

# RAYS CLIPS



August 20, 2010

## Tampa Bay Rays are doing the right thing by protecting Jeremy Hellickson's arm

By John Romano, Times Sports Columnist

**With Jeremy Hellickson, the future takes precedence over the present.**

ST. PETERSBURG

After his first three big-league starts, the rookie pitcher in Washington had a 2-0 record. His ERA was 1.86, and opponents were batting .149 against him. Stephen Strasburg ended up on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. After his first three big-league starts, the rookie pitcher in Tampa Bay had a 3-0 record. His ERA was 1.35, and opponents were batting .136 against him. Jeremy Hellickson could very well end up in Triple A after his next start tonight. Kind of makes you wonder if the Rays are - how shall I put this - insane? In the ramshackle history of an expansion franchise, no Rays starting pitcher has ever made such a dramatic entrance. Hellickson has been poised, he has been efficient, he has, by far, been better than anyone could have reasonably expected.

So are the Rays making a huge mistake by not taking advantage of Hellickson while fighting for first place?

No, they're not.

At least, not at this point.

Certainly, we can all agree on the notion of seizing the day in a pennant race. We wouldn't mind spending more of ownership's money, and we might be willing to trade a prospect at the right price. But risking a young player's future? That should be nonnegotiable.

And that's why this story is not as simple as it seems. There is no universal manual on how to protect promising pitchers, but there has been enough history to suggest they are at greater risk for injury when their workload increases dramatically at a young age.

So will Hellickson, 23, blow out his elbow if he pitches 200 innings instead of 175 this year? I have no idea. But I'd bet the risk is greater. And I don't think it's wise for the organization's future, or fair to the kid's career, to take that chance.

The issue with Hellickson is additionally complicated because he has had some minor health issues in a couple minor-league seasons. So he doesn't have the solid base of innings that, say, Wade Davis had when he came up last season. Davis had four minor-league seasons of 145 innings or more when he was called up. Hellickson has had one.

"Guys like Jeremy Hellickson, you think can be a big part of your future," manager Joe Maddon said. "Because he's met with some success right now, which you thought he could, you don't all of a sudden blow it up and then apply more to him in the event he may get hurt or you push him too hard."

So let's presume the Rays are doing the smart thing - the ethical thing - by putting Hellickson's health ahead of the standings. The question then becomes how best to maximize the innings he has remaining in 2010.

Hellickson threw 152 innings in 2008 but was limited to 131 last season because of a shoulder strain. Typically, the Rays don't want an increase of much more than 20 percent. But do they base it on Hellickson's high mark of 152 innings or the more recent 131?

If the team was out of contention, the answer would certainly be different. But given the postseason possibilities, the Rays might be willing to allow Hellickson to flirt with the 175-inning range.

Considering he goes into tonight's game at 137½ innings, there isn't a whole lot of room remaining.

If he stayed in the rotation, Hellickson would exceed 175 innings before the end of the regular season. And that makes no sense at all. Why burn innings in August that could be more valuable in October? Especially with Davis and Jeff Niemann set to come off the disabled list.

So sending Hellickson back to Triple A after tonight's start would have some appeal. The Rays can easily monitor his workload in Durham and can use him every five or six days so he's still ready to start if Davis or Niemann have setbacks.

It's also better than putting him in the big-league bullpen because it's going to take some time to adjust to relief work. Hellickson is not used to pitching on short rest, so you wouldn't want to work him back-to-back nights right away. And easing him into the bullpen would be easier after Sept. 1, when rosters are expanded, and the Rays would have extra relievers to pick up the slack.

Certainly, this is not a perfect solution. On the other hand, the perfect solution does not exist. You cannot chase the pennant at full speed and safeguard Hellickson's future simultaneously. So you try to find a safe landing spot somewhere in the middle.

Sort of how the Rays handled another hotshot rookie pitcher in 2008. Tampa Bay still managed to win the pennant that season, and David Price has matured into a leading Cy Young Award contender in 2010.

It's not likely Hellickson's story will turn out the same way in 2012.

But the least you can do is make sure he is healthy enough to try.

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## **Tampa Bay Rays fall 4-3 to Oakland A's**

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

### **Despite homers by Carlos Peña and Evan Longoria and a solid start by Andy Sonnanstine, the Rays fall 4-3 to Oakland.**

OAKLAND, Calif. - The Rays came 2,400 miles, then lost by less than a foot.

And Matt Joyce knew it better than any of them.

"Man, when they say it's a game of inches," Joyce said, "it's a game of inches."

Thursday's 4-3 loss to the A's snapped the Rays' five-game winning streak and knocked them out of first place in the American League East. They fell a game behind the Yankees, who beat Detroit and will spend the weekend with the woeful Mariners.

But the game could have turned out differently.

Had Joyce's drive to right-center in the top of the sixth been an inch or two higher, Coco Crisp couldn't have leaped at the wall to rob him of a two-run homer that would have put the Rays up 5-1.

"There's not much you can say about it," Joyce said. "It's just one of the greatest catches I've ever seen in person and totally changed the whole game. I honestly didn't think he was going to catch it. I knew I hit it well, as good as I could hit it. That was unbelievable."

Said Crisp, the protagonist in the 2008 Rays-Red Sox brawl when he was with Boston: "I'm always going after the ball with a chance to catch it. And it was low enough that I had a chance."

And had Cliff Pennington's drive down the rightfield line in the bottom of the sixth been an inch or two to the right instead of ticking the foul stripe on the wall, it wouldn't have been a two-run double that put the A's up 4-3.

"I was yelling at it, running over there, just hoping it was going to go foul," Joyce said.

It was that kind of night for the Rays (74-47), who had built a 3-1 lead in the sixth on homers by Carlos Peña and Evan Longoria off A's All-Star Trevor Cahill and a solid outing by Andy Sonnanstine, the *other* fill-in starter in their rotation. Then they let it go to waste.

"That's a game that we normally do win," manager Joe Maddon said. "We let that one get away, and we just can't do that."

The two near-misses weren't the only issues. The Rays also walked two batters in the pivotal sixth, Sonnanstine putting on Kurt Suzuki to start the frame and reliever Dan Wheeler his first batter, Kevin Kouzmanoff, to load the bases.

"Those were big plays, too," Maddon said.

