

RAYS CLIPS



August 22, 2010

Tampa Bay Rays rally, beat Oakland Athletics 5-4

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer
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OAKLAND, Calif. — The 43 pitches David Price needed to get through the first inning Saturday were a pretty clear indication that things weren't going to be easy for the Rays.

But they still turned out pretty well by the end: a 5-4 win over the Athletics that snapped their two-game losing streak and kept them one game behind the Yankees.

"There's a lot of groups that would just kind of, I don't want to say pack it in, but just not fight as much as we did," manager Joe Maddon said. "We are dripping with perseverance this year, and I love that aspect about us. Nobody gets down, everybody comes back, they professionally go about their jobs. I really enjoy watching our guys do that."

It took a while to get there. Price, fortunate to allow only two runs in the 26-minute bottom of the first, righted himself for a while and the Rays rallied to tie, then when the A's went back ahead 4-2, the Rays — who blew leads the previous two nights — rallied again in the eighth and hung on.

Sean Rodriguez delivered the key hit, a two-run homer with two outs.

"Definitely feels good right there to come out with a win, especially to get them late after they got us the last two days," Rodriguez said. "It was big."

There were some other big hits, including Evan Longoria's homer in the second and Willy Aybar's RBI double ahead of Rodriguez's blast.

There were some big pitches, too, especially from Chad Qualls, who returned after missing two games to attend his grandmother's funeral and, with Joaquin Benoit unavailable, retired the side with one on in the eighth.

Price deserved some credit for perseverance, too, managing to work six innings despite his brutal beginning. After throwing 43 pitches (30 strikes) in a first inning that Maddon said wasn't as bad as it looked, he needed only 55 (with 43 strikes and just 12 balls) over the next five.

"The first inning was tough, I had some bad breaks, and that's baseball," Price said. "A lot of foul balls, not the best contact hits."

And the difference? "I guess I made better pitches."

With the win, the Rays (75-48) remained one game off the lead in the American League East and 5½ ahead of the Red Sox in the wild-card race with 39 to play.

The Rays were fortunate to be down only two after Price's miserable start. Two singles, two stolen bases and a hit batter (that initially looked like a run-scoring wild pitch) loaded the bases with A's, and a sac fly and a bloop single that dropped between diving leftfielder Carl Crawford, shortstop Jason Bartlett and centerfielder B.J. Upton made it 2-0.

Price went from bad to very good over the next four innings, throwing just eight pitches in the second and retiring 11 of the next 12, the only batter who reached erased on a double play.

The Rays tied it, as Longoria homered (for the third time in four games, after 19 without) and Crawford singled and scored.

But the A's reclaimed the lead in the sixth. Price allowed a leadoff walk then, after a lineout to third, a throwing error by Longoria and a strikeout, an RBI double to Mark Ellis on a two-out, 0-and-2 pitch. Compounding it, Rajai Davis followed with a single that scored Ellis.

Held to two runs (despite eight hits, two walks and a wild pitch) by impressive A's left-hander Brett Anderson, the Rays rallied in the eighth off Craig Breslow. Carlos Peña drew a one-out walk and Aybar knocked him in with a two-out double, then Rodriguez did the heavy lifting with a two-run homer to center.

"We just had to battle through it," Maddon said.

No-hit duel today between Tampa Bay Rays' Matt Garza, Oakland Athletics' Dallas Braden

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer
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OAKLAND, Calif. — The historical significance to today's pitching matchup between the Rays' **Matt Garza** and Oakland's **Dallas Braden** is that it's just the third time in the past 20 years (though the second in a month) that two pitchers who threw no-hitters met later in the same season.

But for some of the Rays, it's more about recent history, specifically payback for the perfect game Braden threw against them May 9.

"I can't say nobody's not thinking about it; it would be hard to say that," INF **Sean Rodriguez** said. "There's still some guys hyped up about it, saying, 'Dallas Braden, oh yeah, we have to get him.'"

"How do you not? It wasn't just a no-hitter; it was a perfect game. You don't forget that. There's some guys saying we have to give him what we should have given him then."

The circumstances will be just about the same for Braden — another Sunday afternoon getaway day at the Coliseum before the Rays head to Anaheim — but he is at least realistic about having similar success.

"I'm not a math major, but the odds are stacked way against me," Braden said. "You try to do the best you can, and you can't pay attention to what happened last time. These are different teams now. They're in their race; we're on the outs. It's a whole different thing."

The last matchup of pitchers with no-hitters came July 28 when Arizona's **Edwin Jackson** (who blanked the Rays on June 25) faced Philadelphia's **Roy Halladay**. Before that, it was a Sept. 6, 1991, matchup between Chicago's **Wilson Alvarez** (who later became a Ray) and Texas' **Nolan Ryan**. (A list of the times before that was not available.)

"It's pretty weird. The stars align," Braden said. "I don't know how many times guys who have done this have faced off in a year, but let's face it, it's anything but normal."

Garza didn't think quite as much of it: "It's just another game. He threw a perfect game, I threw a no-hitter, so that's cool."

NEW ROLE: Get ready for the "The Jeremy Rules."

With no further need for rookie RHP **Jeremy Hellickson** in the rotation, the Rays sent him down to Class A Charlotte to start the process of transitioning him to the bullpen.

And while he's working out — and, just as important, not adding innings to his total of 144 — and learning how to warm up, how long it takes him and how much recovery time he'll need, the Rays will figure out some things for his expected Sept. 1 return, specifically the terms under which he will be used.

"If you're going to use him out of the bullpen, there's still going to be this unknown," manager **Joe Maddon** said. "You're going to pitch him, and then you're going to want to give him X number of days off based on how many pitches that he threw or how many innings that he went. You're not going to use him like everybody else."

"I would imagine he would do well with this, and then you're going to want to use him more often, but you can't. So you're going to have all these different little rules going on that you're going to create for him to benefit from his abilities and at the same time not abuse his arm."

Hellickson will throw enough that he also could step back into the rotation if needed.

PITCHING IN: The bullpen grew by two. RHP **Chad Qualls** returned after missing two games for his maternal grandmother's funeral in Southern California, and RHP **Dale Thayer** arrived after his second callup of the season from Triple-A Durham.

MONEY BALL: The Rays spent \$7,150,800 on draft bonuses, ranking 12th among the 30 major-league teams, according to a *Baseball America* study. That was up from the \$4,004,500 the Rays spent in 2009 (when they didn't sign their top two picks) and down from 2008, when they doled out \$9,921,000. For the three-year period, the \$21,076,300 they spent was seventh most.

MISCELLANY: **B.J. Upton** turned 26 Saturday. ... Durham clinched the International League South Division title for the fourth straight season and ninth time in 13 seasons as a Rays affiliate.

Tampa Bay Rays news and notes

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer
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The dish

Rays at A's

When/where: 4:07 today; The Coliseum, Oakland, Calif.

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

Probable pitchers:

Rays: RHP Matt Garza (12-7, 3.74)

a's: LHP Dallas Braden (8-8, 3.44)

Watch for ...

To the Matt: Garza has been pitching well, with a 1.72 ERA over his past five starts, though with only two wins to show for it. He is 0-3, 3.70 in four appearances vs. Oakland.

Dallas bull: Braden, who threw the May 9 perfect game, is 4-1, 2.57 in six starts since a stint on the DL with elbow stiffness. Overall, he is 4-2, 3.86 in eight games against the Rays.

Key matchups

A's vs. Garza

Coco Crisp 1-for-9

Jack Cust 1-for-8

Mark Ellis 1-for-8

Rays vs. Braden

Jason Bartlett 3-for-15, HR

B.J. Upton 4-for-19, HR

Ben Zobrist 5-for-11

On deck

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)

Thursday: Off

Friday: vs. Red Sox, 7:10. Sun Sports. Rays — David Price (15-5, 2.97); Red Sox — TBA

Video game craze of the day

The four Rays huddled around a clubhouse with their iPads were intently focused Saturday — on *We Farm*, an animated game of maintaining a farm. And they can blame soon-to-be 7-year-old **Ashtyn Shields**, whose dad, **James**, was updating her "farm" one day at the Trop. "They were making fun of me for playing my daughter's game," Shields said. "And next thing you know these guys are addicted to it."

