

RAYS CLIPS



Aug. 1, 2012

No Tampa Bay Rays deals as MLB trade deadline passes

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — The signs had been increasing that the Rays were not expecting to make any trades by Tuesday's deadline for nonwaiver deals, so it was hardly a surprise when they didn't add to or subtract from their roster.

Even more predictable was their explanation why:

There weren't any deals that made sense, they are confident in what they have if the players do better and there is help on the way with the expected returns of injured Evan Longoria, Luke Scott and Jeff Niemann.

"We did a lot of different research, there were a lot of different inquiries about our guys," manager Joe Maddon said. "So there was a lot of back and forth, and our people back home spent a lot of time sifting through a lot of stuff.

"However nothing did happen, and I'm fine with that. Actually, I'm very happy about that. I felt from Day 1 this group of players is good enough to win our division and go back and win the World Series this time around, and I'm not going to depart from that feeling."

Injuries have severely disrupted their plans, however, especially the absence of Longoria. Their major league-worst .230 team average, and 53 games of three or fewer runs, made the need for offensive help seem obvious.

Hitters traded included Hunter Pence, Hanley Ramirez, Gaby Sanchez, Geovany Soto, Ichiro Suzuki and Shane Victorino. Others considered available included Stephen Drew, Carlos Lee, Alfonso Soriano and Justin Upton.

The Rays seemed to be looking primarily for upgrades at shortstop and catcher, where there were limited options. Players can still be traded if they clear waivers.

"Everybody wants to see us score more runs, but we can definitely score more runs with the guys we have," starter David Price said. "By no means am I upset we didn't make a move or anything like that."

The Rays do have a surplus of pitching, and starter James Shields was considered to be most in demand, including reports of some revived talk Tuesday with the Rangers before they acquired Ryan Dempster.

The Rays did beat the deadline on one acquisition: Executive vice president Andrew Friedman's wife gave birth to their second son Tuesday afternoon. It was the second straight deadline Friedman was in a hospital; last year he had an appendectomy.

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Tampa Bay Rays: Rays set several club records in Monday night marathon in Oakland

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

Rays at A's

When/where: 3:37 today, Oakland Coliseum

TV/radio: Sun Sports; 620-AM

Probable pitchers

Rays: RH Alex Cobb (4-8, 4.93)

a's: RH Jarrod Parker (7-4, 3.38)

On Cobb: Has lost five of his past six with an ugly 6.25 ERA over that span but was better in last outing at Anaheim, allowing three runs in seven innings. Faced A's in his final start last season, leaving with arm issue that led to surgery.

On Parker: Acquired in offseason from Arizona, 2007 first-rounder stepped into rotation well after late April promotion. In past four starts is 2-1 but 6.46 ERA.

Key matchups

Rays VS. PARKER

None have faced

A'S VS. COBB

Coco Crisp 3-for-3

Kurt Suzuki 1-for-2

Jemile Weeks 1-for-3

On deck

Thursday: Off

Friday: vs. O's, 7:10, Sun Sports. Rays — Matt Moore (7-7, 4.01); O's — Tommy Hunter (4-6, 5.72)

Saturday: vs. O's , 7:10, Sun Sports. Rays — Jeremy Hellickson (6-6, 3.23); O's — Wei-Yin Chen (9-6, 3.65)

Sunday: vs. O's, 1:40, Sun Sports. Rays — David Price (14-4, 2.64); O's — Miguel Gonzalez (3-2, 4.46)

Monday: Off

Marc Topkin, Times staff writer

Broken records

Monday's 4-3 15-inning loss led to five team records being broken, and another tied:

5:09

Longest road game by time

15

Longest road game by innings

21

Most strikeouts by Rays pitchers

33

Most strikeouts by teams combined

29

Most strikeouts by Rays pitchers, consecutive games

24

(Tied) consecutive scoreless innings by Rays pitchers

Numbers game

21

Teams (since 1918) to strike out 21 or more batters

8

Teams to lose the game, as the Rays did, all in extra innings

Evan Longoria has soreness, delaying return to Tampa Bay Rays

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — Just when the news was encouraging about **Evan Longoria's** potential return to the Rays lineup, he felt soreness in his left hamstring Tuesday and will take two days off before resuming his rehab assignment at Triple-A Durham on Thursday.

Rays manager **Joe Maddon** acknowledged the change in scheduling likely would push Longoria's return back into next week at the earliest, but he maintained it was not a setback.

"I'm not discouraged by the soreness," Maddon said. "I think that's natural. Sometimes soreness is a good thing. There's a part of soreness that means something's getting better, too. So as long as it's not pain and it's not pulling — those are the words I would not want to hear."

Maddon also revealed that the Rays aren't expecting Longoria to be in the lineup every day when he comes back, even when limited to the DH role. Twice since joining Durham, Longoria has played two games then reported soreness and needed time off, and Maddon said the Rays may have to follow a similar schedule, perhaps using him as a pinch-hitter along the way.

"If we could get him back where he could play for a couple, three days in a row and then you have to give him a day off, that'd be fine," Maddon said.

Tuesday was the 81st game the Rays played without Longoria, which is half a season, and they were 38-42 in the first 80. They were 15-8 with him.

CONRAD OUT: INF **Brooks Conrad** was a victim of Monday's 15-inning 4-3 loss, as the Rays optioned him to Triple A so they could add RHP **Josh Lueke** to bolster their bullpen, which was emptied to cover 72/3 innings.

Lueke, 1-3, 4.73, was probably not the first choice, but RHPs **Brandon Gomes** and **Dane De La Rosa** both worked multiple innings for Durham on Monday and LHP **Cesar Ramos** is now being used as a starter.

