



Smyly's debut derailed by miscues, cold bats

By Aaron Leibowitz, *MLB.com*

OAKLAND -- After Monday night's extra-inning loss at the Coliseum, Rays manager Joe Maddon said he believes his team is just as good as the A's -- with one addendum: "We've got to prove it on the field."

Tuesday, however, brought much of the same. Drew Smyly was decent in his first start in a Tampa Bay uniform, but the Rays missed chance after chance to score, and they were less than stellar with the fundamentals.

The A's, owners of baseball's best record, took advantage, earning a 3-0 victory and taking a 2-0 series edge. The Rays will look to avoid a sweep Wednesday afternoon.

"When you don't score points, man, everything else is magnified," said Maddon. "Good at-bats, saw a lot of pitches against Jason [Hammel]. We were in good position a lot to get things done, and we just didn't. That's really the tale of the game. Our pitching was definitely good enough to win tonight."

Smyly scattered seven hits and two walks over 5 1/3 innings, and he was charged with three runs while striking out six. The southpaw finished at 107 pitches, exiting after Nate Freiman's sixth-inning double made it 2-0.

"I thought I threw pretty good," Smyly said. "Pitch count got up, kind of. I worked a couple deep counts. I missed my pitch against the last batter, Freiman, but besides that I thought I threw the ball well."

The Rays appeared to have a chance to get Derek Norris at home on Freiman's hit, but Yunel Escobar made a wild relay throw that also allowed Freiman to advance to third.

"I just think that he was surprised that the guy went," Maddon said of Escobar. "It wasn't like he should have probably been able to throw more quickly. From what I understand, he did not hear the trail man telling him what to do, and that's why he had to rush the throw and it wasn't that good. He could have had a pretty good shot."

Left-hander Jeff Beliveau replaced Smyly and promptly gave up a run-scoring single to Josh Reddick.

"Right up to that hit by Freiman, [Smyly] kept them in pretty good check," Maddon said. "I thought he made good pitches when he had to, I thought he and [catcher Curt] Casali worked well together. I thought, for a first time out, it was pretty darn good."

The Rays' biggest shortcoming, though, was with the bats. They tagged Hammel for seven hits and four walks in 5 2/3 frames -- and yet, somehow, Hammel put up a zero in the run column.

Tampa had multiple baserunners in the second, third, fourth and fifth innings, but Hammel induced two double plays and the Rays went 0-for-5 with men in scoring position.

"We had baserunners all over the place," Maddon said. "When you don't hit like that, it really looks as though you might not be fully there. We've just got to get those knocks, a couple knocks. We just haven't. That's been our biggest issue, is the ability to drive in runs. We had the guys out there again, we just could not get them home."

Poor baserunning didn't help, either: In the fifth, Desmond Jennings ran into the first out at third on a grounder to short.

The Rays left nine runners on base and the A's left 10, raising the two-game total to 44 between them.

Tampa Bay hit the ball hard off Hammel, who began his career with the Rays from 2006-08. But the right-hander did just enough to keep the Rays off the board, and they went hitless in 3 1/3 innings against the Oakland bullpen.

"I thought Hammel pitched really well, compared to what he has been doing, apparently," Ben Zobrist said. "I didn't really see anything good to hit. And the ones that we did hit hard were not in the right spot."

After winning five consecutive series, the Rays have now dropped two straight sets and five of their last six games.

On the bright side, their pitching staff became the fastest ever to 1,000 strikeouts on Tuesday, achieving the feat in the 113th game of the season. The 2013 Tigers did it in 114 games.

Boxberger changes it up to dominate lefties

By Aaron Leibowitz, *MLB.com*

OAKLAND -- Right-hander Brad Boxberger has been red-hot of late. Against lefties, he's on another planet.

Entering Tuesday, lefties were 0-for-their-last-43 against Boxberger -- a streak dating back to May 20 -- and he has held lefties to an .077 average (5-for-65), best in the Majors among qualifiers.

At 26, the third-year big leaguer is becoming a poster boy for reverse-split specialists.