After the leadoff walk, Sonnanstine allowed a single to Jack Cust, and when he got Mark Ellis on a flyout on his 91st pitch, Maddon decided that was enough.

"It's a tough way to lose it," Sonnanstine said. "I didn't want to give in and give Cust a fastball late in the count so I was not as mad about that one. But when you have those leadoff walks they have a tendency to come back and get you, so I would say of the two the walk was more concerning."

Maddon called on Wheeler, and he said he probably would have anyway even if he had had Chad Qualls, who missed the game due to a personal matter.

Wheeler started badly, falling behind Kouzmanoff 3-and-0, then walking him to load the bases. And it got worse from there. He allowed one run on an infield squibber by Rajai Davis, then two on the drive by Pennington.

"It comes down to fastball command for me, and I just didn't have it today," Wheeler said. "Walks don't usually work out well. I'm more disappointed about that than anything."

The A's struck for a run in the first, but Sonnanstine kept it to one until the sixth. "I thought Sonny again did a great job, gave us another chance to win," Maddon said.

The Rays didn't do much early against Cahill, but by the end of the night they had rapped seven hits, ending his run of 20 consecutive starts allowing six or fewer, matching the longest such streak in modern major-league history (Nolan Ryan, July 1972 to April 1973). Plus, Cahill hadn't given up a home run in his five previous starts. And he had allowed the lowest batting average to right-handed hitters (.174) in the majors.

So in the fourth, Longoria, a right-handed batter, singled and Peña homered, his 24th of the season and first since July 29. In the sixth, Longoria struck again, this time with a home run to left-center, his second in two days after going 19 games and 75 at-bats without one, the second longest drought of his career. It was just the second time this season Longoria and Pena, the Rays top two sluggers, went deep in the same game – also against Oakland, on April 28.

In the end, it just wasn't enough.

"Give us another foot in our favor, we would have been in good shape tonight," Maddon said. "A game of inches, that fine line between winning and losing, there you go."

A's 4

Rays 3

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## Tampa Bay Rays manager Joe Maddon expects Jeremy Hellickson to shine again

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. - Rookie RHP **Jeremy Hellickson** has made it look easy in his first three appearances - the first pitcher in the modern era to work six or more innings and allow three or fewer hits - and manager **Joe Maddon** said there's no reason he can't do it again tonight against the A's.

Primarily, that's because Maddon said it wasn't as easy as it looked for the 23-year-old against Baltimore on Sunday as he didn't have his best stuff and had to figure out what to do and how best to do it.

"My point is he's already been challenged in a sense and came through it pretty nicely," Maddon said. "There's just no telling with this guy. I just like the way he is. For a young man, he's got a real remarkable feel for what's going on out there.

"I have no reason to expect anything other than what we've seen already."

Even though three starts provide an ample sample for scouting and video analysis, Hellickson should enjoy some benefits from the unfamiliarity hitters have. And when he no longer does, Maddon said he has the ability to make the necessary adjustments.

Hellickson, in his typical Midwestern manner, said he just plans to go out and pitch.

"Right now, I'm just going to keep going out there and throw my game," he said. "If they pick up something and I have to adjust to it, then so be it."

**PITCHING IN:** RHPs **Wade Davis** and **Jeff Niemann** (strained shoulders) today face the final hurdle in their expected returns to the rotation next week with Davis throwing 45 pitches (the equivalent of three innings) and Niemann 60 (four) in a simulated game.

"Both came out of their bullpen sessions really well," Maddon said. "I'm really anticipating good from both guys. They look really good. All indications are they're going to be fine."

If so, Davis will start Tuesday in Anaheim and Niemann Wednesday.

**NO QUALLS:** The Rays were without reliever **Chad Qualls** on Thursday and likely will be again tonight due to a personal matter, which Maddon said was a death in the family.

The Rays won't put him on the bereavement list, which would allow them to call up a replacement, because then he'd be required to miss three games.

**DAYS OF REST:** SS **Jason Bartlett** wasn't in the lineup, acknowledging his head was "a little sore" after basepath collisions on consecutive days. Maddon said he already had planned to have Bartlett and **Ben Zobrist** on the bench anyway, so the schedule worked out well.

**FUTURE GRANT:** RHP **Grant Balfour** said he is ahead of schedule in recovering from the strained intercostal (rib) sustained July 30 in pregame horseplay with pitching coach **Jim Hickey**.

"I'll be ready by the end of August, but it's up to them," Balfour said. "They may want to wait until after Sept. 1 (when rosters expand). But I'm feeling great."

Balfour was expected to be out 4-6 weeks but said he feels "great" and will throw a 30-pitch bullpen session today in St. Petersburg.

As for what happened?

"Stupid, I know," he said. "Crazier things have happened."

**MINOR MATTERS:** With Hellickson in the majors and three starters - **Carlos Hernandez**, **Heath Phillips** and **Virgil Vazquez** - on the DL, Triple-A Durham picked up two free agents with big-league experience. RHP **Ramon Ortiz**, 37, is a former 16-game winner with the Angels who pitched in 16 games for the Dodgers this season and most recently was with the Mets' Triple-A team. LHP **Bobby Livingston**, 27, pitched for the Reds (2007) and Mariners ('06). ... **Rocco Baldelli** was 0-for-5 in his third game with the Bulls.

**SPECIAL SESSION:** Sunday's pairing of **Matt Garza** and **Dallas Braden** is the second time this season but just the third in the past 20 years two pitchers who threw no-hitters faced off later in the same year. **Edwin Jackson** and **Roy Halladay** met July 28, **Wilson Alvarez** and **Nolan Ryan** on Sept. 6, 1991.

**Still good:** Rays fans didn't vote enough to get the big prize, but the Moffitt Cancer Center Foundation did get a \$5,000 grant through the Pepsi Refresh Project. (The Twins' project got the \$200,000 grant.)

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## Pinellas extending 1-cent stadium tax indefinitely

By **MICHAEL SASSO** | The Tampa Tribune

If the Tampa Bay Rays ever build a new ballpark in Pinellas County — and that's a big if — they might get a big assist from tourists.

Last week, Pinellas County's tourism board created a funding mechanism that could pay for some of the millions needed for a new stadium. Members of the Tourist Development Council say they're not committing money to a stadium yet, but they want to keep all their options open.