Wrong card of the day

Jeff Niemann got a surprise at the team hotel Saturday when a fan asked him to sign a card for *Jeff Newman*, the former A's player and minor-league manager. But Niemann got the last laugh: "I told the guy, I've got to have that card, and I took it." What's funnier is that Rays manager **Joe Maddon**'s nickname for Niemann is Newman.

More men in plaid

Want to see more of the Rays BRaysers? The TV crew of **Todd Kalas**, **Kevin Kennedy** and **Dewayne Staats** plans to wear them for today's broadcast.

Rays Tales: Adventures in plaid

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer

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Julia Alarcon is a serious fashion designer. Based in New York but calling Tampa home, she has a line, called Lialia (Lee-AHH-lia), of "sophisticated, feminine investment pieces that are relevant, substantial and of-the-moment without being trendy." Now she can add the BRayser to her list. Enlisted by Rays TV man **Todd Kalas**, Alarcon — in the midst of preparing for a September New York Fashion Week show — agreed to lend her expertise to what seemed like a simple task: designing and manufacturing 50-some blazers for her hometown team. It wasn't easy, though.

Having organized dress-themed road trips of all white, Urban Cowboy, Ed Hardy clothes and **Johnny Cash** black, to name a few, manager **Joe Maddon** wanted something special — unifying and unique. And he didn't want just any blazer: He wanted it plaid, in team colors, and with the Rays' sunburst logo, "something more to what we wanted it to look like than something somebody already had in their warehouse."

For her design, Alarcon went with a " '70s-type" large plaid, a little like the jackets worn by the **Herb Tarlek** character on the '70s TV show *WKRP in Cincinnati*, she said, but more **Rodney Dangerfield** in the movie *Easy Money*. (Maddon offered up as an example **Ted Baxter** from '70s TV's *Mary Tyler Moore Show*.)

"A regular-guy look," she said.

Then she had to pick a fabric, complicated by not being able to find the needed 400 yards (they used about half so the plaid could be matched). After a couple of false leads, they settled on a cotton-poly blend and found what they needed at a school uniform manufacturing shop in upstate New York. "Very frustrating," Alarcon said. Plus, she had sizing concerns, figuring athletes' bodies were a little different. And finding a manufacturer who could work fast and cheap enough led them to China. All told, it took several months of planning, three weeks for manufacturing and shipping, and a cost of more than \$16,000 (about \$300 a man). "It's high-end stuff," Maddon said. "You could see that at (high-end menswear store) Hugo Boss, absolutely."

Men in plaid

The BRaysers have been seen on the field, courtesy of the bullpen brigade before Tuesday's game. They're going to be on ESPN; John Kruk made an on-air request, and the Rays shipped up the one extra of the 54 that were made. And they may be coming to a team store near you. "Don't be surprised," Rays VP **Rick Vaughn** said, "to see official MLB BRayser-inspired merchandise if the popularity of the BRayser plaid continues to grow." The relievers' grand entrance Tuesday was an impromptu decision. The jackets had just arrived, and **Joaquin Benoit** was modeling his in the clubhouse just before game time. **Andy Sonnanstine** threw out the idea that the relievers go on the field wearing them. Rafael Soriano made it happen by agreeing to join in, and **Dan Wheeler** suggested they go through the dugout, getting high-fives from their stunned teammates. "I figured it would guarantee us a spot on the opening of *SportsCenter*," Sonnanstine said, "which it did."

Rays rumblings

Pat Burrell has taken the high road in discussing his struggles with the Rays before starring again for the Giants, but he told the *Philadelphia Daily News* he really would have preferred to remain an outfielder: "(The Rays) were confident I could develop into a productive DH. Shoot, I tried everything. That's the frustrating thing." ... Free-agent-to-be **Johnny Damon** says the Tigers "might make a run at **Carl Crawford**." ... ESPN's **Buster Olney** has **David Price** third in the AL Cy Young race, behind **Cliff Lee** and **Felix Hernandez**. ... **Evan Longoria** and Damon were on to something with that "senior prom for senior citizens" line in their Pepsi TV commercial; more than 2,500 participated in the Rays' "prom" Thursday, and sales exec **Dan Newhart** says it's "sure to be an annual event." ... Top draft pick **Josh Sale** prefers No. 5 and supplemental rounder **Drew Vettleson** No. 24 (for **Ken Griffey Jr.**) ... Boston's **Bill Hall** told ESPN.com's **Gordon Edes** that when the Red Sox "come back and win this thing, (the Yankees and Rays) probably are going to feel like they let a season they should have done better slip away."

Got a minute? Dan Johnson

Late-night TV? Those reality shows about pawn shops, *Pawn Stars*, *Hard Core Pawn*, and *Repo Man*. I get a kick out of those.

Karaoke song if you had to? It would have to be heavy metal so I could yell and scream it and cover up my lack of a voice, sort of the Metallica/Disturbed area.

Late-night snack? Usually whatever my wife (Holly) had for lunch, because she has all the leftovers.

Mall time killer? I'm going to be at the Starbucks, guaranteed.

Dream date? If I had to choose and it couldn't be my wife, probably Jennifer Love Hewitt.

Tampa Bay Rays might be willing to take chance on Manny Ramirez

By [Marc Topkin](#), Times Staff Writer
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In its simplest form, the question has an easy answer: Would the Rays be better with Manny Ramirez's bat in their lineup?

Have you been watching? ...

Of course, it's not that simple. But sometime over the next 10 days, it could be an intriguing and complicated issue for Rays execs to consider.

Would he be motivated and engaged enough to have a major impact as the big DH bat they've been lacking to justify giving up prospects plus paying most or all of the \$4 million he's owed?

Or too much of a risk and/or distraction who could disrupt what they have working?

A lot has to happen to get to that point, but you can be sure the Rays are already thinking about it.

Ramirez, 38, came back Saturday from a third DL stint (calf strain) and has to show he is healthy.

The Dodgers, on the edge of the playoff race, have to concede and put him on waivers.

Then, either the Rays have to make and, trickier, get a waiver claim on Ramirez or, better for their chances to do something, have to have him clear waivers.

That way, the Rays, and any other teams, can negotiate freely with the Dodgers, seeking to get some relief on the salary owed in return for better prospects.

The path to get him on waivers is difficult, and that's in addition to the risk of having to take on the full salary if the Dodgers just opt to let him go.

The other NL teams would have to pass, as well as several other interested AL teams who have priority over the Rays — the White Sox, Rangers and Twins (who all could want him), and the Red Sox (more concerned about him going elsewhere). And, depending on the standings, the Yankees (who could look at it both ways). Whoever gets the claim has a couple of days to work a deal.

Oh, and Ramirez, with a full no-trade clause, would have to approve any deal in either case.

Would it be a good idea for the Rays?

With their loose clubhouse, significant Latin presence and manager Joe Maddon's easy-going style, it would seem to be a good fit. Plus, they only need him to hit, which he still does well: .317, with a .409 on-base and .516 slugging percentage.

Ramirez, in theory, should be motivated to compete against the Yankees and Red Sox, and the chance to boost his future value on the October stage.

Most likely, they won't get the chance. But if they do, why not?

History suggests Rays won't move

By [Stephen Nohlgren](#), Times Staff Writer
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ST. PETERSBURG — The doomsday scenario for Tampa Bay Rays fans is that the team becomes so frustrated with Tropicana Field that it packs its bats and gloves and heads up I-75 toward Charlotte, N.C., or San Antonio, Texas.

Even owner Stuart Sternberg has dropped dark hints that other markets would welcome the Rays if Tampa Bay area officials don't underwrite a new stadium.