"I've always liked facing lefties," Boxberger said, "just because I've been able to use what I want to use against them."

This season, Boxberger has essentially been a two-pitch pitcher: fastball and changeup. His cutter has become obsolete, while his changeup has been nasty.

"It's not unlike [Mariners closer] Fernando Rodney," said Rays manager Joe Maddon. "It's very similar to that. I don't think the hitter sees him well. Because of where the ball ends up and how it moves, it can even be more difficult for a left-handed hitter. The changeup really is that good."

Boxberger can't pinpoint the reason behind his splits, but the movement on his changeup coupled with his cross-body throwing motion have certainly helped.

"From what I've heard guys telling me, it's harder to pick up, I guess," he said. "I'm not really sure. It's been working."

Boxberger has been pretty darn good against righties, too. His .142 opponent average ranks third among American League relievers, and he had not allowed a run in 15 straight appearances.

"The way the game's going and how it's changing, it's a different evolution of the lefty specialist," Boxberger said. "You can be either a lefty or a righty. It could be trending that way."

"That's another thing that fans have to get used to," said Maddon. "There's this whole group of pitchers out there that are better to the opposite side for different reasons."

Worth noting

- David Price's first start with the Tigers was playing on the clubhouse TVs in Oakland on Tuesday.

"It was weird with the orange thing on top of his hat," Maddon said. "Otherwise, the colors were very close."

Price took out a full-page ad in Tuesday's Tampa Bay Times, thanking the Rays organization and fans.

"It was very nice of him, very cool that he recognized all the guys the way he did," said Maddon. "One of the best teammates I've ever been around."

- Maddon reiterated that Wil Myers (right wrist) could see game action by this weekend. Myers worked out again Tuesday in Port Charlotte, Fla.

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A's seeking sweep in Gray-Hellickson matchup

By Grace Raynor, *MLB.com*

Rays starter Jeremy Hellickson has three starts to his name all season along with 11 strikeouts. A's right-hander Sonny Gray made five starts in the month of July alone. He has 128 strikeouts on the season.

The two will meet Wednesday afternoon in Oakland, having nearly opposite seasons to this point. While Gray is coming off of American League Pitcher of the Month honors for July, Hellickson is still looking to throw at least five innings for the first time this season. The right-hander had arthroscopic surgery on his pitching elbow in March and is 0-1 in his three starts.

"I want him to go deeper into games, absolutely. I think under a different set of circumstances he probably would have by now," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "We've been looking at pitch usage and what he's doing and trying to give him some good information to take it out on the field and see how it plays out ... more than me trusting him, he's got to trust himself. That's what it comes down to."

Hellickson said physically he feels good, but that he's struggled to throw strikes. He's found success with his velocity and his changeup, but there's no substitute for game experience.

"I'm healthy, I feel strong, but you can't emulate coming out to a big league game," Hellickson said. "I haven't pitched well. I haven't really given [Maddon] a reason to leave me out there. Obviously I'd like to get a chance to work out of my own jams and go deeper in the game."

Gray, on the other hand, hasn't pitched fewer than six innings since June 28 in Miami, and he has a 12-4 record with a 2.59 ERA on the season.

The 24-year-old, who compiled a 5-0 record with a 1.03 ERA in July, already took home AL Pitcher of the Month honors in April, making him the first A's pitcher to win it twice in a single season since Barry Zito did it in August and September of 2001.

Manager Bob Melvin praised his youngster.

"To win it once during a season is quite the achievement, twice even more so obviously," Melvin said. "Based on the numbers, not surprised. Certainly, congratulations to him."

Gray said the success came as a result of simplifying the game and trusting his stuff.

"This last month I got back to what got me here and the reasons I've been so successful and started doing those things again," Gray said. "Just being competitive, attacking guys and not trying to trick people, just make pitches."

A's: Lowrie given rest with bruised finger

Melvin wouldn't let on whether or not shortstop Jed Lowrie (bruised right index finger) would be available off the bench Tuesday night.

Lowrie ended up not playing, a night after taking a ball off the finger in the fourth inning. He stayed in for the rest of that game, which the A's won in 10 innings Monday night.

