itself in the same fashion as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig Disease, or ALS.

As baseball wrapped its noodle around the possibility that Lou Gehrig – sufferer of a handful of concussions – didn't actually have Lou Gehrig's disease, a number of troubling cases presented themselves across the sport. In addition to Morneau, Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Carlos Gomez(notes) is ready to return after a beaming concussed him. And New York Mets outfielder Jason Bay(notes) remained on the disabled list after running into an outfield wall – and returning for two games before a doctor diagnosed his concussion, leading the team to consider revising its head-trauma policy, according to The New York Times.

Though the violence of football and hockey is well-documented, baseball has also dealt with a spate of concussions over the past half-decade. Koskie's career ended because of one, as did catcher Mike Matheny's. The Mets seem particularly vexed, with David Wright(notes), Ryan Church(notes) and Mike Cameron(notes) spending time on the disabled list because of them in recent years.

During spring training every season, Major League Baseball forces clubs to administer a baseline test to have a measure doctors can use for players with traumatic injuries.

Not only are there various degrees of concussions, the fashion in which people react to brain injuries fluctuates widely. Robert Friedlander, chairman of the neurological surgery department at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, compares it to cancer patients: Some people can smoke three packs of cigarettes a day for their life without getting lung cancer, while others' predisposition to forming cancerous cells makes even the slightest cigarette use a death wish.

The problem: Doctors still can't pinpoint who is prone to what. Friedlander studies how cells in the brain die. Down to the level of mitochondria – the tiny energy center inside a cell – researchers have traced the release upon trauma of a protein that kills cells in the brain. Friedlander knows of a drug used to treat acne, minocycline, that in animal studies blocked the protein. He thinks there is potential in humans. Unfortunately, it will take years to determine what might work.

So if the research in Boston is accurate – the paper's peer review and other doctors' excitement is promising – the effects will be far-reaching. Already the NFL has instituted a strengthened concussion policy to prevent players from re-entering games after suspected brain trauma, a practice believed to severely worsen such injuries. Whether the future holds preventative prophylactic treatment, superior equipment or another innovation that precludes concussions, it is obvious sports can no longer disregard the issue.

"The work that group and others have done at looking at the effect in humans is very important," Friedlander said. "We're not getting to the bottom of it yet. This is the tip of the iceberg. We're just starting to understand trauma is not so innocuous. You pay a toll."

Koskie's toll lasted 2½ years. When he walked, he felt drunk. When he talked, words refused to come to him. He slept a lot. Too much. Only when doctors began treating Koskie like a whiplash patient did his symptoms start to improve, enough so that he attempted to come back in 2009 before retiring.

"If I was in Justin's position, where you're in a playoff race and get these setbacks, I'd be frustrated," Koskie said. "I had no pressure when I was feeling better. I just wanted my life back. I wanted to be able to play with my kids without getting sick."

Within the first week of Morneau's injury, he spoke with Koskie, a teammate his first two seasons with the Twins. Koskie tried to assure him the headaches would subside, the fear would vanish and his career would be fine. Morneau went through a four-hour workout July 24 in hope he would soon return. He didn't. He was supposed to take batting practice last week in Chicago and start a rehabilitation assignment soon after. He didn't. His swings Tuesday were the closest he has come to the major leagues, and, as Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said Tuesday: "That doesn't mean he's getting ready to play baseball."

Minnesota is handling this right. Because no one – not even the Twins' doctors – can say how Morneau is wired. Did his brain absorb the trauma deeper than another brain would have? And if it did, how would the death of brain cells manifest itself? Those are horrifying questions. Never mind that Morneau is one of the best hitters in the American League, his .346/.437/.618 line baseball's best alongside [Josh Hamilton\(notes\)](#) and [Miguel Cabrera\(notes\)](#). He's 29 years old.

There are games, and there are lives, and never should anyone be so blithe as to confuse them. Ignorance no longer is an excuse. If athletes and teams need more scared-straight ads, they're readily available in academic studies, cross-sections of damaged brains and the number of coffins filled with men broken by the sport they loved.

New York Yankees slug three homers in 9-5 win over Tigers, remain tied with Rays at top of AL East

BY [Mark Feinsand](#), DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

Like a good heavyweight fight, the [Yankees](#) and [Rays](#) appear ready to go the distance in their battle for the [American League East](#).

[Tampa Bay](#) puts two starters on the disabled list? No problem. The Yankees lose [Andy Pettitte](#) for several weeks? C'est la vie.

Playing without [Alex Rodriguez](#) for the second straight night, the Yankees poured it on early and often in an emotional 9-5 win over the Tigers, putting them in position to win their first series of August this afternoon at the Stadium.

"We need to get on the right track again," [Mark Teixeira](#) said. "We're hoping to be playing in October, and October baseball is all about winning series."

The victory left them in a first-place tie with the Rays, who beat the [Rangers](#) in the afternoon.

Even the [Red Sox](#) are hanging around, sitting 5-1/2 games behind the leaders.

"I don't think there's any team in baseball that can say, 'Our season has been perfect, we haven't had any injuries or any slumps,'" Teixeira said. "That's a part of the game, and the best teams get through that."

Teixeira, [Robinson Cano](#) and [Curtis Granderson](#) all hit home runs to pace the Bombers, who tagged [Jeremy Bonderman](#) for seven runs (six earned) in five innings.

[Dustin Moseley](#), making his fifth start in place of the injured Pettitte, allowed four runs over five innings, picking up his third win .

Tempers flared late in the game when [Chad Gaudin](#) hit [Miguel Cabrera](#) in the eighth inning, possible retaliation for [Brett Gardner's](#) drilling in the first - or the two home runs Cabrera hit against Moseley earlier in the game.

Gardner was plunked by Bonderman to lead off the game, although it was unclear whether it was retribution for Gardner's hard slide into [Carlos Guillen](#) on Monday. Guillen was put on the disabled list Wednesday.

"I don't know if it was (intentional) or not," Gardner said. "It doesn't really matter; if they want to hit me and put me on base, I'm happy with it as long as I don't get hurt."

If anything, it wound up hurting Bonderman, who served up back-to-back homers by Teixeira and Cano, putting [Detroit](#) in a 3-0 hole.

Both benches were warned after Gardner was hit.

"If there were some hard feelings from what happened the other night, I would have thought something would have happened (Tuesday)," Gardner said. "Whatever. It's over and done with. No hard feelings here."

That didn't appear to be the case in the eighth. With the Yankees holding a 9-4 lead, Gaudin hit Cabrera to open the inning, bringing Tigers manager [Jim Leyland](#) out to argue with home-plate ump [Eric Cooper](#).

Nobody was ejected at the time, although Leyland was tossed after the inning ended when he went back out for another round.

Leyland wouldn't discuss the incident, answering each query with two words: "Next question."

Gaudin insisted that he didn't throw at Cabrera intentionally.

"I wanted a sinker, down and away; it just got away from me," Gaudin said. "Simple as that. I didn't do it on purpose. Guys can tell when you do it on purpose."

Cooper didn't eject Gaudin, nor did he toss Tigers reliever [Enrique Gonzalez](#), who threw some inside pitches to [Derek Jeter](#) and Cano in the eighth, one delivery even sailing behind Jeter's back.

Should any of the events continue Thursday, the first-place Yankees are the ones flirting with disaster, playing for much higher stakes than the sub-.500 Tigers.

"There's always a concern that we have more to lose than the other team," Teixeira said. "I've seen guys break hands, get hit in the head and break ribs because of a stupid bean-ball war. You just don't want to have that."