But how likely is it, really, that another city can woo the team away anytime soon?

Not very, if history is any guide.

Twenty teams have secured new stadiums since 1988, when the Chicago White Sox used St. Petersburg as a stalking horse to extract a sweetheart deal from Illinois.

In every city, voters gripe about using tax money. But mayors, legislators and county officials eventually find a way to get the deal done — mostly at public expense.

Except for one anomaly, no baseball team has moved in 38 years.

The modern stadium

The White Sox's new ballpark in Chicago's South Side ushered in the modern stadium era, but it was Baltimore's Camden Yards that lit the fuse.

The Orioles had languished in Memorial Stadium, an aging venue designed for baseball and football. The lease was ending and Maryland politicians were worried. Baltimore had recently lost its football team to Indianapolis and basketball team to Washington, D.C.

So legislators agreed to use lottery money for a new stadium, designed for baseball, with stands close to the action and open concourses where fans could stroll around, buy beer and barbecue and still watch the game. Ticket prices jumped, attendance soared and corporate bigwigs flocked to luxury boxes.

Eighteen more stadiums followed, representing \$7.5 billion in new investment, with two factors paving the way.

First, leases were expiring on combined baseball-football stadiums. These stadiums were 20 to 30 years old and not ideally suited for either sport.

And teams could point to seemingly attractive suitors if hometown cities played hardball.

Miami, the Tampa Bay area, Denver and Phoenix were virgin territory before baseball awarded them expansion franchises in the 1990s. No less than five teams threatened to move to the Tampa Bay area.

St. Petersburg "should send a bill to the Mariners, White Sox and Giants for the leverage they gave to build nice buildings," says Rodney Fort, a sports economist at the University of Michigan.

The Miami example

The Florida Marlins, who began play five years ahead of the Rays, are pathfinders for the Tampa Bay market in more ways in one.

They share a potent statewide media market. Both have languished in attendance despite success on the field. And both say they cannot compete without new stadiums and the revenues they provide.

The Marlins play in Sun Life Stadium, a football venue. It's hot, open to summer thunderstorms and some upper-deck seats are so bad that World Series ticket holders missed action on the field.

The team lobbied for a new stadium for more than a decade, and public officials lurched. In 2003, the county approved funding, but the city declined. Two years later, the city and county agreed, but the Legislature balked.

Baseball commissioner Bud Selig delivered a typical double-edged message:

"We love South Florida and I'm hopeful they'll get a new stadium," he told reporters. "There is certainly no keeping them there without one."

But that was 2005, and the options had shrunk.

Other than Washington, D.C., which was part of Baltimore's designated territory, markets like Portland, San Antonio, Charlotte and Las Vegas were smaller than the Denvers and Phoenixes of the 1990s.

The Marlins, who essentially had no lease, made not-so-secret rounds of those smaller markets, and elicited a \$300-million offer from San Antonio. But they ultimately hung with Miami through four more years of debate.

Miami officials never worried much about the team moving, says county manager George Burgess. "It did not drive our thinking."

Rather, having a new, retractable-roof stadium close to downtown and financed largely by hotel taxes "was a good addition to the amenities in our community," he says. "It's no different than the performing arts center we are proud of."

The payoff: a \$645 million stadium under construction where the Orange Bowl used to stand.

Protracted negotiations carried a cost to taxpayers. The 2003 package approved by the county but nixed by the city was more than \$200 million cheaper.

The usual suspects

Rays owner Sternberg recently said that five cities without baseball are better markets than Tampa Bay. He doesn't name them, but identifies them only as "the usual suspects."

If Portland, San Antonio, Charlotte, Las Vegas and another city are so attractive, they didn't lure the Marlins.

They haven't lured the Oakland Athletics, who routinely trail in attendance and play in another of the last multipurpose stadiums.

They didn't lure the Twins from Minnesota, which was supposedly such a bad baseball market and had such a bad stadium that baseball threatened to eliminate the Twins in 2002. Instead, the team stuck it out and is now playing its first season at glistening Target Field.

Nielsen Media Research lists Tampa-St. Petersburg as the ninth-best cable market in the country, which is a big plus for the Rays, says Dennis Coates, a sports economist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

"If you don't have a big local broadcast market, you are not going to get anywhere," Coates says. "Portland doesn't. Las Vegas doesn't. San Antonio is cheek-to-jowl with Houston. I don't see how easy it would be for them to wrest a team away."

Marc Rosentraub, a University of Michigan economist, is no fan of Tropicana Field. It was designed at the end of the multipurpose era, sat empty for a decade and then original owner Vince Naimoli signed a 30-year lease, even though the stadium was already "economically obsolete," he says.

In modern baseball stadiums, half of gross revenues usually come from premium seats close to the action, luxury boxes and amenities that the Trop can't offer, he says.

"The Rays find themselves in a situation where most of their competitors can offer that luxury experience and they can't."

But Rosentraub, who consulted with the city of San Diego when it built a new stadium in 2004, pooh-poohs the notion that better markets are just waiting to snatch up the Rays.

Greater New York could support a third team, he says, but the Yankees and Mets would block such a move. Other cities are too small.

"There are no markets left," Rosentraub says. "No place they can move to would be any different."

Move, counter-move

Since 1972, when the Washington Senators left for Texas, only one baseball team has moved: the odd case of the Montreal Expos.

A players' strike canceled the team's best season in 1994. Fans and ownership came to bitter loggerheads. Average attendance fell to less than 10,000.

Major League Baseball reportedly bought the Expos in 2002 for \$120 million. Selig then pressured the Baltimore Orioles to cede exclusive rights to the metropolitan Washington market. Public officials ponied up a \$611 million stadium and baseball resold the team for \$450 million.

Other than that instance, where the league profited, individual team owners are urged to work things out with existing cities or to sell to someone who will.

The commissioner typically issues statements that a team can't stay in a mediocre stadium forever, but pulling the trigger on a move can be traumatic. Lawsuits follow, with hometown judges at the helm. Congressional representatives challenge baseball's limited antitrust exemption.

The San Francisco Giants, for example, tried for years to ditch windy Candlestick Park, another aging football stadium. Voters refused three times to commit tax money and then-baseball commissioner Fay Vincent announced that owner Bob Lurie could shop the team to interlopers from other cities.

Who should pop up but a Tampa industrialist?

In 1992, jubilant St. Petersburg officials announced Vince Naimoli had bought the Giants and would move them to its then-empty dome. Then, National League president Bill White vetoed the sale and rounded up a new local owner for San Francisco.

After that, further threats to leave San Francisco lost all credibility. When its new stadium opened in 2000, the city installed infrastructure that enhanced surrounding waterfront land owned by the Giants. But the team footed almost the entire \$325 million construction cost.

Who pays

Critics of the Rays' desire to leave the Trop often cite the Giants' deal and others as proof that taxpayers need not underwrite new stadiums. The Yankees and Mets largely financed their new stadiums. So did the St. Louis Cardinals.

Why not the Rays?

Modern stadium deals, taken as a whole, show why economics make that difficult for midmarket teams.

Teams in big cities can rest easy that huge revenues from new stadiums will remain in place over its lifetime. Small- or midmarket teams like the Rays face less revenue and more uncertainty. Studies of honeymoon periods indicate that stadium novelty tails off in three to eight years.

At best, teams like the Rays might expect a \$25 million to \$40 million revenue boost from a new stadium, some economists estimate, and part of that must be shared with other teams.

On the cost side, yearly bond payments on a \$600 million stadium would run \$35 million to \$50 million, canceling out revenue gains. And bonds must be repaid, even if there is another recession and fans stay home.

For a midmarket team, paying the whole construction bill is all risk and no gain.

These bottom-line dynamics are borne out by other stadium projects. The Marlins and Twins paid about one-fourth of their stadiums' cost. Even in a market like Philadelphia, the Phillies paid only half the construction bill.