On Tuesday, Eric Sogard replaced Lowrie, who his hitting .245 with 28 doubles and 42 RBIs on the season.

Rays: Boxberger dominating against lefties

Right-hander Brad Boxberger has stifled left-handed hitters the past two months, retiring 43 in a row entering Wednesday.

Lefties have a .077 average against him, which is best in the Majors among qualifiers. The last time he gave up a hit to a lefty was May 20.

"I've always liked facing lefties," Boxberger said, "just because I've been able to use what I want to use against them."

Worth noting

- On Wednesday, the Rays will be playing their 29th game of the past 35 against a team over .500. They then play seven straight against sub-.500 teams and then 28 of 32 against above-.500 teams.
- Coco Crisp was the A's designated hitter Tuesday night, returning to the lineup for the first time in 10 days from ongoing neck soreness. Melvin expects him to return to center field Wednesday.

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Key hits missing as Rays fall 3-0

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — The new guy, Drew Smyly, wasn't the problem Tuesday, making a decent debut in replacing David Price in the Tampa Bay rotation.

The Rays' downfall in the 3-0 loss to Oakland was actually an old acquaintance: a stark lack of offense.

"I've said this a thousand times I think, that's been our biggest issue, the ability to drive in runs," manager Joe Maddon said. "We had the guys out there and we just could not get them home."

Add in some sloppy defense (three errors) and questionable baserunning, and the result was the Rays' fifth loss in their last six games, bringing their season record down to 54-59 — and dropping them farther in the standings.

The Rays are now 10½ games behind the Orioles in what may no longer be considered reasonable pursuit of the American League East title, though still 5½ games back of Toronto — and trailing five other teams — in the race for the second AL wild card.

"We've got to be more offensive," Maddon said, about five different ways.

While Price impressed in his heralded debut for the Tigers in the Yankee Stadium, Smyly did okay for the Rays.

"I thought for the first time out it was pretty darn good," Maddon said. "He made pretty good pitches when he had to."

The 25-year-old lefty pitched into the sixth inning, allowing three runs on seven hits, striking out six while walking two (one intentionally, from a 2-2 count) and bouncing two breaking balls for wild pitches while throwing 107 overall, 70 for strikes.

"I thought I threw the ball well," Smyly said.

He went into the start insisting he was not trying to replace or be compared to anyone and but was focused just on being himself, though he was taking Price's slot in the rotation and wearing James Shields' old No. 33.

While Smyly looked calm, he acknowledged that wasn't necessarily the case.

"Warming up and in the first inning you have a little butterflies," Smyly said. "It feels a little different, first game with a new team, you want to do well. But once you got out of the first it was just the same old, same old. Just pitching."

Smyly posted four zeroes to start, including in the fourth when the A's had two on and two outs and after a double steal left first base open with a 2-2 count on righty hitter Nate Freiman, Maddon ordered an intentional walk, loading the bases to have Smyly face lefty Josh Reddick and it worked as he popped out.

"That's the manager's call," Smyly said, not biting on whether or how surprised he was. "He thought it would help, and it ended up being the right call."

The first run Smyly gave up wasn't the result of much, a leadoff single by Alberto Callaspo in the fifth, a sac bunt then a ground ball single by Coco Crisp through the shift, with rookie rightfielder Kevin Kiermaier's tremendously errant throw home eliminating any suspense. "He could definitely have been out," Maddon said.

The hope was to get Smyly through the sixth, but that didn't work out. Smyly had thrown 94 pitches through five and though never said he was tired, did acknowledge "the pitch count got up, kind of." Maddon said he didn't think Smyly was getting tired, but also admitted that it'll take him four or five starts to get a full read on his new pitcher.

After a well-struck out by Jonny Gomes, Derek Norris singled to left and Freiman laced an RBI double into the corner on a misplaced pitch. "I think he kind of yanked that pitch into his happy area as opposed to staying away, where he wanted to go," Maddon said.