Conrad, 3-for-his-last-37 and hitting .172 overall, seemed the likely choice to go down when Longoria returned anyway. He has to stay in the minors for a minimum of 10 days (barring injury) so once the bullpen is back to full rest, Maddon said it's "logical" for the Rays to bring up another position player. INFs **Will Rhymes** and **Reid Brignac** would be among the candidates.

ABOUT MONDAY NIGHT: Maddon said there wasn't anything he would have done differently in the 4-3 15-inning marathon loss in which the Rays struck out 21 A's but managed only eight hits.

That included not bunting after the Rays opened the 14th with two singles, and having Conrad pinch-hit for **Matt Joyce** against LHP **Jerry Blevins**. Conrad struck out.

The A's broke through in the 15th against RHP **Kyle Farnsworth** when **Brandon Ingesingled** and moved up on a bunt, **Seth Smith** was walked intentionally and **Eric Sogard** unintentionally and **Jemile Weeks** delivered a sac fly over the Rays' five-man infield.

MISCELLANY: The 230 July strikeouts by Rays pitchers through Monday were the most by an AL team since the 1964 Indians. ... INF **Jeff Keppinger** said he warmed up well in the bullpen — with his fastball hitting 85 mph — and would have welcomed the chance to pitch had Monday's game gone on. ... INF **Elliot Johnson** said he got hundreds of entries to the first of his weekly Tuesday Twitter contests (@ElliotJohnson9) to guess the lineup.

James Shields pitches a shutout as Tampa Bay Rays beat Oakland Athletics 8-0

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — James Shields was relieved to still be with the Rays to make his Tuesday night start after the deadline passed for nonwaiver trades. Then he went out and showed opposing general managers what they may have missed out on.

Shields put his extended struggles behind him with a stellar three-hit complete-game outing reminiscent of his early season and 2011 performance to lead the Rays to an 8-0 win over the A's.

"That was as good as I've seen him in a long time," manager Joe Maddon said. "You look at Shields and his body of work to this point, you know it's in there and you know he's going to come back and pitch this way. It's fortunate for us that he's still here. He's going to pitch like that the rest of this season."

Combining Shields' welcome effort with a productive though not powerful offense that totaled more than six runs for just the second time since the All-Star break, the Rays (54-50) guaranteed a winning record on their nine-game cross-country challenge against other wild-card contenders, and with a chance today to take all three series.

Many of the Rays were just happy to see Shields in the clubhouse before his start given the recurring trade rumors, David Price and B.J. Upton joining him for a group hug. In his seventh career shutout and first complete game this season, Shields allowed only three singles — and no walks — while striking out 11 and throwing 98 pitches, giving the worn-out bullpen a day of rest. After the final out, Shields pointed to the pen in acknowledgement.

After going 5-0, 3.05 in his first six starts, Shields was 3-7, 5.16 in his next 15, and as his struggles went on it was hard not to think the ongoing trade talk was an issue.

"It really hadn't bothered me to be honest with you," Shields said. "But, yeah, it's good to be a Ray. I consider Tampa Bay my home. ... I'm glad to be here."

Maddon said Shields' performance was the product of the trade deadline passing and a change in game plan orchestrated by pitching coach Jim Hickey to rely more on the fastball and not repeat his changeup and curveball too often.

"I think it was a combination of him relaxing knowing he was here and I think the game plan was outstanding," Maddon said. "It was pretty much textbook. I thought he was outstanding."

Shields agreed it that it looked and felt similar to 2011, when he threw 11 complete games, including four shutouts. "It's been awhile since I felt like last year," he said. "I was in control of everything tonight."

The Rays took a 2-0 lead in the third, combining three hits, two groundouts and, perhaps most importantly, catcher Jose Lobaton getting in an extended rundown, and added on from there.

Rightfielder Sam Fuld, continuing his hot injury-delayed start, had three hits to raise his average to .391 and centerfielder Upton, who was 0-for-7 in Monday's 15-inning marathon loss, had two, singling in the first run and scoring another.

The five runs they got off A's starter Tommy Milone were the most he allowed in a home game, and one fewer than his total for eight starts in the spacious Coliseum.

Lobaton led off the third with a double and went to third on Fuld's single to right. Desmond Jennings followed with a grounder to third and though Lobaton was tagged out, he kept the play going long enough that the Rays ended up in better position as Fuld came around to third and Jennings went to second.

It paid off when Upton singled to left for the first run and Ben Zobrist's grounder to second was soft enough for Jennings to score the second.

They extended the lead to 5-0 in the sixth, when they opened with three consecutive singles, by Upton, Zobrist and Jeff Keppinger, then followed with a sac fly by Carlos Pena and another RBI single by Sean Rodriguez.

Between the pitching, the baserunning and the overall play, Maddon had plenty to be pleased about.

"That was as clean a game as we've played in a long time," he said. "It was very clean."

County attorney says Hillsborough can talk to Rays

By Bill Varian, Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — Hillsborough County officials can talk to the Tampa Bay Rays about the team's future stadium plans, so long as they don't get too specific, a lawyer for the county said Tuesday.

County Commission Chairman Ken Hagan, who requested the legal opinion, said he hopes to start that conversation Thursday, the next time his board meets.

"At the end of the discussion, my goal is to make a motion to send a letter inviting the Rays to come here to talk to us," Hagan said, adding that any conversation would take place in public in the interest of transparency.

The Rays, so far, aren't rising to the prospective offer.