It's not that the Rays will leave town next year without a new stadium or even next decade. But consigning the team to the Trop through 2027 will send the Rays down the same track as the Marlins and Athletics, says Rosentraub, the economist. Good years will be followed by player sell-offs and deep plunges in performance.

Sternberg's business model calls for higher revenues and higher salaries, says Rosentraub.

"I'm not saying subsidize the hell out of" a new stadium, he says, but "you have an owner who wants to win. If you have an unhappy tenant, you are not going to have an experience you will like."

Times researchers Carolyn Edds and Caryn Baird contributed to this report.

The 'usual suspects'

Here is how the Tampa Bay area stacks up demographically against a few cities without baseball.

	Population (2009)	Growth (2000-09)	Cable TV market rank
Tampa Bay area	2,747,272*	14.27 percent	9
Portland, Ore./ Vancouver, Wash.	2,241,841	15.79	26
San Antonio, Texas	2,072,128	20.52	39
Las Vegas/ Paradise	1,902,834	36.56	40
Charlotte, N.C./Gastonia	1,745,524	30.22	24
* 3.4 million including Sarasota/Bradenton			
Sources: U.S. Census, Nielsen Media Research			

Late rally helps Rays slip past Athletics

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

The Rays face Dallas Braden today. You know, the guy who celebrated Mother's Day with the 19th perfect game in major-league history the last time he faced Tampa Bay.

When asked for his thoughts on that, Rays manager Joe Maddon said he hadn't given it much thought.

"We're just trying to win games," Maddon said before Saturday's game.

With the way the A's pitching staff treated the Rays through the first two games of this four-game series and much of Game 3, it was easy to see why.

The Rays appeared headed to their third consecutive loss to start the seven-game road trip until an eighth-inning burst of power propelled them to a 5-4 victory at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

After the A's rallied against the Rays bullpen to win the first two games, the Rays returned the favor with a two-out rally in the eighth.

Willy Aybar's two-out double scored Carlos Pena all the way from first to cut the A's lead to 4-3. Sean Rodriguez put the Rays in front with his eighth home run of the year, a two-run shot to left-center field.

The win enabled the Rays to remain a game behind the first-place Yankees in the American League East and maintain their 5 1/2 game lead over the Red Sox in the wild-card standings.

Randy Choate picked up the win in relief. Chad Qualls, back with the team after spending two days with his family after the death of his grandmother, bridged the gap to the ninth by retiring the three batters he faced in the eighth.

Closer Rafael Soriano pitched a perfect ninth for his 36th save.

The A's pitching staff, first in the American League in ERA, lived up to its ranking.

Left-hander Brett Anderson continued an impressive streak of good starts Saturday night.

Anderson's seven innings extended the A's streak of at least six innings from a starter to 20 games, the second-longest streak of its kind in A's

history. The 1980 squad turned that trick in 25 straight games.

Anderson needed only four innings to tie his career-high in strikeouts at seven. He finished with eight.

Meanwhile, Rays starter David Price was denied his 16th win of the season for the second consecutive start.

The All-Star left-hander lasted six innings, allowing four runs on six hits and striking out one.

Of particular interest was the bottom of the first inning, which lasted 26 minutes and required 43 pitches from Price.

His first pitch, a fastball, was lined into center field by Coco Crisp. His last was a fastball that Jack Cust missed.

In between, the A's scored twice on three hits - all singles - and a hit batter.

Price wasn't hit particularly hard. He was just hit often. Of his 43 pitches, 30 were for strikes, and 15 of those were fouled off. Rajai Davis fouled off seven pitches during a 12-pitch at-bat that ended when he lined out to center field.

After Crisp's single, Price allowed an infield hit to Daric Barton. He hit Kurt Suzuki on the foot to load the bases. Kevin Kouzmanoff drove home Crisp with a sacrifice fly to center. Mark Ellis then dropped a bloop RBI single in between Carl Crawford, Jason Bartlett and B.J. Upton. Crawford dove but couldn't reach it.

Despite the number of pitches seen and the number of minutes spent at-bat, the A's could only produce a 2-0 lead.

Price settled down after that. He needed eight pitches to set the A's down in order in the second and breezed through the next three innings, facing the minimum nine batters.

Price allowed two more runs in the sixth when the A's turned a 2-2 game into a 4-2 lead.

Longoria put the Rays on the board in the second inning with his third home run in four games.

The Rays made it 2-2 in the top of the sixth when Crawford led off with a single, advanced to third on a double by Pena and scored on a sacrifice fly by Ben Zobrist.

Anderson lost his command in the seventh inning when he walked Rodriguez to start the inning and Upton with one out. But he escaped the jam and was in line for the victory when he was replaced in the top of the eighth by Craig Breslow.

Breslow struck out Longoria top start the inning. But his one-out walk to Pena opened the door for the comeback.

Rookie Hellickson headed to Port Charlotte

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

Phase 2 of **Jeremy Hellickson's** 2010 season was made public Friday night when the rookie right-handed pitcher was optioned to Single-A Charlotte, where he will make the transition from starter to relief pitcher.

Hellickson, who received a no-decision Friday in the Rays' 5-4 loss to the A's, is expected to rejoin the team Sept. 1 when rosters expand to 40.

Phase 1 was to find out if Hellickson could pitch at the major-league level. A 3-0 record with a 2.04 ERA in four starts said yes. But with RHPs **Wade Davis** and **Jeff Niemann** set to return to the rotation this week and the other three starters healthy, the Rays have no room for Hellickson in the rotation.

Besides, they want to limit his workload, which is at 144 innings when you combine his work at Triple-A Durham and the Rays.

Rays manager **Joe Maddon** said he could envision Hellickson contributing in September in the same fashion as LHP **David Price** in 2008, which was sparingly.

"I kind of think it's going to be a little of the same," Maddon said. "If we're going to use him out of the bullpen there's still going to be this unknown. You're going to pitch him and you're going to want to give him X number of days off based on how many pitches that he threw or how many innings that he went. You're not going to want to use him like everybody else, I'm going to imagine. I believe he will do well at this, and then you're going to want to use him more often, but you can't."

You're going to have all these different rules going on that you're going to create for him to benefit from his abilities and at the same time not abuse his arm. It's one of those fine-line things, but we've done it before with David. We know we can do that. I think it's going to be similar, actually."

And, like Price, Hellickson could find himself on the postseason roster.

"There's definitely that possibility," Maddon said.

So why is Hellickson making the transition at Port Charlotte?

"Because it doesn't really matter and he's closer to home," Maddon said. "My point is, we know he can get big-league hitters out, so to go to Triple-A out of the bullpen to get Triple-A hitters out doesn't necessarily prove anything.

"I think what he has to learn is the routine necessary to get up and come into a game as a relief pitcher, which he can do in Port Charlotte. â | The big thing is just learning the routine to being a bullpen pitcher. What does it take to warm up? How long do I need? We can pitch him there like we can pitch him in Durham. And again, the results are not necessarily what we're looking for."

Hellickson was told the news after Friday's loss. His reaction?

"Disappointed, obviously," he said.

But Hellickson said he knew there was no room for him in the rotation.

As for working out of the bullpen?

"I don't know," Hellickson said. "But, um, 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."

Hellickson made five relief appearances during his minor-league career, the last in 2006 when he was with Hudson Valley.

Maddon did not have Hellickson's schedule for this week, but he knows he will pitch for the Stone Crabs.

Maddon is sure Hellickson can make the transition. He pitched well during spring training during those times when he entered the game in the middle of an inning and did not allow any of his inherited runners to score.

"I don't have reservations that if he's rested, he's well and he's not been throwing too much that he will be very effective out of the bullpen. I do believe that," Maddon said.

Qualls, Thayer returnRHP **Chad Qualls** rejoined the team after missing two games because of the death of his grandmother.

RHP **Dale Thayer** was recalled from Durham to replace Hellickson.

This gives the Rays an extra arm in the bullpen at least until Tuesday, when the Rays need to clear a spot for Davis.

