

RAYS CLIPS



August 21, 2010

Tampa Bay Rays fall to Oakland A's 5-4

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer
In Print: Saturday, August 21, 2010

OAKLAND, Calif. — The least the Rays could have done was give Jeremy Hellickson a better parting gift.

The rookie right-hander pitched well enough for a fourth consecutive win in his last start before being demoted — to Class A Charlotte, so he can work out of the bullpen — but his teammates couldn't hang on and lost another game to the A's they looked to have won, 5-4.

The A's scored twice in the eighth, taking advantage of some uncharacteristic ineffectiveness by Joaquin Benoit, who has been one of the most dependable relievers in the majors, and an unusual error by second baseman Ben Zobrist, who an inning earlier looked to be the star of the game after hitting a go-ahead homer.

"He makes that play 101 times out of 100," manager Joe Maddon said. "It was really just unfortunate. Believe me, he's very, very good. It's just something that doesn't normally happen to us. We normally don't beat ourselves — we did tonight and we kinda did last night also."

"Like Joe said, most of the time I'm going to make that play," Zobrist said. "It was just a bad time to miss it."

The loss extended the Rays' freaky Friday performances, as they lost for the 14th time in the past 15 weeks and dropped to 3-16 overall.

Of more significance, it was also a wasted opportunity. They knew before they took the field that the Yankees, whom they trail in the American League East, and the Red Sox, whom they lead for the wild card, both lost. But the Rays (74-48) didn't take advantage, remaining one game behind the Yankees and 5½ ahead of the Red Sox with 40 games left.

Hellickson said he was disappointed and not totally surprised by the news, and buoyed by knowing he'll be back Sept. 1, when rosters expand.

"Disappointed obviously, but we've got Wade (Davis) and (Jeff Niemann) coming back and they've earned it to go back in the rotation," Hellickson said.

The Rays are sending him to Class A Charlotte as a matter of convenience, since he's going to spend most of his time working out, pitching maybe just once out of the bullpen, so the travel from Port Charlotte will be minimal.

"It doesn't matter where he gets (the work) done, just so he does it," Maddon said. "He'll get a little side work, cut back on his innings, just trying to monitor him the rest of the season and utilize him the best way we can."

He's been doing pretty well as a starter, and he pitched well enough to win again on Friday, even if he wasn't quite as sharp, allowing three runs on seven hits — including a tying homer by Cust in the sixth.

"I think like my last start it took a couple innings to find my fastball," Hellickson said. "But once I felt good with that, I felt really good."

Hellickson, 23, certainly made the most of his opportunity created with Davis and Niemann going on the disabled list. He won his first three starts and along the way became the only pitcher in modern major-league history to work six or more innings and allow three or fewer hits in each of his first three games. He also was the only Rays pitcher to win his first three starts.

With Davis and Niemann coming back next week, the Rays no longer needed Hellickson, whose roster spot was taken by right-handed reliever Dale Thayer. Benoit got out of a mess Hellickson left in the seventh but got himself in trouble in the eighth. He walked Jack Cust to start the inning then allowed a single to Kevin Kouzmanoff (despite coming in with a majors-low .113 average allowed to right-handed hitters) and a sac fly to Rajai Davis that tied the score.

Benoit wasn't as sharp as he has been, and when he followed a strikeout of Travis Buck with a full-count walk to pinch-hitter Mark Ellis, pushing his pitch total to 37, Maddon made a change.

Lance Cormier got lefty Cliff Pennington to hit the ground ball they wanted, but Zobrist bobbled the ball as it took something of a short second hop, then, with his cleat catching in the dirt, bounced his throw to first, allowing Kouzmanoff to score the decisive run.

"Not a graceful moment," Zobrist said.

Zobrist had put the Rays back on top with a two-out, two-strike homer in the seventh after the Rays took an early 3-0 lead and the A's tied it in the sixth.

It was Zobrist's seventh homer of the season (he had 27 last year) and first since July 24.