"We're going to respectfully decline to comment," Rays spokesman Rick Vaughn said.

St. Petersburg Mayor Bill Foster offered his standard response to overtures of any sort from other governments toward the Rays: butt out.

"This is more outside interference in something that is between the Rays and St. Petersburg and Pinellas County," Foster said.

The legal opinion was the latest development in an ongoing tussle between the two sides of the bay over the Rays' future.

Robert Brazel, a managing attorney in the litigation division of the county attorney's office, wrote that the team is bound by its contract with the city of St. Petersburg to play at Tropicana Field. But he wrote that Hillsborough County "is not a party to the lease agreement and is therefore not bound by any of its terms." The agreement runs until 2027.

The county would open itself up to a lawsuit for "intentional interference" only if it goes beyond talking and causes "damages" to St. Petersburg, Brazel said.

But proving that the talks caused harm would be difficult "unless a new stadium is ultimately constructed in Hillsborough County" and unless St. Petersburg is not compensated for losses under the remaining term of the lease.

Talking about future possibilities? That's okay, Brazel said.

"Any discussions with the Rays should be limited to the Rays speaking about their intentions and desires," the memo states, "and the Rays' long-term plans, goals and interests."

Brazel said Tuesday that talks should not go so far as to delve into specific stadium locations or options for paying for it.

"I think this is really a situation where we should be listeners and let the Rays do the talking," Brazel said. "I see it as an information-gathering process for us."

St. Petersburg officials took a dim view of the legal opinion.

Foster said he was glad the memo referred to the possibility of harm and damages. He said the potential for harm goes beyond money to potentially affect long-term relationships between neighboring governments.

Furthermore, he said his government has offered to talk to the Rays about their future. Foster said he would be willing to amend the city's agreement with the team to allow it to explore other locations within Pinellas County, an offer he said has been on the table for two years.

St. Petersburg City Attorney John Wolfe underscored his belief that financial damages to his city would go well beyond lease payments on Tropicana Field if the team leaves before the agreement expires. The agreement itself states that violating its terms would cause "irreparable harm."

"There is not enough money to provide compensation for 'irreparable harm,' " Wolfe said. "The harm caused by someone even trying to lure the Rays to another city would, in my opinion, cause damages and harm to St. Petersburg's image that would result in a valid legal action."

"I am willing to let a court decide who is right."

St. Petersburg City Council Chairwoman Leslie Curran, who has been critical of Foster's dealings with the Rays, said she'd like to see the mayor get more engaged with the team and its future.

"I think it's a shame the city is letting more time go by without having a serious discussion with the Rays," she said. "We should be having that conversation."

Hagan must win support from his fellow commissioners to send the letter, and the team must take him up on the offer.

Commissioner Mark Sharpe noted that having a Major League Baseball franchise is important to the regional economy. He said it's important that all local governments work together to ensure the team stays. He stopped short of saying he would support sending an invitation to the team.

Commissioner Al Higginbotham said he believes Hagan is on dangerous ground from his own reading of the opinion.

"It seems to me it puts us on thin ice, if we're interested in them coming to Tampa or Hillsborough County, to engage them," Higginbotham said.

Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn, who has expressed his own willingness to work with the team and other local governments, hadn't read the opinion by Tuesday afternoon but said it sounded encouraging.

"I think any movement forward is good news, whether it's a decision that the Rays remain in St. Petersburg or a decision that the Rays are allowed to talk to all jurisdictions," Buckhorn said. "Stagnation is not a solution."

Hagan said his primary motivation is ending a logjam.

The Rays and MLB commissioner Bud Selig have said Tropicana Field is not a viable home for the remainder of the agreement. The team initially proposed building a new outdoor stadium in St. Petersburg, but withdrew that plan four years ago when it ran into community opposition.

Since that time, a group of civic leaders has recommended that the team be allowed to look for new locations more central to the metropolitan area's population clusters, including in Hillsborough County. The team's ownership has largely remained silent on what it wants to see happen.

Hagan said he wants to extend the offer to the Rays as much as anything to get them to open up about their long-term intentions. He said he will be concerned if they elect not to do so.

"It wouldn't be a good sign," he said.

Talk about Rays — before it's too late

Times Editorial

It's time to start talking and quit stalling on initiating public talks about a new stadium for the Tampa Bay Rays. A commonsense legal opinion released Tuesday gives the Hillsborough County Commission all the reassurance it needs to have an open discussion about the future of Major League Baseball in Tampa Bay and stadium options. Pinellas County commissioners sound interested in holding a similar conversation, and they should invite St. Petersburg Mayor Bill Foster and the City Council to participate. If Foster continues to bury his head in the sand, the area's elected officials have an obligation to go on without him.

Hillsborough County Commission chairman Ken Hagan asked the county attorney for the legal opinion to make sure commissioners would be on solid ground in talking to the Rays about remaining in Tampa Bay. As Hagan noted, every year that goes by with no discussion clicks another year off the Tropicana Field lease and makes it easier and less expensive for the Rays to leave the area. Foster's threats to sue anyone who talks to the Rays about the future reflect a pinched reading of the lease and a lack of appreciation for the consensus-building it will take to keep the franchise in Tampa Bay.

The county's legal opinion states the obvious. The Rays' lease with St. Petersburg does not prevent team officials from discussing their long-term interests and goals regarding a new stadium. Nobody is talking about negotiating another specific stadium deal or interfering with the city's contract. Besides, as the legal opinion points out, St. Petersburg would have a hard time proving damages if it is paid for its remaining debt service on the lease and other economic losses if the Rays leave. Nobody is talking about the Rays leaving in the middle of the night, sneaking across the Howard Frankland Bridge and stiffing the city.