Odds and endsHad the Rays won Friday, it would have meant they gained a game on the Yankees during each of Hellickson's four starts. â | The Rays face **Dallas Braden** today for the first time since his perfect game against them on Mother's Day. Throw in **Matt Garza** and you have only the third matchup of pitchers who have thrown no-hitters in the same season. **Roy Halladay** and **Edwin Jackson** did it in July. **Wilson Alvarez** and **Nolan Ryan** faced each other in 1991.

Jaso's bold moves pay off for Rays

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

John Jaso stole his fourth base of the season Thursday night.

"I did?" Jaso asked.

He did. It happened in the fifth inning, after his two-out single off Oakland starter **Trevor Cahill**. The pitch was in the dirt and Jaso, as is his habit, was off and running.

"I would be mad if I was the catcher and that was a stolen base against me," Jaso said.

You see, Jaso wasn't stealing. He was advancing on what is often ruled a wild pitch.

"I saw the trajectory out of the pitcher's hand, and I thought the ball was going to the dirt, so I just put my head down and ran," Jaso said.

A's catcher **Kurt Suzuki** was able to catch the ball without much of an effort, but he did not make a throw. Jaso had that much of a jump.

"They gave him a steal on that? Wow, because he wasn't going," Manager **Joe Maddon** said. "It probably looked like he was, because he broke so quickly."

Jaso is among the better base runners on the team, proving you don't have to be **Usain Bolt** to wreak havoc on the bases, you just have to know when to, well, bolt.

Jaso calls it "brains over legs."

As a catcher, Jaso knows blocking a pitch in the dirt can be troublesome with a runner on first base. First, you lose sight of the runner when you look down to block the ball. Then, you're trying to stop a ball that is rolling away.

"You really don't know what's going on (on the bases)," Jaso said.

A runner shouldn't have much trouble advancing as long as he gets a good jump.

"He makes good decisions," Maddon said. "He's able to advance on the ball in the dirt because he sees things in advance, he anticipates well. To be a good base runner, you have to anticipate."

And in Jaso's case, that applies to more than just moving up a base on a pitch in the dirt.

Not far from his locker inside the Rays' Tropicana Field clubhouse is a sign that says: "Fortune Favors the Bold."

It is one of Maddon's favorite sayings, and it applies to the way the Rays run the bases.

During a June game against the Rangers in Arlington, Jaso fell on his face after rounding second while trying to advance two bases on a single to left by **Jason Bartlett**. He was easily tagged out. When he returned to the dugout, Jaso told Maddon: "We always err on the side of aggressiveness here."

Maddon loved it.

The aggressiveness on the base paths is one of the reasons the Rays have the second-best record in baseball despite having one of the lowest team batting averages in the majors. Once on base, Jaso and his teammates don't wait to advance on a hit. They take it upon themselves to move around the bases.

Jaso proved that during the Rays' recent homestand when he first went from first to third against the Orioles on a soft liner by **Carl Crawford** over the shortstop's head, then scored all the way from first against the Rangers on a double by **Evan Longoria** that bounced off the glove of Rangers center fielder **Julio Borbon**.

"I could have gotten around second, pulled up and coasted into third," Jaso said, "but I was sprinting around the bases the whole time, and (third-base coach **Tom Foley**) started waving me around and I was like, 'All right, here we go.' I think that's the big key, not just assuming that you're only

going to the next base, that you're thinking you're going two bases ahead at all times, looking for the next base is always crucial. That's mental base running. You don't have to be fast to be able to think that way."

Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully to announce future



Updated Aug 22, 2010 2:20 AM ET

LOS ANGELES (AP)

Vin Scully is expected to announce his future plans in the broadcast booth for the [Los Angeles Dodgers](#).

The team confirmed Saturday night that an announcement would be made before Sunday's game against the [Cincinnati Reds](#).

The 82-year-old Hall of Fame announcer is nearing the end of his 61st season with the Dodgers, which the club says is the longest tenure of any broadcaster with the same team in sports history.

Scully said last fall that he still loves the job he's had with the team since 1950, but that it's increasingly hard to be away from his wife during the season.

He's been working on a series of one-year contracts, and he had said he would work this season and then decide his future.

Scully calls all nine innings of the team's television broadcasts, while the first three innings of his games are simulcast on the radio.

He works alone on the air and long ago reduced his travel schedule to avoid calling games east of the Rockies, although he calls road games against the Dodgers' NL West and AL West opponents.

In March, Scully was briefly hospitalized after falling and hitting his head at home.

Updated: August 21, 2010, 6:50 PM ET

Jason Varitek sees progress in injury

By Joe McDonald

ESPNBoston.com

[Archive](#)

BOSTON -- The [Boston Red Sox](#) conducted a conference call Friday night in reference to the progress of injured catcher [Jason Varitek](#).

On the call were manager Terry Francona, medical director Dr. Thomas Gill, head trainer Mike Reinold, Varitek and his representatives from the Boras Group. The prognosis is Varitek won't hurt his fractured right foot further even though he's feeling discomfort.

"He's able to advance forward and continue his progression, he's not quite ready to play in a game yet," Francona said. "The good part is if he feels discomfort, neither doctor thought [Varitek] was putting himself in jeopardy, so that was good to hear and Tek felt relieved by that."

Varitek has been on the disabled list since July 2, when the Tampa Bays Rays' [Carl Crawford](#) fouled a ball off Varitek's right foot. But the catcher admits he's not getting frustrated despite the continued discomfort.

"I've been encouraged," Varitek said. "I haven't gone backwards. You want it done yesterday, but you look at it where last homestand, I couldn't walk without a bad limp. So that's encouraging."

Varitek will continue to increase the workload and will be able to soon concentrate on moving more laterally during his workouts.

"I need to get to another gear and another level of running with less limping," Varitek said. "It's getting better. It's moving along."

Still a ways off from a minor league rehab assignment, Varitek now knows there will always be discomfort until he's able to rest it during the offseason.

"It's going to hurt for a while," he said.

Oakland A's can't hold lead as Tampa Bay Rays rally off Craig Breslow

By Joe Stiglich

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Posted: 08/21/2010 10:16:00 PM PDT

Updated: 08/22/2010 02:05:16 AM PDT

Things were falling into place nicely for the A's on Saturday night, as they have for most of this homestand.

With one swing of the bat, however, Sean Rodriguez halted that joy ride.

Rodriguez sent a two-run homer rocketing over the wall in left-center in the top of the eighth, the deciding blow that lifted the Tampa Bay Rays to a 5-4 victory over the A's in front of 16,202 at the Oakland Coliseum.

Rodriguez's shot capped a three-run rally off lefty reliever Craig Breslow (4-4), as the Rays erased a 4-2 deficit and snapped the A's four-game winning streak.

The turn of events spoiled what was shaping up as a hard-earned victory for Brett Anderson, who had outdueled David Price in a battle of two of the major leagues' top young left-handers.

"You've got to give them credit. They put the bat on the ball and hit in some clutch situations," A's left fielder Rajai Davis said. "You see why their record is what it is."

The A's missed a chance to gain another game on the first-place Texas Rangers, who have lost five of six but still lead the A's and Angels by seven games in the American League West.

The defeat also magnified the need for a healthy return by closer Andrew Bailey, whose absence was masked during the good vibes of the A's win streak.

Several relievers have helped pick up the slack as Bailey has missed 28 games with a strained rib cage. But his presence is needed to shore up Oakland's late-inning relief.

A's manager Bob Geren said Bailey could be activated as soon as today.

Breslow, who earned the save Friday, relieved Anderson to start the eighth but allowed Willy Aybar's two-out, run-scoring double that pulled the Rays to within 4-3. Then he served up a 1-1 pitch that Rodriguez hit deep into the seats in left-center.

"I tried to get the fastball in, and I left it over the plate," Breslow said.

Later Rays closer Rafael Soriano needed just seven pitches in the ninth to record his 36th save.