The issue at hand is hotel bed taxes, the tax tourists pay when they stay overnight at Pinellas County's hotels. For now, Pinellas County levies a 1 percent bed tax on tourists that kicks about \$5 million a year toward paying off Tropicana Field's bonds.

The county also levies another 4 percent bed tax for other tourism uses.

That 1 percent tax for the stadium was set to expire on Sept. 30, 2015, when the bonds are paid off. But, the county's Tourist Development Council didn't let that happen.

At a meeting last week, the tourism agency agreed to extend the 1 percent tax indefinitely - at least creating a potential funding source for a new Rays stadium. Up to 80 percent of the money generated from the tax could go toward a new ballpark, or about \$4 million a year.

A ballpark isn't the only potential use for the money. It could also be used for a spring training facility, a convention center or for general tourism sales and marketing, Pinellas County Chief Assistant County Attorney Dennis Long said.

Four million dollars isn't chump change, but it would only pay for a small portion of a new stadium's cost. A new ballpark could cost a half-billion dollars or more.

Let's say Pinellas County, St. Petersburg or some other government agreed to pony up \$400 million of that cost and issue bonds. The annual debt payments on that \$400 million would be about \$28 million a year, according to the ABC Coalition, a group that studied the need for a new Rays stadium.

So, bed taxes might bring in one-seventh of the annual public cost of a new ballpark.

A lot must happen before anyone could tap that money for a stadium.

First, the Tourism Development Council will revisit the issue next month. And, the Pinellas County Commission must approve extending the bed tax, too.

Most importantly, some government would have to agree to pick up the cost of a new stadium. That could be a long way off.

For now, the Rays are unwilling to commit to Pinellas County. The team has said it wants to look around the entire Bay area for a new stadium site - including in Hillsborough County. St. Petersburg Mayor Bill Foster, though, has been adamant that the team stay within St. Petersburg, or at least in an area that could be annexed into the city.

The Rays say they've dropped the stadium issue for now and will approach Foster about it again after the World Series.

Two members of the tourism board, Karen Seel and Doreen Moore, said they weren't specifically voting to fund a new stadium. However, by extending the 1-percent bed tax they wanted to keep all options open.

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## **As a baseball fan, she's a natural**

**By TOM JACKSON | The Tampa Tribune**

Published: August 20, 2010

ST. PETERSBURG - Well into her 99th year, Martha Jackson Foster has banked as many memory bytes as your average office PC (although she readily concedes her recall function leaves something to be desired).

Nonetheless, about some things, her recollections are as clear as a crisp November afternoon. Speaking of which: Husband No. 1 filled autumn Sundays with blankets, hot chocolate and the hometown Cleveland Browns. On an August afternoon not quite 74 years ago, she watched Bob Feller stroll from the bullpen for his first major league start.

There were stuffy gymnasiums in Atlanta where she jumped center — "I was always the tallest," she says, generationally rueful — in six-on-six high school girls basketball games. And in nine years as a court clerk, she was called on to type an execution order only once — but it was for a thug so vile, she recalls, the presiding judge whispered he'd be willing to throw the switch himself.

These scrapbook pages of the mind may constitute highlights aplenty for any life so long and so well-lived. But Tuesday, Martha Jackson Foster, twice widowed (both times by men named Bob), a mother of three (spaced 17 years apart) and a driver yet of her own car (a well-tuned 1978 Chevrolet Lumina), opened an entirely new chapter.

Call it, "When Martha Met Evan."

Miss Martha is more than a mere member of the enormous and expanding Tampa Bay Rays television nation. Headquartered in a doublewide mobile home southeast of Dade City, she may be its foremost citizen.

Having long since shucked any allegiance to the Indians of her working, married and child-rearing years, Miss Martha organizes her days around Rays broadcasts. She practically sets her bird-chirping clock by the time of the first pitch, and when the Rays are playing night games on the coast, she takes an afternoon nap.

She keeps a 10-inch Evan Longoria Bobble Head on the table separating twin recliners stationed in front of an old but reliable television whose picture, even for weakening eyes, "is good enough for me." As for the Longoria doll, a gift from daughter Lynne Jackson, 60, a San Diego lab technician, Miss Martha enjoys his agreeability, but not his solitude. She's thinking of adding a Matt Garza replica, if only to yank on his goatee.

She knows Jason Kubel's towering infield popup, triggering a Minnesota win on Aug. 5, was only the latest ball to rattle off one of the Tropicana Field catwalks in a way that materially affected the outcome of a game. And she understands that it's odd when a major league team has a catcher for a leadoff hitter.

So, when Joe Henderson's column appeared a couple of weeks ago extolling the surge in Rays TV fandom, Marti and Ray Witham read it as a tribute to Miss Martha, their boon companion and fellow Ohio expat. A couple of telephone calls later, and Rays communications vice president Rick Vaughn was inviting Miss Martha off her recliner to be the team's guest.

### **Charmed, I'm sure**

Tuesday, Miss Martha cashed in. Ferried to the game in chum Richard Shaffer's Dodge crossover SUV and escorted by Marti and Ray, she rolled onto the field behind home plate as Rays batting practice was winding down.

In a dark blue Rays jersey with a No. 3 and Longoria's name across the back, stretchy blue pants, sensible shoes and a team cap clamped down on unapologetically gray waves, Martha Jackson Foster otherwise beamed like a schoolgirl.

A few minutes later, his work in the cage completed, Longoria ambled over. Later, Miss Martha would describe her affection for the All-Star third baseman as early and enduring. "I liked him even before I knew what kind of ballplayer he was going to be," she'd say. "I liked his looks. He didn't seem to take things too seriously."

For Miss Martha, Longoria's pregame demeanor was all unhurried charm. When she chided him for a recent haircut that sprigs out from beneath his cap, he winced. "That's the same thing my mom says." They chatted some more and took pictures, Longoria nudging the footrests of her loaner wheelchair out of the way for her to stand.

Later, when Longoria lined a first-inning single into left-center field, Miss Martha returned the favor, springing — more like a high school center than any nonagenarian — to her feet to cheer her chosen one.

### **Managing her tongue**

All in all, Miss Martha said, sipping black coffee and nibbling a cheeseburger from her perch at the top of the lower grandstand behind the visitors dugout, there was only a single awkward moment in the entire delightful experience. When Manager Joe Maddon stopped by for a visit, she said, it was all she could do not to school him on his habit of sticking with pitchers too long.