It's two years and counting since Foster backed himself into a corner and refused to negotiate further with the Rays. The mayor said the team could explore stadium sites just outside the city limits in mid Pinellas; the team predictably wants to look at the market as a whole and both Pinellas and Hillsborough counties. The Rays have understandably grown more frustrated, and county commissioners on both sides of the bay and Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn have signaled they are ready to look for solutions. They understand the clock is ticking, the cost for the Rays to move from Tampa Bay is dropping and the team isn't likely to be playing in the outdated Trop in 2020, much less until the lease expires in 2027.

In case anybody missed it, the Rays' local television ratings are up and the team ranks 29th out of 30 Major League teams in average attendance. The Rays want to talk. The political leaders of both Pinellas and Hillsborough want to talk — except for one who has isolated himself. It's time to start working toward building a consensus for a new stadium and exploring all of the possibilities, with or without the St. Petersburg mayor.

Rays decline to make moves as trade deadline passes

By Roger Mooney, *The Tampa Tribune*

OAKLAND --

The non-waiver trade deadline passed this afternoon and, not surprisingly, the Rays did not make any deals.

Executive vice president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman was pursuing his primary needs – shortstop and catcher – as well as help for his unproductive offense. He was willing to move more than pitcher James Shields.

But, apparently, nothing lined up with other teams or Friedman's asking price was too high or potential trade partners wanted too much, like rookie left-hander Matt Moore.

Friedman is willing to hold on to his pitching depth, and with the Rays hitting a major league-low .230, pitching will be the key if this team is to return to the postseason.

Shields will make his scheduled start tonight against the A's. With every reliever used during Monday's 4-3, 15-inning loss to the A's, the Rays could certainly use a big game from Shields.

"This is where I want to be," Shields said before Monday's game. "I want to be in the playoff hunt and ready to go to the playoffs."

Shields, who will make \$9 million next season and \$12 million in 2014, could be dealt in the offseason when potential trade partners will include the teams who were not in contention and, therefore, not interested in adding players at the trade deadline.

The Rays are holding out hope that the return of third baseman Evan Longoria during the upcoming homestand from a partially torn left hamstring suffered April 30 will be the same as adding a bat at the trade deadline.

Also, pitcher Jeff Niemann (fractured right fibula) is expected to rejoin the rotation in late August. Manager Joe Maddon said Monday that a fresh Niemann could provide a big lift as the playoff race enters its final month.

"We feel good as far as what we've had to deal with this year," Shields said on the Rays playoff prospects. "Hopefully, Longo comes back soon, and if we keep pitching and playing defense like we have the last couple of series we'll be right in the thick of things."

The Rays could still make a trade, but the players would have to pass through waivers which makes it more problematic.

Longoria sits out with soreness

By Tampa Tribune Staff

OAKLAND, Calif. --

3B **Evan Longoria** did not play Tuesday for Triple-A Durham because his left hamstring was sore from playing back-to-back days. It was the second time during this latest minor league rehab assignment that Longoria sat because of soreness, and it will be a precaution that will be repeated when he rejoins the team.

"If we can get him back where he can play a couple, three days in a row and then we have to give him a day off, that would be fine," manager **Joe Maddon** said.

Longoria, who has basically missed three months since partially tearing his left hamstring April 30, is playing his way back into game shape like he would if these were the first days of spring training. His hamstring isn't the only area that is sore, but it is the one area that needs to be carefully monitored.

"I don't think it's bad, honestly," Maddon said. "Even if he were to come back here and be able to follow that routine, that's not so bad, either. I'm not anticipating him to be able to come back and play every day, even as a DH at the beginning."

The Bulls are off today, and Longoria is scheduled to return to their lineup Thursday, meaning a return for the Baltimore series, which begins Friday at Tropicana Field, is out. Maddon said it is possible Longoria returns for the Toronto series.

"That would be more realistic," Maddon said.

Standing pat

Maddon said a number of teams inquired about Rays players as Tuesday's non-waiver trade deadline neared, but nothing lined up, so the Rays, as is their habit at this time of year, did not make a trade.

"I'm fine with that," Maddon said. "Actually, I'm very happy about that."

The Rays can acquire players in time for the Aug. 31 deadline to set playoff rosters, but those trades would be made difficult by the fact the player would have to clear waivers. The Rays are also viewing the return of Longoria, DH **Luke Scott** (oblique strain) and RHP **Jeff Niemann** (fractured right fibula) as the same as trade-deadline acquisitions.

RHP **James Shields**, whose name came up the most in trade rumors, could be dealt in the offseason when potential trade partners will include the teams who were not in contention and, therefore, not interested in adding players at the trade deadline.

Maddon said he has not backed off the preseason goal that the Rays can win the division and reach the World Series.

"I'm really happy nothing happened because I really believe in the guys that we have," he said.

Conrad optioned

INF **Brooks Conrad** was the odd man out and was optioned to Durham when the Rays decided to recall RHP **Josh Lueke** from Durham to add a fresh arm to the bullpen.

"It was nothing that Brooks has done," Maddon said. "We just needed the protection in the bullpen."

Conrad, claimed off waivers June 21 from Milwaukee, was 7-for-20 with a home run, three doubles and six RBIs in his first seven games, five starts. But he was 3-for-37 with 20 strikeouts since then.