Wade Davis, Jeff Niemann ready to return for Tampa Bay Rays

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer
In Print: Saturday, August 21, 2010

OAKLAND, Calif. — RHP **Jeff Niemann** got mad during Friday's simulated game, stepping off the mound when a couple of pitches didn't go exactly where he had aimed.

And he couldn't have been happier about it.

"That was the great thing about it," Niemann said. "We were all ticked off about the lack of location instead of how it felt. It had nothing to do with the arm."

Niemann and RHP **Wade Davis** both looked, and pitched, as if there were no problems with their previously strained shoulders. And how well they did was the final proof the Rays needed to green-light their return from the disabled list, with Davis set to start Tuesday in Anaheim and Niemann on Wednesday.

"It went really well. They both threw the ball good," manager **Joe Maddon** said. "Velocities were good, deliveries were good, breaking stuff, everything was good."

Davis threw 43 pitches over three "innings" and Niemann 64 over four, pitching to INF **Reid Brignac**, INF **Dan Johnson**, INF/OF **Sean Rodriguez** and C **Kelly Shoppach** and throwing as close to game speed and under game conditions — using their full repertoire, sitting in the dugout between innings — as possible.

Actually, Niemann (10-3, 3.12) and Davis (9-9, 4.45) could benefit from the time off.

"I always had the feeling when this happened that they were serious enough to be put on the DL but not real serious, where almost a 15-, 16-, 17-day break might be beneficial for them; where they would come back stronger for the last 5-6 weeks of the season," pitching coach **Jim Hickey** said. "So hopefully, that will be the case."

SWING KING: LHP **David Price** is striking out batters at almost twice the rate he was earlier in the season, but he's not saying why.

"I really don't know," said Price, who seeks his 16th win tonight. "It's just how it happens sometimes. I don't really have an answer for it."

Maddon has an idea how Price went from 6.36 strikeouts per nine innings over his first 12 starts to 10.64 over his past 11. And it has to do with improved command of his fastball, specifically in the bottom of the strike zone.

"And it's been really alive," Maddon said. "He's been consistently mid 90s. You saw the swings some of the Tigers took vs. him (Aug. 9), and these are really good hitters. ... The fastball has to be pretty electric in the zone if you're getting those kind of swings."

PITCHING IN: RHP **Chad Qualls** is expected to rejoin the bullpen tonight after missing the past two games due to a death in his family. ... RHP **Grant Balfour** (intercostal strain) is getting closer to being ready, throwing a 40-pitch bullpen session Friday in St. Petersburg. He will throw again Monday and is likely to make a couple of minor-league rehab appearances before a likely Sept. 1 return.

ALL IN?: The Rays declined comment on a *Las Vegas Sun* story about Mayor **Oscar Goodman** claiming to have met Monday with a representative of a major-league team about the possibility of relocating if a stadium is built.

Goodman declined to provide details but did say he has "been advised that we are designated as an American League city."

The two AL teams with unresolved stadium issues are the Rays (who typically don't comment on speculative reports) and A's.

MINOR MATTERS: Triple-A Durham clinched its fourth consecutive International League South Division title with a 3-1 win at Norfolk. **Rocco Baldelli** led the way with a double and home run. LHP **Jake McGee** got his first Triple-A win, in relief of big-league veteran **Ramon Ortiz**, who made his first start for the Bulls.

MISCELLANY: The Rays are a major-league best 27-13 when facing a lefty starter as they do tonight and Sunday. ... CF **B.J. Upton's** career-high matching 10-game hitting streak ended. ... LF **Carl Crawford's** hitting streak ended at nine Thursday.

Tampa Bay Rays news and notes

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer
In Print: Saturday, August 21, 2010

The dish

When/where: 9:07 tonight; The Coliseum, Oakland, Calif.

TV/radio: Sun Sports; 970-AM, 680-AM (Spanish)

Probable pitchers:

Rays: LH David Price (15-5, 2.85)

A's: LH Brett Anderson (3-4, 2.89)

Watch for

Price check: Price is looking to add to his team record of 15 wins, having allowed three or fewer earned runs in 20 of his 22 starts. He beat the A's in Oakland on May 7.