Another errant throw, this one a relay by shortstop Yunel Escobar not only allowed that run to score, but set up the next one, as Freiman went to third and scored on Reddick's check-swing single off reliever Jeff Beliveau.

Maddon said Escobar also had a chance for an out at the plate, but rushed his throw because he wasn't aware Norris was trying to score.

"From what I understand, he did not hear the trail man telling him what to do," Maddon said. "Because of that, he thought the runner was not running and that's why he had to rush the throw and it wasn't that good. He had a pretty good shot at that runner."

There was an accomplishment for the pitchers. Reliever Kirby Yates got Freiman swinging to end the seventh for the Rays' 1,000th strikeout for the season, and they got there quicker, in their 113th game, than any team in MLB history. The 2013 Tigers did it in 114 on their way to an MLB record 1,428 for the season.

But Tuesday's three-run margin proved to be insurmountable as the Rays were shut out for an AL-high matching 14th time, going 0-for-5 with runners in scoring position (and 1-for-15 for the series) while leaving nine on.

The Rays were shut down in the sixth by former teammate Jason Hammel, who had been brutal in his first four starts for the A's after being acquired from the Cubs — going 0-4 with a 9.53 ERA, getting through the fifth inning only once and never allowing less than three runs.

Not that the Rays didn't have chances. They loaded the bases in the second, with a pair of two-out singles and a walk, but Kevin Kiermaier grounded out. They started the third with a walk, a fielder's choice grounder and a single, but Evan Longoria grounded into a double play. Three of the first four batters in the fourth singled, but Yunel Escobar hit into a double play and Kiermaier flied out.

At that point, they had four hits in a stretch of six at-bats over two innings with nothing to show for it.

"We just have to get those knocks," Maddon said. "A couple knocks here and there and guys would be flying around like the Wallendas."

But the most frustrating failure may have come in the fifth, in part because it looked like a lack of hustle on the bases, though Ben Zobrist insisted that was not the case.

The inning started with a walk by Desmond Jennings, the fourth straight inning the Rays got the leadoff man on. He moved up on a wild pitch, then broke for third on Zobrist's grounder and got thrown out, with Matt Joyce going down swinging for the second out.

That's when things got curious.

Longoria blooped a ball into shallow right that Josh Reddick came in hard and dove for but couldn't hang on to. With two outs, Zobrist would have — in theory anyway — had a chance to score what would have been the game's first run if he was busting it around the bases.

But Zobrist got only as far as third, and was surprised at the question about whether should have tried to race home, especially since he said third base coach Tom Foley wasn't waving him around.

"I didn't have a chance to score. Did you think I had a chance to score?" Zobrist said. "I didn't feel like I was loafing on it. ... Just because of where the ball was hit there was very little chance to score unless the ball kicked away. That's probably not a play I ever scored on, that close to the infield."

Maddon said he didn't see Zobrist's part in the play live and would have to check out the replay to determine whether he could have scored, noting Zobrist "is a full effort player all the time."

It mattered more because the Rays never got closer to score, with only one other runner reaching base the rest of the night.

"We've had this conversation so many times when we're unable to score runs," Maddon said. "That's really the tale of the game, because our pitching was good enough to win tonight."

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Rays' Hellickson looking to work deeper into games

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — RHP Jeremy Hellickson takes the mound this afternoon for his fourth start since coming off the disabled list and is hoping to get through five innings for the first time.

Part of the issue is that Hellickson needs to pitch better. In 132/3 innings since returning from January elbow surgery, he has allowed 17 hits (for a .304 average) and five walks.

"The main thing is to attack the zone more and attack the zone more," Hellickson said.

But a bigger part may be regaining the confidence of manager Joe Maddon, who has been quick to pull him at the first signs of trouble.

"I haven't pitched well, I haven't really given him a reason to leave me out there," Hellickson said. "Obviously I'd like to get a chance to work out of my own jams and go deeper into the game, but with the bullpen we have and every game a must-win there's not really time to wait around, so I just have to be better early and give him confidence to leave me out there late in the game."

Maddon said it's ultimately a combination of both issues. Strategically, the Rays want to see him be more aggressive in putting hitters away and make more use of his curveball.