Noteworthy

Robin Friedman, wife of executive VP of baseball operations **Andrew**, gave birth Tuesday to the couple's second son. ... On Monday, the Rays became the fourth team since 1919 to strike out more than 20 batters (they struck out a team-record 21) and walk at least 10 (three were intentional) in the same game. ... Monday's game took franchise record 5 hours, 9 minutes to play. The 33 combined strikeouts were also a franchise record. ... Former USF football standout **Anthony Henry** will throw out the first pitch before "USF Night" on Saturday.

Shields goes distance as Rays rout A's

By Roger Mooney, The Tampa Tribune

OAKLAND, Calif. --

As the ball settled into B.J. Upton's glove in center field for the final out Tuesday night, James Shields turned toward the guys sitting down in the bullpen and fired a "This was for you" point.

On a night when the Tampa Bay Rays bullpen needed a breather, Shields provided just that, throwing his first complete game of the season as the Rays rolled to an 8-0 victory against the A's at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

"After (Monday's) game the bullpen needed a rest. That was the main point," Shields said, referring to Monday's 15-inning, 4-3 loss in which all seven relievers worked.

"We saw that a lot last year," Rays manager Joe Maddon said of Shields' excellence. "It was pretty much textbook. Outstanding."

The Rays remain 3 games behind the Angels, who took over the top spot in the wild card standings from the A's. The Rays trail the A's by 2 1/2 games for the second wild card spot entering this afternoon's series finale

Tuesday was James Shields circa 2011, when he led the major leagues with 11 complete games and threw four shutouts.

"It's very satisfying," he said. "Obviously all the (trade) talk that's been going, but for me personally being able to go deep in the game like that and go nine innings for the first time this year, I'm really happy about it."

Shields held one of the hotter lineups in baseball to three hits and struck out 11. He didn't allow a runner past first base and worked to only two batters over the minimum.

And he did it in a tidy 98 pitches by establishing his fastball and using his curveball and changeup when needed. Shields said he didn't throw his first curveball until the fourth inning, because he didn't need to throw one during the first three innings.

Shields and pitching coach Jim Hickey came up with a gameplan that called for more fastballs after Shields' last start, when he allowed five runs in six innings in a loss to the Orioles in Baltimore.

"He wanted me to stay aggressive early in the game, try to make them swing the bats. That's what I did," Shields said.

That Shields even made the start was a surprise based on the rumors last week that had Shields being traded to as many as seven different teams. Those rumors tailed off over the weekend and Shields said he didn't believe he was going to be traded by Tuesday's non-waiver trade deadline.

He wasn't, of course, and he fished his Tampa Bay game cap out of his locker to wear during his postgame interview as a sign that is glad to still be a part of the team.

"(The trade talk) really hadn't bothered me, to be honest with you, but, yeah, it's good to be a Ray," he said.

"This is my home. I consider Tampa Bay to be my home. I'm glad to be here."

His teammates, who would have viewed a Shields trade as a salary dump in the middle of a playoff race, were relieved that he stayed.

"It shows they still have confidence in us," J.P. Howell said before the game.

So was it a coincidence when the Rays offense went out and produced 11 hits and the second-most runs on this trip behind the 10 they hung on Baltimore July 25?

"We had a good feel about us (before the game)," Maddon said.

The Rays handed Shields a 2-0 lead in the second inning when Upton singled home Sam Fuld and Ben Zobrist's grounder to second scored Desmond Jennings from third base.

They scored three more times in the sixth inning for a 5-0 lead when Jeff Keppinger and Sean Rodriguez had RBI singles and Carlos Peña had a sacrifice fly.

Those five runs came against A's rookie right-hander Tommy Milone, who entered the game with a 0.91 ERA in eight home starts this season. Milone had never allowed more than two runs in a game in front of the home crowd.

"That was as clean a game as we've played all year," Maddon said.

The rest was up to Shields, and he made it look easy, winning for just the second time since June 10.

"You know it's in there," Maddon said. "You know he's going to come back and pitch this way.

"Fortunately for us he's still here."

Rays bullpen continues to deliver the goods

By Roger Mooney, The Tampa Tribune

OAKLAND --

The Rays have one of the best bullpens in the major leagues, the best in terms of ERA since the All-Star Break. Because of that, Josh Lueke found himself flying cross country Tuesday to add a fresh arm to bullpen that worked overtime in Monday's 15-inning, 4-3 loss to the A's.

All seven relievers made an appearance with Burke Badenhop pitching two innings.

"We're not going to the dance without those guys being well and rested," Rays manager Joe Maddon said before Tuesday's game. "The moment you start beating up your bullpen too badly, that's the part that's almost impossible to reproduce, so we thought we needed that extra arm to be protective."

To make room for Lueke, who was summoned from Triple A Durham, infielder Brooks Conrad was optioned to Durham.

Maddon said the Rays could play with a short bench for several days if it means saving innings for the guys who helped the Rays to a 42-5 record when leading after six innings, 44-2 when leading after seven and 44-1 when leading after eight.

Monday's game would have taken far less than the 5 hours, 9 minutes needed until Jamile Weeks sent the A's to a major league-leading 12th walk-off win with a one-out sacrifice fly in the bottom of the 15th off Kyle Farnsworth. Farnsworth was pitching on back-to-back days for the first time this season.

Wade Davis in the ninth inning and Jake McGee in the 10th pitched out of bases-loaded jams. The A's had two runners on in the 11th, but J.P. Howell was able to get out of that jam.

Joel Peralta pitched a perfect inning. Fernando Rodney worked for the third straight day.

They combined to record 15 of the team record 21 strikeouts the Rays recorded in the marathon game.