Anderson gave up eight hits but allowed just two runs over seven innings.

That marked the 14th straight game in which the A's starter pitched at least six innings and gave up three or fewer runs, an Oakland record and the longest such streak in franchise history since the 1927 Philadelphia A's ran off 18 straight starts.

Anderson has allowed just five earned runs over his last three starts but is 0-2 in that span.

Price already had collected a Rays franchise-record 15 victories. But he labored through a 43-pitch first inning, when the A's took a 2-0 lead.

Coco Crisp and Daric Barton led off with singles, and after a double steal, Price hit Kurt Suzuki to load the bases. Kevin Kouzmanoff drove in a run with a sacrifice fly, and Mark Ellis followed with a blooper that fell in shallow center to score Barton.

Still, the A's allowed Price to stick around for six innings.

"We had a really good pitcher on the ropes early," Geren said. "We got him in a deep pitch count, but we really didn't take advantage of it."

Anderson allowed Evan Longoria's solo homer in the second, and the Rays tied in the sixth on Ben Zobrist's sacrifice fly.

But the A's took the lead right back, getting Ellis' RBI double and Davis' run-scoring single to make it 4-2.

Could one of 2 Rays be a future Athletic?

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Sunday, August 22, 2010

(08-21) 20:46 PDT -- With more than \$20 million expected to come off the A's payroll for next year, including **Ben Sheets'** \$10 million and **Eric Chavez's** \$12 million, there's little doubt the team will go after a big bat or two on the free-agent market this winter.

In the opposing dugout this series, there are two notable players heading for free agency: onetime A's first baseman **Carlos Peña** and outfielder **Carl Crawford**. Peña still has power and Crawford will be among the most coveted players on the open market - if he gets there.

"The main thing is that I want to see how the season ends and how things work out with this team," Crawford said. "I hope things go well, and if not, I'll have to see what's out there. (Oakland) does have good pitching. I'll weigh a lot of things, but obviously I want to go somewhere where the team can win."

Peña is likely to move on from Tampa Bay. Asked if he'd ever consider returning to Oakland, a team that traded him as a rookie, Peña said, "Of course. I don't rule out anything like that, and I like the area."

Playing the field: Ballboy **Kevin Fennell**, something of a media sensation after TV cameras showed him repeatedly bringing a female fan foul balls, has a date with the fan next week, and he says all the ribbing he's received since "is worth it."

The bullpen actively encouraged Fennell's overtures, and reliever **Craig Breslow** said with a smile, "Hopefully it will become a fairy-tale romance."

Friday's batting practice came to a halt when Fennell was highlighted on MLB Network on the stadium's big screen.

"It's been a different week, pretty much," Fennell said. "I've had a lot of Facebook requests."

Fennell's parents are on a cruise in Alaska, unaware their son is in the spotlight. "No idea at all," he said.

Briefly: **Joey Devine** and **Josh Outman** are throwing off the mound in Arizona. ... Class A Stockton beat San Jose 9-5 for its 14th consecutive victory.

A's Dallas Braden faces Tampa Bay's Matt Garza in a duel of pitchers with no-hitters this season

By Joe Stiglich

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Posted: 08/21/2010 09:24:56 PM PDT

Updated: 08/22/2010 02:05:30 AM PDT

Braden vs. Garza offers an intriguing duel

The Tampa Bay Rays were in the opposing dugout when Dallas Braden threw his perfect game May 9.

That outing came on a Sunday afternoon at the Oakland Coliseum.

The same elements will be in place today when Braden takes the mound against the Rays to close out the A's seven-game homestand.

It's his first time facing Tampa Bay since his Mother's Day masterpiece. Making things more interesting: Braden is opposing right-hander Matt Garza, who threw a no-hitter July 26 against Detroit.

This marks the second time this season that pitchers will face each other after throwing no-hitters earlier in the year. Arizona's Edwin Jackson (who no-hit the Rays on June 25) and Philadelphia's Roy Halladay (perfect game against Florida on May 29) squared off July 28.

"It's fun because you get a lot of competitive juices flowing with the way the teams are playing, and knowing (Garza) is a competitor as well," Braden said.

Rays left fielder Carl Crawford said he and his teammates don't feel they have anything to prove against Braden.

"We had a good approach last time," Crawford said. "But if he's on like he was last time, there's pretty much nothing you can do."

▣ A's ball boy Kevin Fennell has been quite the media sensation since cameras captured him handing foul ball after foul ball to a female fan who caught his eye Thursday at the

Coliseum.

Fennell, 21, landed all over the highlight shows, and he did an interview with the MLB Network on Friday.

"It's been a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Fennell, a Concord resident, said. "I had no idea it'd turn into this."

Fennell got a kiss on the cheek from the girl, Jacki Lynch, during the game. Afterward he got her phone number, and he said they're planning to get together next week.

Fennell has received plenty of good-natured razzing from A's players. But two people hadn't heard of his fame yet -- his parents, Martin and Lori.

"They've been on a cruise in Alaska," he said. "They have no idea whatsoever."

▣ Manager Bob Geren said it's possible closer Andrew Bailey could be activated from the disabled list today or Tuesday in the road opener at Cleveland.

K-Rod's troubles top list in goofy season

Author: Miguel Rodriguez

- Published Date: Aug 22, 2010 12:08 AM
- Last Updated: Aug 22, 2010 12:20 AM

The big top is in Pittsburgh this weekend. No, I'm not talking about the annual disgrace known as the Pirates. They'll get theirs in a minute. It's the Mets. One big circus, day after day after day. Buffalo's first up-front connection with the Mets was last season, when the debut in Citi Field was a disaster and the debut in Coca-Cola Field had fans here howling about why the UnAmazins' were brought in.

In 2010, you can do nothing but give props to the Mets at the minor-league level. Great signings, great promotions from within -- Lucas Duda has become the best in-season upgrade since Jeff Manto, circa 1997 -- and another solid job from manager Ken Oberkfell and pitching coach Ricky Bones with strong work from new hitting/outfield/third base coach Jack Voigt.

But what in the world is going on with the big boys?

The Mets have some of the craziest stats you'll ever see. They lead the majors with an astounding 18 shutouts. Big problem: They are just 44-61 in games in which their pitchers allowed even a single run! That's in part because the team batting average since the All-Star break entered the weekend at an MLB-low .211.

The Mets did clinch a series win on the road within their own league for the first time this season with Saturday's rain-shortened 5-1 win in Pittsburgh. They avoided becoming the first team since the 1909 Washington Senators to go a whole season and not win a road series in their league. Before Saturday, the Mets' road series wins were in Baltimore and Cleveland during interleague.

And those things are just numbers. There are the continually goofy decisions of manager Jerry Manuel, who labeled his offense "pathetic" Thursday night. The short roster, which includes three catchers as well as a pitcher (Oliver Perez) the manager refuses to use and ownership won't buy out of his \$36 million deal. Jason Bay's concussion, which Manuel said prior to Friday's game would be season-ending and then said after the game might not be. Oops.

But in yet another season of black eyes, nothing can be worse than the Francisco Rodriguez saga.

The Mets have a major question hanging over their heads regarding their ace closer, who is done for the year with thumb damage apparently caused when he tried to rearrange his future father-in-law's face outside the Citi Field family room.

after a game.

The Mets placed K-Rod on the disqualified list, meaning they won't pay him the \$3 million he's owed this season because they feel his injury is not baseball related. They also converted his contract to a non-guaranteed deal, meaning they can cut their cord for a small price next spring.

They owe K-Rod \$11.5 million in 2011 and there's a \$17.5 million club option for 2012. The players union, of course, quickly filed a grievance on K-Rod's behalf. Small issue. Rodriguez is facing third-degree assault and second-degree harassment charges for the incident.

He pitched one time after it following a two-day suspension that the union claims is the Mets' determination of punishment. Then K-Rod admitted he was hurting and the Mets went back for more. They might even look to void K-Rod's contract entirely, although that would be a tough fight with the union.