Big Brett: Anderson, 22, can be tough as the Rays saw twice last year, when he went 1-0, 1.80 against them. He has been just as good at times this season, allowing only two homers and eight walks in 56 innings.

Key matchups

A's vs. Price

Daric Barton 0-for-3

Rajai Davis 0-for-3

Kevin Kouzmanoff 0-for-3

Rays vs. Anderson

Evan Longoria 1-for-5

Carlos Peña 2-for-5, HR

B.J. Upton 0-for-5

On deck

Sunday: at A's, 4:07, Sun Sports. Rays — Matt Garza (12-7, 3.74); A's — Dallas Braden (8-8, 3.44)

Monday: at Angels, 10:05, Sun Sports. Rays — James Shields (11-11, 4.82); Angels — Scott Kazmir (8-10, 6.40)

Tuesday: at Angels, 10:05, Sun Sports. Rays — Wade Davis (9-9, 4.45); Angels — Ervin Santana (13-8, 3.93)

Wednesday: at Angels, 3:35, Sun Sports. Rays — Jeff Niemann (10-3, 3.12); Angels — Dan Haren (1-4, 4.39)

Marc Topkin, Times staff writer

Soon, he'll be Dr. Maddon

Some days, folks around the bay area don't believe manager **Joe Maddon** is too smart. But the people at Lafayette College, which he attended in 1972-76 until going into pro ball, think a lot of him. Friday, they formally announced what Maddon revealed last spring: He will receive an honorary degree — a doctor of letters — in an on-campus ceremony Sept. 2 (an off day before a series in Baltimore).

Simulated star of the day

Bullpen catcher **Scott Cursi** was the unofficial MVP of **Jeff Niemann's** and **Wade Davis'** simulated games. He caught all 3½ innings without a break *and* served as umpire. Plus, he took a foul ball off the mask. "He was the star of the show," pitching coach **Jim Hickey** said.

Number of the day

5 Rays with at least 10 steals: Carl Crawford, **B.J. Upton**, **Ben Zobrist**, **Evan Longoria** and **Jason Bartlett**; only two other teams have as many as four.

Rays fall to A's, send Hellickson down

By [ROGER MOONEY](#) | The Tampa Tribune

Phase One of the Jeremy Hellickson Project is complete. Now it's on to Phase Two, which is turning the Tampa Bay Rays top pitching prospect into a bullpen guy.

The Rays optioned Hellickson after Friday's 5-4 loss to the Oakland A's not to Triple-A Durham as expected, but Class-A Charlotte where they will monitor his workload and give him at least one chance to work out of the bullpen in a game before recalling him Sept. 1, when rosters expand to 40 players.

"This is something we have talked about in advance," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "I know he's been very much aware of it. From the outside looking in it might seem awkward or strange, but from the inside looking out it's very common-sensical. For us, this is something we planned on doing this way.

"There's nothing he could have done to change that outside of somebody being hurt, possibly. But for now we're getting the other two guys back soon. We just felt it was the right thing to do for now."

Hellickson said the news caught him a little off-guard.

"I had no idea," he said. "I guess I had an idea. The first I heard was what they told me (after the game)."

And how did he take it?

"I'll be back in 10 days," he said. "Disappointed, obviously. We got Wade (Davis) and (Jeff) Niemann's coming back, and they've earned it to get back in the rotation."

Hellickson made his major-league debut Aug. 2 in an effort to create an extra day of rest for the rotation. He was sent back to Durham after pitching seven innings of three-hit ball against Minnesota and collecting his first big-league win.

But Hellickson was back eight days later when Niemann was placed on the disabled list with a right shoulder strain. Davis had been placed on the DL with the same injury.

Davis is expected to rejoin the rotation Tuesday in Anaheim and Niemann is scheduled to start Wednesday against the Angels.