The bullpen has been involved in some form in 101 of the Rays first 103 games. After a rough patch during the first road trip of the season, the bullpen has settled down to pitch to a 3.19 ERA.

In their previous 37 1/3 innings heading to Tuesday's game, the relievers allowed only two runs and struck out 54. They worked 58 2/3 innings since the All-Star Break and allowed a run in only five of those innings.

Their 1.53 ERA since the break is the lowest in the majors.

Howell extended his streak of scoreless outings to 15 on Monday.

Maddon said the bullpen will benefit from off days Thursday and Monday. Still, he said it was wise to add a fresh arm just in case Tuesday's starter James Shields struggled or today's starter Alex Cobb has a short outing.

The Rays used the same tactic after beating the Mariners in 14 innings in July 20. Cesar Ramos was called up the following day in a move that proved huge when he was needed to pitch four innings when Cobb left the game after being struck on the leg with a line drive at the end of the second inning.

"After (Monday) night we're really concerned about the bullpen," Maddon said. "They were in good shape and they're still in good shape, but now is when you don't want to beat people up."

Official: Hillsborough, Rays can talk stadium – carefully

By Mike Salinero, The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA --

Talk to the Tampa Bay Rays about their stadium plans and you risk a lawsuit, the St. Petersburg city attorney has warned other local governments.

Not so fast, the Hillsborough County attorney pushed back Tuesday: You can indeed chat – so long as you do it in the open and don't get too specific.

The legal row over just talking about a stadium points up the tension rising about the future of the Rays. It's fed by the team's insistence, backed by Major League Baseball, that there won't be a future here without a stadium to replace the indoor Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg has 15 years remaining on a lease agreement with the Rays for Tropicana Field. The team wants out before then, but the contract prohibits it from entering into negotiations to relocate.

Knowing that, Hillsborough commissioners asked the county attorney's office in April for a legal opinion on whether they could talk to the Rays in general terms about the team's future plans.

On Tuesday, county managing attorney, Robert E. Brazel, said yes. Brazel, in a memo to commissioners, said the county is not bound by the lease agreement between St. Petersburg and the Rays.

Brazel said St. Petersburg could sue the county for talking to the Rays, but the city would have to prove it had been damaged by Hillsborough's "intentional interference" with St. Petersburg's "advantageous business relationship" with the Rays.

"The damages element would likely be the most difficult to establish, unless a new stadium is ultimately constructed in Hillsborough County," Brazel wrote.

"Moreover," Brazel said, St. Petersburg would be unlikely to prove any damages if "the city is ultimately compensated for its debt service and other economic losses" should the Rays leave.

St. Petersburg City Attorney John Wolfe disagreed, citing a clause in the lease agreement that said the city would suffer "irreparable harm and damage" should the Rays discuss relocating with any other party.

"The harm caused by someone even trying to lure the Rays to another city would, in my opinion cause damages and harm to St. Petersburg's image that would result in a valid legal action for an injunction and damages against those who intentionally embark upon any such attempt," Wolfe said in an e-mail Tuesday.

Having the discussions in an open meeting, as Brazel suggests in his memo, would not protect the county against a lawsuit, Wolfe said.

The Rays declined to comment.

Any talks between the county and the Rays would have to be in general terms about the team's intentions and desires relating to their current issues with Tropicana Field and the team's long-term goals, Brazel said.

Brazel "wants us to avoid talking about financing a stadium," said commission Chairman Ken Hagan, who made the motion to get the legal opinion. Brazel "opined that we can have general discussions regarding the Rays' long-term interests and goals."

Hagan said acceptable topics, if the Rays choose to enter into discussions, would be what type of stadium the owners prefer, what part of the Tampa region they prefer, and whether they would confirm their interest in staying here.

Rays, A's play rubber game with Wild Card in sights

By Justin Albers, MLB.com

The A's and Rays are in a similar spot. They're both within striking distance of first place in their respective divisions, with Oakland currently owning an American League Wild Card spot.

But both teams elected to stand pat as the non-waiver Trade Deadline came and went on Tuesday afternoon. If they want to continue to stay in the playoff race, they'll have to do it with the guys currently on their rosters.

The A's will turn to right-hander Jarrod Parker on Wednesday afternoon at the Coliseum. Parker, who is 7-4 with a 3.38 ERA this season, hasn't been sharp lately. He's given up four or more runs in three of his last four starts, including his last outing against Baltimore.

In that start, Parker was roughed up for six runs on eight hits in only five innings. Parker struck out eight and walked just one, but he gave up two home runs.

"A couple bad pitches I'd like to have back," Parker said afterward. "Some of those pitches I probably could have hit out of the park."

The A's have the lowest ERA in the AL, so manager Bob Melvin was OK with the team not making a move like division rivals Texas and the Angels did.

"That's been a strength for us all year, and if you can hold teams down, you give yourself chance to win games," Melvin said. "I know they upgraded their pitching. That wasn't something we felt like we needed to upgrade."

The Rays will counter with left-hander Alex Cobb, who has lost three consecutive starts despite allowing three or fewer runs in all three. Cobb gave up only three runs over seven innings in his last outing against the Angels, while striking out three and walking none. But the Tampa Bay offense gave him just one run of support.

"It's the same story," Rays manager Joe Maddon said afterward. "We just have to do better offensively. We have opportunities, they're out there."

Cobb is 4-8 with a 4.93 ERA in 12 starts this season. He has won only one of his last six decisions, and he figures to be the odd man out when Jeff Niemann returns from the disabled list. But Cobb said he can't worry about that.