"It's not that I lack confidence in him," Maddon said. "I just know what's going on right now. We've just got to get him beyond that. It's almost like he's teetering, we've got to get him beyond that one moment. All of a sudden there's that breakthrough and then heads up, he turns back into what he had been a couple years ago. Coming off surgery there's all kinds of doo-dads going in mentally. You want him to go deeper into games, absolutely. And under a different set of circumstances he probably would have right now."

There has been a pattern. In the three starts this season, Hellickson has been pulled after 41/3, 42/3 and 42/3 innings. In his 2013 ALDS Game 4 start, he got one inning. In his last five starts of the 2013 regular season: 42/3, 22/3, 51/3, 51/3, 22/3, 41/3.

TEMPER, TEMPER: Maddon was ejected in the 10th inning of Monday's 3-2 loss, upset with first-base umpire Quinn Wolcott's "egregiously bad" call on a check swing that would have been strike three on Josh Donaldson. It instead led to a bases-loading walk then Derek Norris' winning single.

It was Maddon's third ejection in the past 24 games, reflective of either his intensity as the team battles back into the race or his frustration. Has he heard from MLB about his actions? "Not yet," he said. "I think every one has been justified. I was upset (Monday) night; that was a pretty big moment."

THANKS DAVID: Maddon and other Rays were impressed with the full-page ad traded ace LHP David Price took out in Tuesday's Tampa Bay Times thanking many members of the organization as well as the fans. "It was very nice of him and very cool that he recognized all the guys the way he did," Maddon said. "One of the best teammates I've ever been around."

K CLUB: With reliever Kirby Yates getting Nate Freiman swinging to end the seventh, the Rays' logged their 1,000th strikeout for the season, and they got there quicker, in their 113th game, than any team in MLB history. The 2013 Tigers did it in 114 on their way to an MLB record 1,428 for the season.

REHAB REPORT: OF Wil Myers (broken right wrist) was chased inside by rain in Port Charlotte but hit in the cages. He will work out at the Trop today and head to Triple A, with plans to work out Thursday and Friday then start a rehab assignment as soon as Sunday.

MISCELLANY: LHP Erik Bedard and RHP Juan Carlos Oviedo officially cleared release waivers and are free to sign with any team. ... With Jason Hammel starting for Oakland, Tuesday was the 65th time a former Tampa Bay pitcher faced the Rays; they were 34-30. ... Oakland's 18 runners left on Monday tied the Rays record for an opponent.

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Athletics collecting former Rays

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — When Jonny Gomes walked into the Oakland clubhouse Friday after being reacquired by the A's, he reacquainted himself with pitcher Scott Kazmir with an observation:

"The last time we were together we were getting some hardware."

That would have been 2008, when both were members of the Rays team that made it to the World Series. Through a series of signings and trades, capped by last week's deals to get back outfielders Gomes and Sam Fuld, the A's have stocked up on ex-Rays.

"Getting the band back together," Kazmir said.

Pitcher Jason Hammel and catchers John Jaso and Stephen Vogt make it six who played for the Rays, plus pitcher Jesse Chavez, who was briefly in the organization; coach Ariel Prieto, who pitched for the 2001 Devil Rays; and trainer Nick Paparesta, a former Rays assistant.

"It's fun just to be in a clubhouse where there's familiar faces," Vogt said. "There's a lot of stories we've been telling of coaches and people. It's just been fun to reminisce about our time with Tampa Bay."

Rays manager Joe Maddon said they should be known now as the Oakland R-A's, noting "the potentiality for a lot of weird convergences." He joked that he'd probably feel just as home in their clubhouse if he wandered the wrong way down the O.co Coliseum.

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Drew Smyly okay in Rays debut

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — The kid was all right.

While David Price impressed in his much-heralded debut for the Tigers in the Yankee Stadium, Drew Smyly did okay in his first start filling Price's spot in the Rays rotation.

Smyly, 25, pitched into the sixth inning, allowing three runs on seven hits, walking two (one intentional) and throwing two wild pitches while striking out six and throwing 107 pitches (70 strikes). The game was not complete at press time.