Maddon maintained from the start that Hellickson was not going to join the rotation despite his outstanding year at Triple A. Unless

there is another injury to a starter, there is no room for Hellickson in the rotation, because the Rays are committed to the five-man rotation they have used all season.

"It doesn't preclude the fact that he still could start at some time," Maddon said. "We want to make sure he gets a little side work, cut back on the innings, just try to monitor him the rest of the season and utilize him the best that we can."

Hellickson has pitched out of the bullpen five times in his professional career, the last time being in 2006 with Short Class-A Hudson Valley.

"I don't know," Hellickson said when asked if he thought the transition to the bullpen would be tough. "I mean it shouldn't be. But I don't know. I've only thrown a couple of innings out of the bullpen. It wasn't too much different. We'll see."

In all, Hellickson made four starts for the Rays. He was 3-0 with 2.05 ERA.

Against the A's on Friday, Hellickson had the Rays in position to win and move into a tie for first place in the American League East with the New York Yankees.

The 23-year-old rookie allowed seven hits in 6 1/3 innings and allowed three runs — matching the total allowed during his first three starts combined.

He turned a 4-3 lead over to the bullpen, but with the help of an eighth inning error by second baseman Ben Zobrist, the bullpen let the game get away for the second straight night.

This time it was Joaquin Benoit, who struggled with his command and took the loss as the Rays lost for just the third time in the 63 games in which they held a lead after seven innings.

"They just outplayed us," Maddon said. "They played better than we did. They made plays. They ran the bases well. They pitched better. They beat us. They deserved to win that game."

Zobrist gave the Rays a 4-3 lead in the top of the seventh with his seventh home run of the year and first in 19 games.

Benoit, who came on to get the final out of the seventh inning, immediately got into trouble in the eighth when he walked Jack Cust to start the inning, then allowed a single to right by Kevin Kouzmanoff. Both runners advanced when right fielder Matt Joyce threw behind Kouzmanoff.

Gabe Gross, pinch-running for Cust, scored on a sacrifice fly. After Benoit walked pinch-hitter Mark Ellis with two outs, Maddon brought in Lance Cormier. Cormier got Cliff Pennington to hit a grounder to Zobrist, who bobbled it then threw late to first baseman Carlos Peña.

"A pretty little two-hopper, not that difficult of a play, and I just didn't get it clean," Zobrist said. "Lance came in and did a good job to get the ball that we needed to get the out. I've been playing good defense this year, and picked a bad time to make an error there."

It only the second error of the season for Zobrist.

"Ben's an outstanding second baseman. He makes that play 101 times out of a 100," Maddon said. "That was just an unfortunate play. He's very, very good. That's something that normally doesn't happen."

NOTEWORTHY

B.J. Upton's 10-game hitting streak came to an end ... Evan Longoria's hitting streak was stopped at six games ... Maddon said he expects RHP Chad Qualls to rejoin the team today after missing the past two games because of a death in the family ... The Rays are 7-9 in their past 16 games. They are 10-9 in August after going 19-7 in July. They have also lost six of their last eight on the road.

Niemann, Davis pass latest tests

Roger Mooney, The Tampa Tribune

Jeff Niemann and Wade Davis came through their simulated games Friday without any problems and are expected to rejoin the rotation next week when the road trip takes the Rays to Anaheim.

Davis, who threw three innings, and Niemann, who threw four, have been on the disabled list with right shoulder strains, injuries that weren't too serious but warranted time off.

"I also had the feeling when this happened they were serious enough to be put on the DL, but not real, real serious where a 15-, 16-day break could be real beneficial for them, where they would come back stronger for the last five or six weeks of the season," pitching coach Jim Hickey said. "Hopefully that will be the case. ... I think they both could have gotten by with skipping a start, having nine or 10 or 11 days in between starts and been OK with it."

"But this is just a nice, a little more of a forced rest, if you will - a little strengthening, a rehabilitation, a little recharging of the batteries."

Davis is scheduled to face the Angels on Tuesday night. Niemann is on track to pitch against them Wednesday.