"I'd get out the hook a long time before he does," she said. "But I bit my tongue."

Tuesday's game marked the middle of a three-game sweep of the Texas Rangers before the Rays left for a west-coast swing. Notably, for a team that would prefer to leave nothing to chance in its stretch run against the hated Yankees, the game at which Martha Jackson Foster was the Rays' guest was the only one in which they coasted: 3-0 after one inning en route to a 10-1 final.

I'm just saying.

As for Miss Martha, who credits laughter, crossword puzzles and the occasional margarita for a full and satisfying life, she kept the celebration going when her escorts finally dropped her off a little after 11 p.m.

Too wired for bed, she slumped into her recliner and clicked the remote, her television flickering to life. Tuning into the replay, she tapped Bobble Head Evan on the cap and grinned. "You won't believe what happened today."

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## 'Sports Magnet' Matt Walker a hit around the Trop

By **ROGER MOONEY | The Tampa Tribune**

Everyone at Tropicana Field had just been invited to stand and stretch and sing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," and Matt Walker, seated in the back of the press box in his wheelchair Tuesday night, grabbed his microphone with the Tampa Bay Rays logo, pushed himself a little taller in his chair and started singing into his recorder.

*"Take me out to the ball game â€¦"*

Earlier, Matt had called WKID in Clearwater with an update of the Rays-Texas Rangers game.

Later that night, he would do a postgame wrap with WDAE's Whitney Johnson that was edited and played on The Sports Animal the following afternoon.

You may have heard it or one of the other updates Matt has done during the summer for WDAE.

He calls himself Matt "The Sports Magnet" Walker.

"It's perfect," Johnson said, "because we're all attracted to him."

Matt is 15 years old. He has cerebral palsy. He was born two months early and weighed 3 pounds, 4 ounces.

He lives in St. Petersburg with his dad. He has an older sister, Katie. His mom passed away seven years ago from breast cancer. He attends Meadowlawn Middle School.

The wheelchair is Matt's only concession to his condition.

"He doesn't consider himself as disabled," Matt's father Steve said. "He's one of the guys. He wants to try everything."

Matt builds and paints birdhouses for his business, Bird, Bath & Beyond.

He can fly jet planes on his computer.

He wants to become the Rays TV announcer when he gets older.

Today, Steve will drive his son to Tropicana Field so Matt can record the names of all the players on the Rays and the Toronto Blue Jays rosters. They will be played Aug. 31 during the third inning of the Rays-Jays game when each batter comes to the plate.

The Rays let a boy or girl announce the batters live during the third inning of Sunday games. Matt's turn behind the public address



system is being recorded because he talks with a halting speech that becomes more halting as he gets excited.

And Matt's excited about this.

"Now batting for the Tampa Bay Rays, third baseman Evan Longoria," he yelled into his microphone the other night.

Rick Vaughn, the Rays vice president of communications, met Matt several years ago when Vaughn started volunteering his Saturday mornings at the Miracle League in St. Petersburg. He was taken by this kid in the wheelchair with the million-dollar smile who announces the starting lineup and sings the national anthem before each game.

"He has so much energy," Vaughn said.

This season, Vaughn has provided press passes for Matt and his dad for a number of Rays games. Matt even made the press box announcements during one game.

The Rays, Steve pointed out, have yet to lose when his boy is in the house.

Johnson also met Matt while volunteering at the Miracle League. One week he heard Matt sing the national anthem and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." The next week Johnson brought his recorder.

"His is the most inspiring rendition of the national anthem I've ever heard," Johnson said. "It brings tears to my eyes."

Johnson invited Matt to the WDAE studio one afternoon this summer and let Matt tape a sports update that was edited and played on the air.

"To see him smile and laugh when he heard his voice on the radio was the greatest moment of my radio career," Johnson said.

"People come up to me all the time and say, 'We love this guy.' It's pretty neat. Super, super rewarding."

Whitney's brother, Ray, taught physical education for 32 years. He taught Matt at Shore Acres Elementary School in St. Petersburg.

"The reason I got into teaching was to meet guys like Matt," Ray Johnson said. "He's an inspiration. You had a kid in a wheelchair in a regular school being just a regular guy. Anything we presented to him, he gave it a shot. He's a trip. Mr. Happy. I've taught thousands of kids and can't remember them all. But Matt is a kid you don't forget. On bad days of teaching he helped me remember why I became a teacher."

Longoria, who donated \$500,000 to the Miracle League, is Matt's favorite player.

Before Longoria, it was Trever Miller and Jorge Cantu. Both lent their time to the Miracle League. Cantu often calls Matt on his birthday and Christmas.

The two former Rays once held a clinic for the Miracle League players at the Trop. All Matt wanted was for his dad to push his wheelchair to the middle of the outfield.

Once there, Matt asked his dad to let him lay on the field so he could look up at the ceiling.

Then Matt started singing.

*"Take me out to the ball game"*

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## Rays lose 'game of inches' to A's, 4-3

By ROGER MOONEY | The Tampa Tribune

It was the type of loss that called for the clichés.

"A game of inches," right fielder Matt Joyce said.

"The fine line between winning and losing," Manager Joe Maddon said.

And they were right.

A home run that was denied by a leaping catch at the center-field wall and a line drive down the right field line that was fair by an inch if that much produced a two-run swing in the sixth inning Thursday night and made all the difference in the Tampa Bay Rays' 4-3 loss to the Oakland A's at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

The loss snapped the Rays' five-game winning streak and dropped them into second place in the American League East, a game behind the New York Yankees. The Rays still maintain a 5 1/2-game lead over the Red Sox in the American League wild-card race.

"That's a game that we normally do win and we let it get away," Maddon said. "We just can't do that."

It got away because Coco Crisp robbed Joyce of a two-run homer that would have given the Rays a 5-1 lead in the sixth inning off A's starter Trevor Cahill.

It got away because Dan Wheeler, pitching in relief of Andy Sonnanstine in the bottom of the sixth, couldn't command his fastball and allowed a walk to load the bases and then, an out later, a two-run double to Cliff Pennington that landed at the base of the right-field wall just into fair territory and scored the tying and go-ahead runs.