"You can stress about that your whole career, really," Cobb said. "Just because it's getting down to where a few starts until he's back, you don't look at it any differently than you have your whole career. You go out there every start trying to win and compete in every game. If you do that, then you don't worry about all the little things that go along with it. My approach is going to stay the same whether he's ready tomorrow or late August or September."

A's: McCarthy struggles in rehab start

- Right-hander Brandon McCarthy made his first rehab start on Monday since returning to the 15-day disabled list on June 20 with recurring right shoulder soreness, and he struggled. McCarthy allowed six runs over 3 2/3 innings for Triple-A Sacramento.

McCarthy will throw another bullpen session after a couple days of rest, and he's expected to make another rehab start at some point before returning to the big leagues.

"You want to make sure he's throwing the ball where he wants to," Melvin said, "and he feels good about himself coming back to the big league level. We just have not gotten there yet because health is the big issue with him, and once he throws his bullpen, we'll have a better indication."

McCarthy is 6-3 with a 2.54 ERA in 12 starts this season. He last pitched on June 19.

- Outfielder Coco Crisp remains day-to-day with a left hamstring strain, but Crisp took cage batting practice on Tuesday for the first time since injuring himself on Saturday.

Rays: Conrad optioned, Lueke recalled

- The Rays optioned infielder Brooks Conrad to Triple-A Durham prior to Tuesday night's game and recalled pitcher Josh Lueke. Conrad had been hitting just .172 in 24 games, but the move was made mostly because the team's bullpen was depleted after Monday's 15-inning game.

"Right now, obviously after [Monday] night we're really concerned about the bullpen," Maddon said Tuesday. "We've been in really good shape, and we're still in really good shape, but now is when you don't want to beat people up."

Lueke had an 18.90 ERA in three appearances for the Rays earlier this season. He last pitched in the big leagues on May 18.

- Shortstop Sean Rodriguez's RBI single in the sixth inning of Tuesday' 8-0 win was his first RBI since July 14. Rodriguez was 0-for-17 in his last eight games before going 1-for-3 on Tuesday night.

Worth noting

- Parker has never pitched against the Rays.
- Cobb is 0-1 with a 10.38 ERA in one career start against the A's.
- The A's had only three hits in their 8-0 loss to the Rays on Tuesday, just their third defeat in their last 13 games.

Conrad sent down, Lueke called up

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Rays optioned infielder Brooks Conrad to Triple-A Durham prior to Tuesday night's game against the Athletics and recalled right-hander Josh Lueke.

Conrad was hitting .172 with two home runs and seven RBIs in 24 games.

The Rays felt like they needed an extra reliever to help replenish the bullpen following Monday night's 15-inning contest.

"Right now, obviously after last night we're really concerned about the bullpen," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "We've been in really good shape, and we're still in really good shape, but now is when you don't want to beat people up."

Maddon said when he talked with the front office everybody agreed that the Rays weren't "going to the dance without those guys being well and rested."

"The moment you start beating up the bullpen too badly, that's the part that's almost impossible to reproduce," Maddon said. "So, we thought we needed that extra arm to be protected."

Rays records struck down in 15-inning game

OAKLAND -- Monday night's marathon did not end the way the Rays would have liked, as they saw their two-game win streak snapped in a 4-3 loss to the Athletics.

The game also left a legacy for the Rays, who saw several records fall during the 15-inning affair.

For starters, it was the longest road game for the Rays in terms of time (5:09) and innings.

Rays pitchers set a club record by striking out the most hitters in one game with 21. This was the highest total of strikeouts in one game since the Athletics struck out 21 in a 9-7 win at Texas that went 13 innings. In addition, the combined total of strikeouts by both clubs (33) established a new mark for the Rays.

Rays pitchers struck out 29 hitters over their two games, which was the highest total in consecutive games.

In addition, the Rays added an odd note by becoming the fourth team since 1919 to have its pitchers strike out 20 or more batters in a game and walk 10 or more in the same game.

Entering the final game of July, the Rays have struck out a Major League-high 230 batters in the month, the most by an American League team since the 1964 Indians fanned 264 behind Sam McDowell's 44. Rays pitchers have struck out 10 or more batters in 11 of the last 16 games.

Keppinger was armed and ready for 16th

OAKLAND -- Jeff Keppinger was used as the Rays' designated hitter in Monday night's 15-inning loss to the Athletics. But if the Rays had escaped the 15th, the veteran infielder would have been the guy to replace Kyle Farnsworth on the mound.

"Yeah, that's what they said," Keppinger said. "They said Farnsworth's going to go one inning. I was coming up to lead off the next inning, so I don't know, maybe if we'd have gotten the lead they might have changed their mind and left Farnsworth in there. But they said I was going to get a chance to get in there and do what I have to do."

Keppinger actually went down to the bullpen and warmed up in anticipation of entering the game.

"I felt all right [warming up]," Keppinger said. "I was just trying to throw strikes, get the ball over the plate into the catcher's mitt."

Keppinger thinks the last time he pitched in a game came during his freshman year at the University of Georgia.

"I believe I got a save," Keppinger said.

Had Keppinger entered the game, he planned on doing some pitching.

"I was throwing everything I got," he said. "I wasn't just going to go in there and lay them in. I was going to compete."

When asked about his pitching repertoire, Keppinger noted: "I can't tell you. Then they're going to know if I get in there sometime."

Shields stays, and so do the rest of Rays

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- James Shields stood next to his locker in the visiting clubhouse at Oakland Coliseum on Tuesday afternoon. Major League Baseball's Trade Deadline had passed and Shields remained a member of the Rays. So he smiled.