"I was nervous (Friday) walking out for a sim game with no one in the stands, with four guys you know really well hitting," Niemann said. "I was really pumped, so I'm looking forward to getting out there Wednesday when it's a real game."

Davis and Niemann faced Dan Johnson, Reid Brignac, Kelly Shoppach and Sean Rodriguez. Hickey called the hitters the stars of the afternoon.

"That was actually one of the best simulated games I ever saw in terms of the hitters wanting to be there," Hickey said. "Sometimes you've got to grab two guys, a righty and a lefty, and have them out there. These guys were volunteering for duty, ready to rock and roll."

Aside from allowing a home run to Shoppach, Niemann said he appreciated the effort from his teammates.

"They weren't up there taking anything," he said. "They were taking us as real as they could, and that's what we wanted them to do, take some real hacks. If we mess up, hit it. Let us know. We need to know where we stand, too."

Hellickson headed back to Durham

RHP Jeremy Hellickson, who started for the Rays on Friday night, is expected to be sent back to Triple-A Durham.

The rookie, 3-0 with a 1.35 ERA in his first three starts, will be optioned to clear room on the roster for Niemann or Davis.

Hellickson will return Sept. 1 when the rosters expand. Unless there is a need in the rotation, he is expected to join the bullpen. The Rays would like to have him on the postseason roster, but Hellickson will have to show that he can pitch out of the bullpen.

Durham clinches playoff berth

The Bulls clinched the International League's South Division title Friday night with a 3-1 victory at Norfolk. Rocco Baldelli hit his first home run of the summer in the ninth inning. He drove in two of the Bulls' three runs and raised his batting average to .278.

Durham, which won the Triple-A Governor's Cup last season, is looking to win its fourth IL title.

This is the fourth time in four years under Manager Charlie Montoyo that the Bulls have reached the postseason.

Odds and ends

The Rays took a 3-15 record on Friday nights into Friday's game, with 13 of those losses coming on the past 14 Fridays. ... LHP David Price is looking for his 16th win of the season tonight. He is tied with Carl Pavano and Phil Hughes with 15. CC Sabathia leads the American League with 16.

As a baseball fan, she's a natural

By Tom Jackson, Tampa Tribune

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."

08/21/10 2:19 AM ET

Late error costs Rays chance to catch Yanks

Bobble by Zobrist in eighth allows winning run to score

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- For a second consecutive night, the Rays could not hold the lead. And once again, losing the lead resulted in defeat Friday night as the A's beat the Rays, 5-4, at the Oakland Coliseum with 13,207 watching.

By losing, the Rays (74-48) missed a chance to move back into a tie for first place in the American League East after the Yankees fell to the Mariners, 6-0.

The Rays took a 4-3 lead into the bottom of the eighth, but the A's tied the score on a sacrifice fly by Rajai Davis. The Rays were still in trouble as the A's had runners at the corners with two outs. Lance Cormier took over for Joaquin Benoit to pitch to Cliff Pennington and Cormier delivered by getting a ground ball to second.

"Once the ball was hit, I was just trying to get down the line as fast as I could," Pennington said.

Unfortunately for the Rays, the normally sure-handed Ben Zobrist bobbled the ball.

"I was maybe two feet out of the batter's box when I saw him bobble it," Pennington said. "I could see him the whole time I was running, and I figured I had a good chance to beat him."

Pennington beat the throw, which allowed Kevin Kouzmanoff to score the go-ahead run.

"Pretty little two-hopper, wasn't that difficult of a play, I just didn't get it clean," Zobrist said. "Lance came in and did a great job of getting the ball we needed to get the out. I've been playing good defense this year. I just picked a bad time to make an error there."

Rays manager Joe Maddon came to Zobrist's defense afterward.

"Ben's an outstanding second baseman," Maddon said. "He makes that play 101 times out of 100. I mean it was just really an unfortunate play. Believe me, he's very, very good. It's just something that normally doesn't happen to us."

"We don't normally beat ourselves. We did tonight and we kind of did last night also."