"I was yelling at it running over there just hoping it was going to go foul," Joyce said. "Man, when they say it's a game of inches, it's a game of inches."

Cahill was trying to become the first pitcher in modern major-league history, an era which dates back to 1900, to allow six hits or fewer while pitching five innings or more in 21 straight games. He entered the night tied with Nolan Ryan for the major-league record of turning that trick in 20-consecutive starts.

B.J. Upton's seventh-inning single denied Cahill of that historic feat. But by then, the game had turned in the A's favor thanks to those two well-hit balls the previous inning.

The Rays took a 2-1 lead in the fourth on Carlos Peña's 24th home run of the season, a two-run shot that landed in the seats above the right-field wall.

Evan Longoria's second home run in as many games with one out in the sixth gave the Rays a 3-1 lead. It was also the second time this season Peña and Longoria homered in the same game. The first came on April 28 against the A's at Tropicana Field.

After a single by Peña, Joyce hit a ball to straight-away center field that appeared destined to make it a 5-1 game.

"I knew it was going to be close," Joyce said when asked if he thought the drive had a chance to leave the park. "I was hoping that it would either get over his head (for extra bases) or over the fence. I honestly didn't think he was going to catch it. I knew I hit it well, as good as I can hit it, and that was unbelievable."

Crisp, who has been a pain for the Rays before, jumped and was able to reach above the wall to bring the ball back.

"He put some good wood on it, and it was just low enough where I could jump and catch it," Crisp said. "Fortunate for me, I was able to come down with it and end up being a part of the reason why we won."

Part of the reason? Joyce said it was the reason the A's won.

"There's not much you can say about it," Joyce said. "It's just one of the greatest catches I've seen in person and totally changed the whole game."

A 5-1 lead against Cahill would have been huge, especially with the Rays' bullpen behind Sonnanstine, who pitched 5 1/3 innings and allowed just three runs.

The Rays were almost able to deliver the knockout blow to Cahill, who improved to 13-5.

"I think we did, but Coco brought it back," Maddon said. "That would have given us five runs at that point. Overall we did a pretty nice job against him. We could have had five runs after six innings, but their guy made a great play and prevented that from happening. After that catch he got better I thought."

Still, the Rays had a 3-1 lead in the bottom of the sixth.

Sonnanstine got into trouble when he walked Kurt Suzuki and allowed a single to Jack Cust to start the inning.

Wheeler replaced Sonnanstine after Sonnanstine got Mark Ellis to fly out to Joyce in shallow right field.

Wheeler walked Kevin Kouzmanoff to load the bases. He got Rajai Davis to bounce back to the pitchers mound, but the ball was hit so slow, Wheeler's only play was the first base while Suzuki scored to make it a one-run game.

Pennington drove a double to right field that landed at the base of the wall just inside fair territory. Cust and Kouzmanoff scored on the play to give the A's a 4-3 lead.

"When you fall behind in the count, can't throw a strike, you ended up throwing what I didn't want to throw, you end up throwing a cookie and just missed even more," Wheeler said. "It all comes down to fastball command for me, and I just didn't have it today. I'm more upset about coming in in that situation and walking Kouzmanoff on five pitches. Walks usually don't work out well."

If Joyce missed giving the Rays a four-run lead by an inch or so, Pennington gave the A's the lead by almost the same margin.

"You give us another foot in our favor and we were in good shape," Maddon said. "A game of inches, the fine line between winning and losing, there you go."

## **NOTEWORTHY**

RHP Chad Qualls missed the game because of a death in his family. Maddon isn't sure if Qualls will rejoin the team tonight but expects him back Saturday. ⚾️ LF Carl Crawford had his nine-game hitting streak snapped. Still, in his last 10 games he's batting .317. ⚾️ Upton extended his hitting streak to 10 games, matching his career-high. ⚾️ John Jaso had two hits and is batting .319 since July 28. ⚾️ Pennington has hit safely in all six games against the Rays this season. ⚾️ Jerry Blevins pitched a perfect ninth inning and recorded his first major-league save. ⚾️ The A's evened their record at 60-60, the 21st time they've been at .500 this season, a team record. ⚾️ Cahill is 4-1 with a 0.90 ERA in his past five starts.

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## Rays notebook: Hellickson new to A's

By **ROGER MOONEY** | **The Tampa Tribune**

Rookie RHP **Jeremy Hellickson** has a number of things working in his favor tonight when he makes his fourth career start: his fastball, his change-up, his curveball.

Also, the unknown.

Opposing hitters can read all the scouting reports and watch all the film they want, but the real learning happens when they step into the batter's box.

"They've seen tape, but they haven't seen me in person," Hellickson said. "I think there's a big difference."

Rays manager **Joe Maddon** agreed.

"I really believe under these circumstances a good young pitcher may have the edge over a talented offensive team just because you need to see these guys," Maddon said. "At this point, I can't disagree that there's probably some element of surprise with him right now. But I also have a lot of faith in this guy down the road to be able to make adjustments when he sees a team the second or the third time."

Maddon said he saw some of that during Hellickson's last start, when he didn't have his best stuff but was able to pitch six innings against the Orioles for his third victory in as many starts. Maddon noticed how Hellickson occasionally stepped off the rubber, gathered himself quickly then made his pitch.

"Look at his track record of success in the minor leagues," Maddon said. "Minor-league hitters have had the same kinds of problems with him, too, even though they've seen him several times. Of course we're talking about major-leaguers, but he's had this success all the way through, which speaks well for him right now, too."

### Day off for Bartlett

SS **Jason Bartlett** wasn't in the lineup Thursday, but Maddon said that was more by design than the bumps Bartlett encountered during a pair of base-path collisions during the sweep against the Rangers.

"I had this picked as a day off for him regardless. I know he got banged a little bit, two good collisions, so it actually worked out well," Maddon said.

Bartlett was available to pinch-hit or for late-inning defense.

RF/2B **Ben Zobrist** also did not start Thursday because it was a scheduled day off.

Maddon said he wants to rest some starters during this road trip. LF **Carl Crawford** may not be one of them, since Maddon noted the three-game series with the Red Sox at Tropicana Field that awaits the Rays at the end of this trip.

### Niemann, Davis coming along

RHPs **Jeff Niemann** and **Wade Davis** (right shoulder strains) are scheduled to throw simulated games this afternoon.