"I'm glad to still be a Ray," Shields said. "Me, B.J., and Price had a group hug."

Shields had been the Rays' player most mentioned in trade rumors this year. According to the rumor mill, Shields drew interest from the Angels, Rangers, Braves, Cardinals, Dodgers, Indians, and Reds.

But in the end, Shields, nor any other Rays players, were traded elsewhere.

Rays manager Joe Maddon said the front office did a lot of research about potential players to acquire to improve the club. And the interest in Rays players was obvious.

"There were a lot of inquiries about our guys," Maddon said. "So there's a lot of back and forth, so our people back home spent a lot of time sifting through our stuff. However, nothing did happen, and I'm fine with that. Actually, I'm very happy about that.

"I felt from Day 1 that this group of players is good enough to win our division and go back and win the World Series. I'm not going to depart from that feeling."

While the Rays did not make any deals, Maddon said the team still has a chance for "some great acquisitions" when Evan Longoria, Luke Scott, and Jeff Niemann return to the team.

Longoria could be back as early as this weekend, but more than likely next week, while Scott and Niemann will need to go on rehab assignments. All were doing well on Tuesday -- although Longoria sat out Tuesday night's game with some soreness in his partially torn left hamstring.

"So at the end of the day, it doesn't surprise me that nothing happened," Maddon said. "I've been saying that all along. And I'm very pleased that nothing happened, because I really believe in the guys that we have."

Shields dominates A's with three-hit shutout

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Tuesday's non-waiver Trade Deadline wasn't about who the Rays traded for, rather who they kept.

James Shields did not find himself in the uniform of another team on Tuesday night. Instead, the veteran right-hander suited up in his familiar Rays uni with the No. 33 on the back and pitched in a fashion that made the Rays glad they resisted any temptation to trade him to any number of interested teams.

Shields threw a three-hit shutout with 11 strikeouts, leading the Rays to an 8-0 win over the Athletics at the Coliseum before a crowd of 15,836. It was Shields' third straight start reaching double-digits in strikeouts.

Count Rays manager Joe Maddon among those thankful that Shields still calls Tampa Bay home.

"You look at Shieldsy's body of work, you know he's going to come back and pitch this way," Maddon said. "It's fortunate for us that he's still here. He's going to pitch like this the rest of the season."

Though Shields maintained all along that any trade talk was just a part of the job and that it did not bother him, he allowed that Tuesday night's outing was "very satisfying."

"Obviously all the talk that's been going on, but me personally being able to go deep into the game and go nine innings for the first time this year, I'm really happy about it," Shields said. "Like I said before, it's good to be a Ray. This is my home. Tampa Bay I consider my home so I'm glad to be here."

By winning, the Rays closed the books on a 13-13 July while improving to 54-50 on the season and 5-3 on the current road trip that concludes Wednesday afternoon in Oakland.

The Rays moved to within 6 1/2 games of the Yankees in the American League East and three games out in the race for the top Wild Card spot -- 2 1/2 games behind for the second Wild Card spot.

If ever the Rays needed a starter to go deep, Tuesday night was the night, after the number of pitchers that were needed to cover 15 innings on Monday night. Not only did Shields go deep, he picked up his first complete game of the year, after recording an astounding 11 complete games in 2011.

"It's been awhile since I felt like last year," Shields said. "But I was in control of everything tonight. I was in control of all of my pitches and that's what pitching is all about, if you attack the strike zone and throw a lot of strikes."

Shields entered the game with just two wins in his previous 13 starts. But you wouldn't have guessed that, given the way he attacked the strike zone throughout his outing, conserving pitches and seemingly getting stronger along the way, en route to his ninth win of the season.

Shields noted that he was able to execute an excellent game plan hatched with pitching coach Jim Hickey.

"He just wanted me to throw more fastballs, mix it up more," Shields said. "Not repeat my changeup, [not] repeat my curveball as much. Just basically stay aggressive. He wanted me to stay aggressive early in the game and try to make them swing the bats. That's what I did early in the game."

The Athletics did not have a runner reach as far as second base all night.

"What I think he did well tonight was just keeping balls out of the middle of the plate and was able to get ahead," Seth Smith said. "I faced him four times, and he threw only one good pitch to hit, and that was the last one. So anytime you can get ahead with strikes without throwing anything to hit, you're going to be OK."

Shields retired Smith on a flyout to center field to end the game.

"After last night's game, the bullpen needed a rest," Shields said. "That was the main [thing he wanted to accomplish]. I pointed to [the bullpen] right after the last out just to let them know I got them."

Maddon noted that Shields' effort put his bullpen back in order for Wednesday afternoon's game.

"A game like that tonight can really set up your bullpen for a long time," Maddon said.

Prior to Tuesday night's game, Maddon told reporters that he did not expect his team to have a hangover from the previous night's gut-wrenching, 15-inning loss to the Athletics.

Maddon proved prophetic, from Shields' performance to that of the Rays' struggling offense that got busy early and produced throughout.

B.J. Upton singled off Tommy Milone to drive home the first run of the game with one out in the third. Ben Zobrist grounded out to drive home another to put the Rays up 2-0.

Jeff Keppinger and Sean Rodriguez had RBI singles and Carlos Pena added a sacrifice fly in the sixth to push the Rays' lead to 5-0.

The Rays tacked on another in the seventh when shortstop Brandon Hicks couldn't field Upton's grounder, allowing Desmond Jennings to race home with the Rays' sixth run. The Rays added two more in the ninth, including Upton's second RBI.

"That was as clean a game as we've played in a long time," Maddon said. "A clean game."