Smyly seemed calm, working primarily with a fastball in the 89-90 range and a slider. He insisted going in that he was not trying to replace or be compared to anyone and was focused on being himself. Then he took the mound taking Price's place and wearing James Shields' old No. 33.

The first run Smyly allowed wasn't the result of much, a leadoff single by Alberto Callaspo in the fifth, a sac bunt then a ground ball single by Coco Crisp through the shift.

The second came as Smyly seemed to be tiring in the sixth, and though the Rays had the bullpen in action, Rays manager Joe Maddon left him out there, and it cost them.

After a well-struck out by Jonny Gomes, Derek Norris singled to left and Nate Frieman laced an RBI double into the corner. A horrible relay by shortstop Yunel Escobar not only allowed that run to score but set up the next, as Freiman went to third and scored on Josh Reddick's single off reliever Jeff Believeau.

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Lack of offense spoils Smyly's debut; Rays lose 3-0

By Roger Mooney, Tribune Staff

OAKLAND — Drew Smyly sat at his locker late Tuesday afternoon and looked at a scouting report of the A's batters while on a flat-screen TV behind him David Price made his much heralded debut with the Tigers.

Smyly's debut with the Rays didn't command a nationwide TV audience. He didn't pitch a gem. Heck, he didn't even get the win.

But Smyly kept the Rays in the game for nearly six innings and with some help from his offense, who knows?

Instead, it was the A's that came up with the key hits for a second straight night and beat the Rays 3-0.

"We had our opportunities early," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "We had base runners all over the place, and that's the thing, when you don't hit like that, it really looks as though you might not be fully there. We just got to get those knocks. A couple of knocks right there and the guys are flying around like the (Flying) Wallendas."

Right now the Rays aren't flying anywhere.

Tuesday's loss was their third straight and fifth in their last six games. They are 10 ½ games behind the first-place Orioles in the AL East and 5 ½ games out of the second AL Wild Card spot with 48 games to play.

It was the 14th time the Rays have been shut out this season.

They end this six-game run this afternoon against the Angels and A's – the teams that have the second-best and best records in the major leagues, respectively.

Tuesday's loss was notable for two reasons: Smyly didn't seem phased by changing teams after the trade deadline move that flipped him and Price and the Rays pitching staff recorded their 1,000th strikeout of the season, getting there faster than any team in major-league history.

They Rays needed 113 games, while the previous record holder, the 2013 Tigers, needed 114.

Smyly allowed seven hits and three runs in 5 1/3 innings. But it was a scoreless game until Coco Crisp singled home Alberto Callaspo with one out in the fifth inning.

"I thought he did pretty well, actually, right up until that hit by (Nate) Freiman," Maddon said. "He kept them in check, made pretty good pitches when he had to."

That hit was a run-scoring double by the A's first baseman in the sixth inning that made it a 2-0 game. A throwing error by Yunel Escobar allowed Freiman to advance to third. From there, Freiman easily scored on a single through a drawn infield by Josh Reddick.

Smyly said after some initial jitters, Tuesday felt like all the other games he pitched at the major-league level even if those games were with the Tigers.

"Warming up in the first inning you have a little butterflies, it feels different," he said. "First game with the new team you want to do well, but once you get out of the first it's the same-old, same-old. It's just pitching."

Smyly's welcome-to-Joe Maddon moment came in the fourth inning when Maddon ordered him to walk Freiman even though Freiman was batting with a 2-2 count. Sam Fuld and Josh Donaldson had just pulled off a double steal to put runners at second and third with two outs.

Maddon ordered the move because he felt Smyly matched up better with the left-handed Reddick, who was on deck. The lefties were batting .176 against the left-handed Smyly prior to the game.

"That's the manager's call," Smyly said. "He thought it would help, and it ended up being the right call."

Smyly got Reddick to pop up to second base to end the inning.

When asked if he was ever ordered to intentionally walk a batter with two strikes, Smyly said, "I don't think so."