"All indications are that they're going to be fine," Maddon said. "From that point we'll move to when we're going to use them in a game and how we are going to set them up."

Maddon and pitching coach **Jim Hickey** said this week that they expect Davis to rejoin the rotation Tuesday against the Angels and

Niemann on Wednesday.

Both pitchers will throw about four innings today against a handful of their teammates. Who would want to step in and volunteer to hit against a pair of hard-throwing righties?

C **Kelly Shoppach**, who doesn't get many chances to hit right-handers, was one.

"Listen, when you're in this position where we're doing pretty well, we got all this stuff going on in a good way, guys are coming back and playing pretty well, there's a lot of energy involved, so it's a lot easier to get volunteers," Maddon said.

### **Odds and ends**

RHP **Chad Qualls** was not with the team Thursday because of a personal matter. It was not known if he will be with the team tonight. ¶ This series pits the two best pitching staffs in the American League. The A's lead the AL with a 3.55 ERA. The Rays are second at 3.61. With a 3.33 ERA, the Rays' bullpen is second in the AL behind the Twins' 3.14. ¶ Crawford took a nine-game hitting streak into Thursday's game. ¶ CF **B.J. Upton** also took a nine-game hitting streak into Thursday's game. He is batting .333 for August. ¶ First-pitch temperature was a comfortable 60 degrees. ¶ The Rays and Yankees had 74 wins each through 120 games. The last time two teams from the same division had as many wins at the same point was in 1979, when the Orioles had 79 wins and the Red Sox 75.

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## **Rays fall to A's, lose ground in AL East**

### ***Pivotal sixth inning drops Tampa Bay game behind Yankees***

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The inches worked against the Rays on Thursday.

And when those inches were added up, the calculation equaled a 4-3 loss to the Athletics before a crowd of 10,118 at the Oakland Coliseum.

In losing, the Rays saw their winning streak snapped at five, while dropping to 74-47 on the season and falling out of a tie for first place in the American League East with the Yankees.

The sixth inning proved to be the pivotal point of the game after five innings of a pitching duel between Andy Sonnanstine and Trevor Cahill.

Evan Longoria homered off Cahill with one out in the sixth to give the Rays a 3-1 lead, but the sixth would haunt the Rays as the inning in which they should have scored more.

Carlos Pena followed with a single, then Matt Joyce hit a ball to deep center field that Coco Crisp made a leaping catch on at the wall to take away a home run.

"He put some good wood on it and it was just low enough where I could jump and catch it," Crisp said. "Fortunately for me, I was able to come down with it and end up being a part of the reason why we won tonight."

All Joyce could do offer superlatives about Crisp's catch.

"There's not much you can say about it, it's just one of the greatest catches I've ever seen in person," Joyce said. "It totally changed the whole game."

"I knew it was going to be close. I was hoping it would either get over his head or over the fence. I honestly didn't think he would catch it. I knew I hit it well. That's as good as I can hit it. That was unbelievable."

Having been awarded a stay of execution by his center fielder, Cahill followed by helping himself when he fielded Sean Rodriguez's swinging bunt with his bare hand, then whirled and threw to first for the final out of the inning.

When asked about his club having Cahill on the ropes, but not being able to get the knockout blow against him, Rays manager Joe Maddon just smiled.

"Well, I think we did, but Coco just brought it back," Maddon said. "That ball was well struck and could have given us five runs at that point. I thought, overall, we did a pretty nice job against him. We could have had five runs against him after six innings. But their guy made a great play and prevented that from happening."

The fielding gems seemed to get the Athletics' offense on track in the bottom half of the sixth.

Sonnanstine held the Athletics to one run through five innings before getting off to a rocky start in the sixth by walking leadoff batter Kurt Suzuki. Jack Cust then delivered a single to center and the Athletics were in business.

Dan Wheeler took over for Sonnanstine and Maddon insisted afterward that the veteran right-hander would have been the man for the job even if Chad Qualls had been available -- Qualls had to leave the team due to a death in his family.

Wheeler proceeded to walk Kevin Kouzmanoff to load the bases with none out.

Rajai Davis then grounded to Wheeler to score Suzuki and Cliff Pennington followed with a two-run double to give the Athletics a 4-3 lead they would not relinquish.

"It hit the line, it hit the foul line, from my angle it looked like it hit the foul line," said Joyce, who played right field on Thursday. "So I was yelling at it running over there, just hoping it was going to go foul. But I mean, man, when they say it's a game of inches, it's a game of inches."

The A's scored first when Crisp opened the Athletics' first with a single up the middle off Sonnanstine. Daric Barton followed with a double to right to put runners at second and third. One out later, Suzuki grounded out to shortstop to drive home Crisp.

Longoria singled with one out in the fourth and Pena followed with his 24th home run of the season, hitting a 1-1 pitch from Cahill into the right-field stands to give the Rays a 2-1 lead.

The Rays seem to be a measuring stick for the young Athletics.

"We've proven that we can play well against some of the top teams all year," Pennington said. "We're going out there trying to win every series, no matter the opponent."

Meanwhile, the Rays figured tomorrow is another day, which means the good fortune could shift in the other direction.

"Any time you lose or don't come up with the big hit it's frustrating," Joyce said. "But we play 162 games, so we'll come back [Friday] and hopefully those couple of inches will go our way."

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## **A's ready for anything against versatile Rays**

By Joey Nowak / MLB.com

As the Rays meet the Athletics for the second game in a four-game set, Oakland manager Bob Geren made a keen observation about his team's weekend opponent.

"Tampa's just another team that has a little of everything," the skipper said. "They have some power, they have some speed, they can play some small ball, they can do a little bit of everything."

Yes, the Rays -- in a see-saw battle with the Yankees for the best record in baseball over the last few days -- have a lot of weapons. Before the series in Oakland, the Rays recorded a resounding sweep of the Rangers, who lead the American League West.

Both the A's and Rays are strong in the pitching department as both clubs own the best ERAs in the American League -- Oakland with a 3.55 mark and Tampa Bay at 3.61.

The A's will get a good look at some of Tampa Bay's best young pitching firsthand on Friday, when right-hander Jeremy Hellickson takes the hill for the Rays. He'll be looking for his fourth win in as many decisions.