The Rays held a 3-1 lead Thursday night before losing, 4-3. Entering Friday night's game, the Rays were 60-2 when leading after seven innings.

For Zobrist, he experienced the highs and lows of the Major Leagues in just over an inning. In the top of the seventh, he gave the Rays a 4-3 lead when he hit his seventh home run of the season only to see his glove unravel what his bat had accomplished.

"Going into that inning, feel pretty good about yourself that you helped the team go up by a run," Zobrist said. "And then it's interesting how quickly you can be humbled. It's a good reminder and it's a learning experience. But I think like Joe said, most of the time I'm going to make that play. It was just a bad time to miss it. ... It was not a graceful moment."

Jeremy Hellickson made his fourth start for the Rays and once again appeared as if he had no pulse while holding the Athletics to three runs on seven hits in 6 1/3 innings. The 23-year-old right-hander walked one and struck out seven and appeared headed for his fourth win, but he ended up with a no-decision and a ticket to Port Charlotte afterward.

"I felt really good," Hellickson said. "I think like last start it took a couple of innings to find my fastball. Once I felt good with that I felt good. Real good."

Hellickson has won over the Rays' clubhouse with the work he has done in his four starts with the team.

"Helly pitched great again and gave a chance to win the game again," Zobrist said. "We just didn't get very many hits. We got a few runs early. ... We just didn't hit as well as we can tonight. But give credit to their pitcher [Vin Mazzaro] over there. He threw a good game. He worked off his fastball well. And threw that changeup and two-seamer well and spotted it up pretty well. You've got to give him credit."

Matt Joyce's two-run single in the first gave the Rays an early lead and John Jaso's sacrifice fly in the second pushed the lead to 3-0.

Daric Barton had a two-run single off Hellickson in the third and Jack Cust led off the A's sixth with a solo home run that tied the game at 3, a deadlock that Zobrist's blow broke in the seventh.

"They outplayed us tonight," Maddon said. "They just played better than we did. They made plays, they ran the bases well. They pitched better. They beat us tonight. They deserved to win that game."

08/21/10 3:04 AM ET

Hellickson optioned to Class A after loss

Rookie sent to work in 'pen, will return for pennant run

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Jeremy Hellickson was optioned to Class A Charlotte after Friday night's 5-4 loss to the Athletics and right-hander Dale Thayer was recalled from Triple-A Durham.

With Jeff Niemann and Wade Davis returning from the disabled list, there was suddenly no room for the 23-year-old right-hander in the Rays' rotation. Because Durham will be playing a lot on the road in the coming days, the decision was made for Hellickson to pitch at Port Charlotte as a matter of convenience.

"Disappointed, obviously, but we've got [Davis and Niemann] coming back," Hellickson said. "And they've earned it to get back into the rotation."

The Rays would like to see Hellickson make at least one relief appearance at Port Charlotte before bringing him back up with the team for the pennant run.

"We just sent Jeremy back, he's going to go to Port Charlotte and do a little bit of working out on the side, hopefully get him out of the 'pen in a game, work him out of the bullpen and see what that looks like then get him back up here," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "

Hellickson leaves the Rays after posting a 3-0 mark with a 2.05 ERA in four starts.

"Outstanding, you saw tonight the grit, the pitchability, you saw the composure beyond his years of experience," Maddon said. "He is very good and he's going to get better."

"This is something that we talked about in advance. He's been very much aware of it. Again, from the outside looking in it might seem awkward or strange. But from the inside looking out it's very common sense. For us, we had planned on doing it this way. There's nothing he could have done to change that. Outside of like somebody being hurt possibly. But for now we're getting the other two guys back."

Hellickson said pitching out of the bullpen shouldn't be too much of a transition for him, but he added, "I don't know. ... But we'll see."

Of the time he's spent with the Rays, Hellickson said, "It's been a lot of fun."

"Too bad we couldn't win tonight," Hellickson said. "But I thought I pitched good and it was a lot of fun."