"We're going to reserve our rights," said Mets Chief Operating Officer Jeff Wilpon. "It's not something we have to determine now. It's not something we have to make a decision on now."

Rodriguez is going to anger management and that seems fair enough. He's had issues before, the bus showdown last year with executive Tony Bernazard, the batting practice confrontation last year with Yankees pitcher Brian Bruney, now on the Bisons' disabled list.

GM Omar Minaya said last week that "right now" the Mets want K-Rod back in 2011. They don't really have much in the way of a replacement. They'd have to go the free agent route because they haven't really developed any closer. They haven't needed to because they owned a locked-up choice in the big leagues.

'Painful' Pirates

Before the season, Pirates President Frank Coonelly foolishly called 2010 "the beginning of the next dynasty" for the beleaguered franchise. Guess not. Consecutive losing season No. 18 was clinched Friday night and the Bucs are on pace to lose 109 games, which would be their most since 1953.

So what did Coonelly say Friday? Plenty.

"This year has been more painful than anything I've experienced," he told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "Our performance this year has been an embarrassment, to the city, to the Pittsburgh Pirates and to our fan base."

Manager John Russell certainly seems to be on the firing line and time may be running out on General Manager Neal Huntington as well, although a change in GMs and thus philosophy could set the team back even more.

"I do still have confidence in Neal and JR," Coonelly said. "But we need to figure out why we're underperforming the way we are."

At least Coonelly did say the Pirates will spend. Their payroll this year is \$39 million, last in the majors. It figures to get around \$50 million next year as the Pirates look to trades and free agents.

Rangers will spend

The new Rangers ownership group led by Chuck Greenberg and Hall of Fame pitcher and team President Nolan Ryan scored some immediate brownie points with fans when they officially took the reins last week. In the middle of the pennant race, they announced lower prices for concessions, parking and merchandise and said they are prepared to prop the payroll.

The Rangers are only at about \$55 million this year and will have to pay arbitration-eligible Josh Hamilton far more than the \$3.25 million he's making. And they'd like to have a shot at keeping Cliff Lee, although the Yankees will have something to say about that.

"We feel like we have a pretty good handle on how to keep this team together with Cliff as a part of it," Greenberg said. "It's nothing that frightens us, and we'd be real happy to go into next season with that group and the cost that we project."

Around the horn

-- Credit where credit is due: Old friend Brandon Phillips mouthed off too much, the Cardinals responded with a three-game sweep in Cincinnati and the NL Central race was over, right? Not so fast. The Reds have quickly seized control again and it's yet another example of how Dusty Baker can take the temperature of his clubhouse and get results.

Baker hasn't survived the postseason yet (think '02 Giants and '03 Cubs) but there aren't many better over 162 games.

-- Newsday columnist Ken Davidoff has a running gig on Twitter where he picks the Yankees' and Mets' season record and spends the season reminding folks of his predictions -- which are usually very close -- through the news of the day.

In true Russ Hodges Giants-win-the-pennant fashion, Davidoff tweeted last week: "The #Yankees go 97-65, and the #Mets 80-82! The #Yankees go 97-65, and the #Mets 80-82! RIP, Bobby Thomson, a class act. #Giants."

-- Oh, Rays fans. Where are you? There were just 18,319 in Tropicana Field for last week's David Price-Cliff Lee showdown. The three-game series of potential playoff opponents drew just 55,888. Yet, they'll all bandwagon in with their cowbells come October. Boo.

BASEBALL DOWN THE LINE

Hall of Fame omission of steroid era players could teach moral lesson

Roger Clemens, Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa will all be eligible for induction in the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2013 but could be left out because of their link to performance-enhancing drugs.

August 22, 2010

The Hall truth has a morality play

Roger Clemens has a lot more to worry about than the Hall of Fame these days, what with his recent perjury indictment and all. But if the Rocket is found guilty of lying about his use of performance-enhancing drugs, it could make the balloting for the Hall class of 2013 a watershed moment in baseball history.

Voters have made their disgust of the steroid era apparent in the case of **Mark McGwire**, who broke the season-single home run record and retired

with 583 homers, then fifth on the all-time list. Those numbers would seem to make him a lock for enshrinement. Yet in four years of Hall eligibility, he's never received as much of 24% of the vote — far short of the 75% needed for induction.

The 2013 ballot will offer an even starker referendum on drug use in baseball. Not only will Clemens, a seven-time Cy Young Award winner, be in his first year of eligibility but so will all-time home run leader **Barry Bonds** and **Sammy Sosa**, whose 609 homers are the third-most in history by a right-handed hitter.

All three would be obvious — perhaps even unanimous — choices without the taint of steroids. And though all three have denied taking banned substances, pleas of not guilty from Clemens and Bonds would ring hollow if both lost their perjury cases. The New York Times, meanwhile, has reported Sosa tested positive for PEDs in 2003.

Wouldn't leaving them out of the Hall leave a big hole in baseball's history?

"There are precedents for that," says **Andy McCue**, president of the Society for American Baseball Research. All-time hits leader **Pete Rose**, for example, was also denied his place in the Hall when he was banned from baseball for gambling.

"History will always be there to tell these people's stories. And even if they're not in the Hall of Fame ... their records will still be there. Essentially it becomes a moral question."

A valuable moral question, McCue says, when it leads people to ask why they can't find plaques for Bonds, Rose or Clemens in baseball's most hallowed Hall.

"To me, when that person, presumably a kid, looks up and says 'My God, he's the hits leader. Why isn't he in the Hall of Fame?' That's a classic teaching moment," McCue says. "And that's good."

Rays hit the road addressed for success

It won't be hard to spot the Tampa Bay Rays when they arrive in Orange County on Sunday. They'll be the only ones wearing kitschy plaid blue blazers with a yellow sunburst on the left breast.

Or at least we hope so.

Manager **Joe Maddon** likes choosing themes for trips, then having his team dress accordingly. And so far that's worked because when the Rays pulled on their custom-made "Braysers" (get it? It's a combination of "Rays" and "blazer.") and headed for Oakland last Thursday, they had the best road record in baseball.

"This is something I've been cooking up for a while," Maddon told reporters about the jackets, which are mandatory attire on the seven-game trip. "I like it as being a unifying aspect. I also like the way they look. It's morphing **Herb Tarlek** [from WKRP in Cincinnati] with **Ted Baxter** [Mary Tyler Moore]."

Few players are complaining. Before leaving, they even posed for a team picture in their outfits. And outfielder **B.J. Upton** finished off his ensemble with a crisp white dress shirt and black bow tie.

Sooner the better

Guy Cipriano

August 22, 2010 12:13am EDT, Centre Daily Times

New York-Penn League president Ben Hayes is part administrator, handling mundane tasks such as umpire assignments and enforcing league rules.

CDT photo/Craig Houtz

Pittsburgh's first-round pick, Jameson Taillon, left, signed with the Pirates at the draft's deadline last week. The New York-Penn League and its 14 short-season clubs are hoping for changes within Major League Baseball's June Draft so franchises can get first-year professional players on the field and fill out rosters.

[View larger](#)

Hayes is also part ambassador, making stops at various events to promote the short-season league.

Now in his 10th year overseeing the NY-PL from his St. Petersburg, Fla., law office, one of Hayes' biggest — and perhaps most challenging — tasks could be protecting the league's economic vitality from dates its 14 franchises wield no control over.

Under a current Major League Baseball proposal, next year's amateur draft won't be held until June 13. Short-season leagues aren't supposed to begin play until two weeks after the event. The NY-PL has applied for and received waivers to the rule in recent years, including this summer when play started June 18, 11 days after the draft's opening night.

If the league received a similar extension next year, the regular season would begin June 24 and not end until the second week of September.

The State College Spikes draw respectable late-August and early-September crowds because Centre County's population swells when Penn State's fall semester begins. But the Spikes don't want the season starting any later.