Though he's made quite an impression already, Hellickson said he's not too concerned with opponents studying his game.

"They've seen tape, but they haven't seen me in person, and I think that's a big difference," he said.

As for Rays manager Joe Maddon, he has faith the hurler -- who has a 1.35 ERA -- will be able to make any necessary adjustments should teams start to figure him out.

"For a young man, Maddon said, "he really has a remarkable feel."

### **Rays: Tampa Bay tough on AL West**

Even with Thursday's 4-3 loss in the series opener, the Rays are 14-7 against the AL West, particularly with the help of the sweep against the Rangers earlier in the week. The Rays were just 12-21 against the AL West last year.

Thursday's loss also snapped a five-game winning streak and dropped the Rays a game behind the first-place Yankees for the first time in four days.

### **Athletics: Mazzaro enjoying success**

Vin Mazzaro, who is among Oakland's young crop of promising pitchers, gets the start on Friday. He hasn't won a game since July 24, but owns a 2.37 ERA in his last three starts.

The A's have hit only four home runs this month and have gone yard just 72 times this season, the lowest total in the big leagues.

### **Worth noting**

The A's are 52-0 when leading after the eighth inning. ... Oakland starters have allowed one earned run or fewer in eight of the club's last 12 games. ... The Rays know the power of the A's pitching staff, having fallen victim to Dallas Braden's perfect game on May 9.

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## **Rays aren't looking past any opponent**

### ***Club slated for 23 games against sub-.500 teams down stretch***

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Of the 42 games left on the Rays' schedule, 23 are against teams currently under .500.

The composition for the remainder of their slate is as follows: Yankees, seven games, Blue Jays (6), Orioles (6), Angels (6), Royals (4), Athletics (4), and Mariners (3).

Just because the majority of their final games are against teams with records below .500, Rays players know they can't underestimate those teams.

"We know they're going to be hunting for us," Carlos Pena said. "We don't know what their records are. Every team we go after, we try to do the best we can to beat them. So there's not going to be any letting down, or trying to be comfortable. We're trying to win, because any given day, any team can beat any other team. We know that, so we're not taking anything for granted."

Carl Crawford added: "You can't take them lightly. Those teams have nothing to lose. So they're really dangerous when they play like that."

Pena and Crawford both remember being on a team that had a record under .500, which last occurred for Tampa Bay in 2007, the last year the team was known as the Devil Rays.

"When you're in that situation "it's fun to shoot for the top," Pena said. "Teams love to play spoilers. I know how it goes."

Crawford said being in that situation breeds a mentality of playing like you had nothing to lose.

"Everybody figured you were going to lose anyway," Crawford said. "You just went ahead and played as hard as you could and saw what happened at the end."

### **Zobrist taking easy route to first base**

OAKLAND -- Ben Zobrist owned a Major League-leading 43 walks since June 23 entering Thursday and leads the Rays with 71 walks for the season.

Zobrist knew he had been walking a lot, but said he wasn't aware of how many free passes he'd drawn until the number was called to his attention.

"I think I was just being too aggressive before," Zobrist said. "I realized I needed to pull it back. Pitchers were doing their jobs in trying to get me to swing at borderline pitches and I had been obliging earlier in the season.

"I think now, I'm just making that adjustment to where I'm getting the ball to where I want it. That's the one thing that I look at offensively from the last few months. I'm like, 'OK, I've gotten on base a lot and I've given guys behind me a chance to get some RBIs and get some runs scored.' That's the positive out of it. You don't necessarily want to lead the team in walks. You want to lead the league in hitting. It's something that I've had to work on to pull my zone back to where I need to in order to be an aggressive hitter."

### **Davis, Niemann turn in good sessions**

OAKLAND -- Jeff Niemann and Wade Davis, who have been on the disabled list with sore right shoulders, had good bullpen sessions on Thursday.

Rays manager Joe Maddon said both starters will throw simulated games on Friday.

"They both came out of their bullpen sessions really well," Maddon said. "I'm really anticipating good from both guys [Friday]. They look really good. So we'll just come out tomorrow, about 2 o'clock or so; we'll have both of them throw. I don't know the parameters yet.

"I need to talk to [pitching coach Jim Hickey] about the number of pitches and up and downs, and things like that. We're going to have several hitters come out and hit against them. All indications are that they're going to be fine."

After Friday's simulated game, Maddon said they will have a better idea about how to proceed with the pair.

### **Worth noting**

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, when Matt Garza faces Dallas Braden on Sunday it will mark just the second time in the last 20 years two pitchers will face each other after throwing no-hitters earlier in the season. The last time was July 28 of this season when Edwin Jackson, then pitching for the D-backs, lost to Roy Halladay of the Phillies. The previous occasion came Sept. 6, 1991, when Wilson Alvarez of the White Sox faced Nolan Ryan of the Rangers. ... Evan Longoria is one double from becoming the only Rays player with a pair of 40-double seasons (44 in 2009). ... B.J. Upton is hitting .333 in August with 11 extra base hits. He took a nine-game hitting streak into Thursday's game, leaving him one game shy of his longest hitting streak. ... Chad Qualls was not with the team on Thursday as he dealt with a personal matter.

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## **Rays maintain strong community presence**

### ***Richardson helps create six recreation centers in St. Petersburg***

By Adam Spunberg / MLB.com

Obscured behind many large-scale initiatives is an industrious person, who pondered the world in its stark realities and aspired to some greater scheme, and then got help from those who could make it possible. Such was the case with Karen Richardson, a



warmhearted Rays employee who challenged the violence that terrorized her childhood community, and she succeeded with a major assist from the altruism-conscious Rays upper management.

It was one tragedy that led to a plethora of triumphs. When an eight-year-old girl was shot in the neighborhood where Richardson grew up and still lived, she applied her frustrations into something proactive.

"It was right in my neighborhood, a couple of blocks from my house," Richardson said. "I grew up there. It was very personal. I felt like something needed to be done. We've got to do something. There are kids dying out there, and we all grow up somewhere."

Determined to make good on her pledge, Richardson recruited fellow St. Petersburg residents and Rays employees Beverly Lee and Julia Thompson to approach Rays Senior Vice President of Business Operations, Brian Auld.

"He lit up," Richardson said enthusiastically. "When I told him, he said he had heard a little about the incident, but I asked him if there was something we could do."