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Niemann, Davis throw simulated game

Right-handers scheduled to rejoin team vs. Angels

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Hours before Friday night's game at the Oakland Coliseum, a pitching duel took place between Rays right-handers Jeff Niemann and Wade Davis.

Both are about to come off the disabled list -- each had a sore right shoulder -- so a simulated game was arranged as a final tune-up before rejoining the rotation.

Happily for both, all went well.

"They're both on task," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "I don't anticipate any setbacks."

Niemann threw four innings and 64 pitches while Davis threw three innings and 43 pitches.

"Right from the very beginning of the simulation, they went at it like they would [if they were on the mound in a regular game]," Rays pitching coach Jim Hickey said. "It wasn't like 15 fastballs to get into it. It was facing hitters."

The Rays hitters taking part in the simulated game included Kelly Shoppach, Reid Brignac, Sean Rodriguez and Dan Johnson. Shoppach managed to go deep against Niemann.

"It all went good, they threw all of their pitches at pretty much top effort and I thought it went extremely well," Hickey said.

"Barring some very unforeseen circumstance, they will start as we talked about; Davis first, on Tuesday, and Niemann on Wednesday."

Hickey said Friday's simulated game came as good news, but it affirmed Hickey's suspicion that both were going to be all right.

"I also had the feeling when this happened that they were serious enough to be put on the DL, but not real, real serious, where almost a 15, 16, 17 day break would be beneficial where they come back strong the last five or six weeks of the season," Hickey said. "So hopefully that will be the case."

"I think they both probably could have gotten by without missing a start. But this is just a little more of a forced rest, if you will, a little strengthening and rehabilitation and recharging of the batteries."

As for the home run he surrendered to Shoppach, Niemann said, "He's my catcher. I had to give him one."

Upton riding hot stretch at the plate

OAKLAND -- B.J. Upton entered Friday night's game riding a 10-game hitting streak (13-for-37, .351), matching his career best. He is now hitting .244 with 11 home runs and 43 RBIs.

"I've seen a lot more hard contact [from Upton]," Maddon said. "He's been doing a good job against lefties pretty much the whole time; it's been more against right-handed pitchers. And we just talked to him about a few different issues with that." Maddon referenced Upton's recent game against the Rangers when he homered on a breaking ball against a left-hander. But what really impressed Maddon was a base hit he had to left field against right-hander Alex Ogando.

"He was throwing like 95, 96, and [Upton] turned on that thing," Maddon said. "So I think the biggest issue for him is confidence. And he's gaining more confidence. And I'm seeing him fighting through at-bats better. I'm not accusing him of not doing that before. It just seems like his level of mental intensity has picked up."

Rays not so different from the A's

OAKLAND -- Based on the Rays' success since the beginning of the 2008 season, manager Joe Maddon is often asked by the writers who cover opposing teams to compare other teams to the Rays, which is what happened in Oakland.

When the question about the A's came Maddon's way, he fielded the query with a smile.

"If you look at their numbers, they're [quite] similar," Maddon said.

He told the reporter to look at the A's offensive numbers, the defensive numbers and what they are doing on the bases and compare those numbers to those of the Rays. The reporter asked Maddon if he had looked closely at the offensive numbers of the A's, who have struggled with the bats all season.

Maddon countered with: "Look at us."

While the A's do have a higher team batting average, .257 to .253 for the Rays and a lower overall ERA, 3.55 to 3.62. The Rays have hit 40 more home runs than the A's, scored 125 more runs, and drawn 134 more walks. Therein lies the difference between the teams and likely points out why the Rays and A's are in their respective positions in the standings.

Qualls to rejoin team on Saturday

OAKLAND -- Chad Qualls was not with the team again Friday night due to a death in his family.

"He'll be back tomorrow," Maddon said. "I have not talked to him. I spoke to him before he left and more likely he was going to be two days. He's coming back [Saturday], I haven't heard anything different from that."

According to Maddon, Qualls had to travel to the Valencia area of California, just outside of Los Angeles.