"I think from our standpoint the closer to where we have started in the past, the better," general manager Jason Dambach said. "From a consistency standpoint, to ask fans to wait another week to 10 days to start the season when they are used to it starting June 17th, 18th and 19th is not good."

Williamsport Crosscutters general manager Doug Estes called playing into September "incredibly challenging." The Crosscutters held seven home games from Aug. 31-Sept. 6 last season and their attendance dipped more than 30 percent during the period. Once September starts, teams are competing with fall sports, including high school and college football, for fan interest. Plus, central Pennsylvania school districts begin classes in either late August or early September.

"The biggest thing is that kids are back in school," Estes said. "It doesn't make sense to have that many games in September from a dollar and cents standpoint."

The majority of the Spikes and Crosscutters' players live with host families, so housing isn't a major problem for the franchises. But late home games present logistical challenges in multiple NY-PL markets, including Vermont, Tri-City, Lowell and Jamestown, located on or near college campuses. The Staten Island Yankees don't play on campus, but the franchise's players live in College of Staten Island dormitories. When the college's students return, players must live in a hotel, another cost incurred by the Yankees. Staten Island's 2009 season didn't end until Sept. 16 because of its run to a NYPL title.

"Ideally, from a date standpoint, if we did nothing with the number of games that we play, that's if we maintain the 76-game schedule, I wouldn't mind seeing the season begin June 10 so we get the season over by the first of September," Hayes said.

Hayes has expressed the NY-PL's concerns to the commissioner's officer. But receiving the ideal starting date could be difficult given the current draft structure. Factors such as the MLB Network, which broadcasts the first round in prime time, the needs of scouting directors and later starts to the NCAA Division I tournament impact the timing of the draft.

The NY-PL has a reputation as the starting destination of many former college stars. That reputation is eroding because of MLB's mid-August signing deadline and a later ending to the College World Series. Only one 2010 first-round pick is currently playing in the league.

The Spikes have 13 players selected in this June's draft on their current roster. Only five were on the Opening Day roster. Multiple key players, including center fielder Mel Rojas Jr. and shortstop Drew Maggi, missed significant time because of lengthy contract negotiations with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Pirates director player of development Kyle Stark said the signing deadline is changing the composition of the NY-PL's players. Instead of filling rosters with first-year professionals, teams are assigning players selected in previous drafts or Latin American signees who participated in extended spring training to NY-PL.

"As long as teams expect to sign a majority of their draft picks later in the summer, then they must rely on players from extended," Stark said.

The signing deadline also has led to an influx of non-drafted free agents from four-year colleges entering the league. While the Pirates held enough players in extended spring training to fill the Spikes' roster, some organizations turned to players not selected in the 50-round draft to fill rosters. The Cleveland Indians shipped seven non-drafted free agents to Mahoning Valley. Auburn encountered a similar situation, receiving five non-drafted free agents from the Toronto Blue Jays. The Scrappers and Double-days are trying to avoid last-place finishes in the six-team Pinckney Division.

"It hasn't happened just this year," Hayes said. "It has happened over the last five, six years, seven years. It has been a gradual process. But if you go back and look, the higher draft picks are taking longer to sign. Players are slotted with their signing bonuses and everybody is kind of waiting to see where other people get slotted before they sign."

Pirates president Frank Coonelly, whose organization signed four players shortly before last Monday's deadline, including first-and second-rounders Jameson Taillon and Stetson Allie, said the signing deadline needs to change to help both parent clubs and short-season leagues.

"It's not that much different than the past when it worked up against when you would go to college, which was later," said Coonelly, who examined draft issues during his tenure in the commissioner's office. "The Aug. 15 deadline has moved things up, but it made it clear that anybody who wants to exercise leverage on the player side — and there's some fault on the club side — we're going to be waiting until the last minute. We need to move that date up considerably so these short-season teams can get players and so we can get the players in and playing."

Coonelly said the draft will be a major topic when the MLB's Collective Bargaining Agreement expires after next season. Hayes and executives across the northeast are hoping the changes benefit the NY-PL.

"It's not like the old days when the draft happened and everybody signs the first week and gets out to short-season clubs," Hayes said. "Those days are over. We can wish, we can want, but it doesn't mean that it can reverse itself and go back in that point in time."

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After Bullpen 101, Hellickson could return

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Jeremy Hellickson made a tremendous showing in his four starts with the Rays, posting a 3-0 mark with a 2.05 ERA.

"What Jeremy did proved to us what we thought he could do," Rays manager Joe Maddon said.

Alas, there are only five spots in the starting rotation, and Jeff Niemann and Wade Davis are both set to be activated off the 15-day disabled list. So after Friday night's start in which Hellickson got a no-decision against the Athletics, Hellickson got the news he had been optioned to Class A Charlotte, where the plan is for him to become familiar with pitching out of the bullpen.

"The big part is just learning the routine for being a bullpen pitcher," Maddon said. "What does it take to warm up? How long do I need?"

Maddon said Hellickson is "definitely" a candidate to pitch out of the bullpen should the Rays make the postseason, much in the same way David Price did during the 2008 postseason. Like Price, Hellickson is a top prospect, so the Rays must be sensitive to how they treat him.

"I kind of think it's going to be a little bit of the same [as it was with Price]," Maddon said. "If you're going to use him out of the bullpen there's still going to be this unknown. You're going to pitch him and then you're going to want to give him 'X' number of days based on the number of innings that he threw, or how many innings that he went."

Between starts at Triple-A Durham and for the Rays, Hellickson has logged 144 innings this season, which is a lot of innings for a young prospect and makes it necessary for the Rays to monitor whatever he does for the remainder of the season.

"You're not going to use him like everybody else," Maddon said. "I would imagine he'll do well with this. And then you're going to want to use him more often, but you can't. So you're going to have all these different little rules going on that you're going to create for him to benefit from his abilities and at the same time not abuse his arm."

"It's one of those fine-line things. But we've done it before with David. We know that we can do that. I think it's going to be similar actually."

Qualls rejoins team after attending funeral

OAKLAND -- Reliever Chad Qualls returned to the Rays on Saturday after missing two games to attend his grandmother's funeral in the Los Angeles area.

"It's kind of been a lot going on," Qualls said. "A lot of travel, to get from Tampa back to the West Coast, so I could take care of the business I needed to take care of."

Qualls said the fact that the Rays were on the West Coast made the trip easier as he simply had to take a short flight Saturday morning rather than having to fly across country to do so.

Qualls re-joined the team, as did Dale Thayer, who was recalled after Jeremy Hellickson was optioned to Class A Charlotte.

"Bullpen's gotten kind of thick, which is good," Maddon said. "I want to use the guys when I want to instead of forcing them into different situations."

Smooth road so far gets a little bumpy

OAKLAND -- Despite losing, 5-4, Friday night, the Rays still own the best road record in the Major Leagues at 35-24 entering Saturday, but they have lost six of their past eight on the road.

The Rays' road 35 wins are already the third-highest total in club history. The Rays won 40 in 2008 and 36 in 1999. Their 12 road series wins are only one shy of the club high of 13 in 2008.

The Rays have remaining road series against the Angels (three games), Orioles (three), Red Sox (three), Blue Jays (three), Yankees (four) and Royals (four).

Worth noting

Entering Saturday, the Rays are 27-13 (.675) when the opposition starts a left-hander, best in the Major Leagues. ... David Price turns 25 on Thursday. He and Phil Hughes own the most wins in the Major Leagues by pitchers under 25. ... Rays hitters lead the Major Leagues in walks with 510, but they also lead the American League in strikeouts with 953. In addition, the team's 145 stolen bases are tops in both leagues. The White Sox rank second and trail the Rays by 33. Five Rays players have 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. ... Triple-A Durham clinched its fourth consecutive International League South Division title with a 3-1 win at Norfolk (Orioles) Friday night. The Bulls have won the South Division nine out of 13 seasons as the Rays' affiliate and will be seeking a fourth Governor's Cup Championship.