Auld recalls the event with similar gusto.

"I was thrilled," Auld said. "Karen came to me along with Beverly Lee and Julia Thompson. They have been with the organization for many years and are well respected. They came to me as representatives of many of our staff who live in the South St. Petersburg area. It is always easier to get involved the right way when you have a group of people who are close to the situation."

Richardson's idea consisted of setting up six recreation centers, where kids could be distracted from the evil forces that tempt them on the streets. The Rays organization heeded her call, and then some players got involved.

"Carl Crawford, David Price and B.J. Upton were very very interested," she said. We have six centers, and each player watches over two of them. They call them Carl's Crew, Price's Pals and B.J.'s Bunch."

Upton has been extremely vocal about what it means for him.

"I was at that point once," he said. "I was that kid sitting there at a recreation center. When you have someone to look up to, it just makes it easier."

Perhaps Richardson was the perfect person to present the idea, because she knows quite a bit about loyalty. Not only has she continued to reside in her childhood area, but she also stayed on with the Rays after beginning in 1990.

"I've been there since the Devil Rays started," she admitted proudly, no small feat considering the franchise's historically low winning percentages and eventual ownership change. Nobody could blame her for eating up the recent successes on the field, something she graciously attributes to Auld, President Matt Silverman and their team.

Even with the World Series appearance in 2008 and the ongoing 2010 campaign, the new Rays management has made community relations a priority, applying some of the same on-the-field innovation to their initiatives off the field.

"Quite simply, it is part of our brand and our identity," Auld said. "You might say that it is in our DNA. It hasn't always been that way, but Stuart Sternberg made it clear that he wants our employees to be proud of our organization. The easiest way to do that is to support them in bettering their communities. All staff are encouraged to take up to one paid day per month or one hour per week to volunteer in whatever area they happen to be invested."

When asked about the future of the programs, Auld said, "We are working closely with the United Way and the Pinellas School system to seek out ways to augment our support for the recreation centers in South St. Pete. It's not clear where this will all end up, but thanks to the passion of Karen and several of her peers, I have no doubt that our impact will grow."

In the meantime, Karen continues to lead the community charge on a daily basis, an unconventional role for a Rays Box Office Supervisor. This past week, she brought Price out to the centers and facilitated the purchase of school supplies and tee shirts. The children thanked Price with a massive thank-you card.

The mutual respect between Auld and Richardson, two people of vastly different backgrounds, is a testament to the special atmosphere permeating through Tropicana Field these days.

"To tell you the truth, I'm most proud of the fact that the Rays Organization has become a place where someone like Karen feels empowered to bring her ideas to the forefront," Auld said. "The culture we have created embraces ideas from all areas -- I know there was a time when Karen and Beverly may not have felt so comfortable coming to me to ask for support."

Many have called the Rays a model organization, for finding ways to coexist with and defeat their leviathan rivals the Yankees and Red Sox, but while these accolades have spawned from their economic efficiency, it is the genuine decency that really deserves emulation. Now if only other organizations could be fortunate enough to find a Karen Richardson of their own.

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## **Oakland A's use unusual formula to beat Tampa Bay Rays**

By Joe Stiglich  
Oakland Tribune

Posted: 08/19/2010 10:18:34 PM PDT

Updated: 08/20/2010 08:15:09 AM PDT

Their offensive hero from each of the past two games resides in the No. 9 spot in the order.

They preserved a one-run lead in the ninth inning Thursday with a reliever who had never recorded a major league save.

The A's hardly are using a conventional blueprint for victory, but it's working right now.

They notched a come-from-behind 4-3 victory over the Tampa Bay Rays on Thursday night at the Oakland Coliseum, taking the first of a four-game series against the team that was tied for the major leagues' best record.

The A's broke through with a three-run sixth that erased a 3-1 deficit and rewarded Trevor Cahill with his 13th victory.

Rajai Davis' bases-loaded ground out in the sixth scored Kurt Suzuki and brought Oakland to within 3-2. Then No. 9 hitter Cliff Pennington drilled a two-out, two-run double off the base of the wall in the right-field corner against Dan Wheeler (2-1) to put the A's ahead 4-3, paving the way for their third straight victory.

A day earlier, Pennington delivered a walk-off single against the Toronto Blue Jays.

"Getting two-out hits is what this team has to do to win ballgames," Pennington said.

Coupled with Texas' 4-0 loss to Baltimore, the A's gained a game in the American League West for the third straight day. They're seven games behind the first-place Rangers, the closest they've been since July 21.

A paltry crowd of 10,118 was on hand, but those who showed had reason to get charged up even before the A's go-ahead rally.

Momentum shifted to the A's while they were playing defense in the top of the sixth.

After Evan Longoria had homered to stretch Tampa Bay's lead to 3-1, center fielder Coco Crisp robbed Matt Joyce of a two-run shot later in the inning, leaping high to snatch a ball that was headed over the center field wall.

"He's really good out there, everybody knows that," Cahill said of Crisp.

"A ball that's hardly going over the fence, I feel like he's got a chance to make the catch."

Despite struggling with his fastball command, Cahill (13-5) lasted eight innings and allowed three runs on seven hits. It was the fourth time in his past five starts he's gone at least eight innings.

He paid for his two mistake pitches.

Carlos Pena crushed a 1-1 pitch deep to right-center for a two-run homer in the fourth to give the Rays a 2-1 lead. Before that, Cahill had allowed just one earned run over his previous 36 innings.

Longoria's sixth-inning blast made it 3-1.

Cahill fell just shy of carving his own spot in the record books. In allowing seven hits, Cahill snapped his string of 20 consecutive starts of pitching at least five innings and giving up six hits or less.

He wound up tied with Nolan Ryan for the longest such streak in major league history dating back to 1900.

"(The record) was in the back of my head, but I didn't worry too much about it," Cahill said.

He's 8-2 with a 1.84 ERA at home and has allowed just four earned runs in his last 40 innings overall.

With closer Andrew Bailey on the disabled list, Craig Breslow nursing a bruised forearm and Michael Wuertz having pitched three of the past four days, A's manager Bob Geren called on lefty Jerry Blevins in the ninth to protect a 4-3 lead.

Blevins set the Rays down in order to notch his first career save.

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### ***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.

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