The Rays had seven hits and drew four walks against former Rays pitcher Jason Hammel between the second and fourth innings and came away empty.

"That's been our biggest issue, the ability to drive in runs," Maddon said. "We had the guys out there again, and we could not drive them home."

Kevin Kiermaier left five runners on base during his first two at-bats. He left the bases-loaded in the second inning when he grounded out to end the threat. He then flied out to center field with runners on first and second to end the fourth.

Evan Longoria grounded into a double play to end the third inning. Yunel Escobar grounded into a double play for the first two outs of the fourth inning.

In the fifth, Desmond Jennings made the first out when he was caught trying to advance to third base on a grounder to short by Ben Zobrist.

Zobrist ended up on third base with two outs after Longoria lifted a ball into short right field that Reddick couldn't hold onto after a long run.

That single by Longoria would be the Rays final hit of the night.

Hammel, who earned his first win since his July 5 trade to the A's, and his bullpen retired the final 12 batters they faced.

"I didn't feel like we had a lot of chances," Zobrist said. "I didn't feel like we were threatening to get runs in. I thought Hammel pitched really well compared to what he has been doing, apparently. I didn't really see anything good to hit. And the ones that we did hit hard we're not in the right spot."

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Rays Notes: Maddon eager to learn about Smyly

By Roger Mooney, Tribune Staff

OAKLAND, Calif. — LHP Drew Smyly is a bit of a mystery to his new teammates, who got their first up-close look at him Tuesday night when he made his Rays debut against the A's.

Though the Rays faced Smyly just over a month ago, it will take some time for manager Joe Maddon to know exactly what he has in the 25-year-old, who is in his third big-league season.

"It's unusual for us to break in somebody new like this in the middle of the season," Maddon said. "This is cold turkey right now."

The last pitcher acquired in a midseason trade to start for the Rays was RHP Jae Seo in 2007.

When asked how long he expects it will take before he understands Smyly, Maddon said, "Probably a month, I would say, by the September run. By then I should have a pretty good idea what the warning signs are, what is enough, what does he look like when it's getting a little ratty or is he going to work through this. I think maybe a month should be a good break-in period, 500 miles, 5,000 miles, I don't know."

One that got away

The Rays made their share of mistakes in Monday's 3-2 loss in 10 innings, but Maddon was more upset with the work of home plate umpire C.B. Bucknor during the 10th inning. Maddon was ejected by first base ump Quinn Wolcott after Wolcott ruled A's 3B Josh Donaldson checked his swing on what would have been strike three.

"That's not boarder line, that was egregious and that's what I had a problem with, because I had been patient all night with a lot of stuff," Maddon said of Wolcott's call. "Some of the umpires in this particular crew you have to be patient with. So my patience ran out at that point. That call was inappropriate. I know he's a young umpire, but hopefully he'll learn something from it."

RHP Grant Balfour took the loss after allowing a pair of hits on 0-2 counts and walking two batters in the inning.

Balfour was upset with not getting the call on Donaldson and with a foul pop that fell between 1B Sean Rodriguez and RF Kevin Kiermaier earlier in the at-bat.

"It's tough when you got to get five outs sometimes. That's all I'll say," Balfour said. "We got beat by a good team, and it's tough when you got to get five outs."

He gone

The ejection was Maddon's fifth of the season. It was also the first time the Rays lost after Maddon was tossed.

"Every one has been justified," Maddon said. "I was upset. That was a pretty big moment."

Jake and Box

LHP Jake McGee and RHP Brad Boxberger have pitched a combined 45 innings during the 46 games prior to Tuesday night. The Rays were 30-16 during that run.

They have combined for a 1.40 ERA and an opponents batting average of .144. Together they have walked just nine batters and struck out 73 (44 percent of the 166 batters faced).

Boxberger extended his scoreless streak to 17²/₃ innings Monday when he retired all four batters he faced.

Daily Myers update

RF Wil Myers (right wrist fracture) worked out Tuesday in Port Charlotte. He will work out today at the Trop, then fly to Durham.

Myers is expected to work out with the Triple-A Bulls on Thursday and Friday. Maddon said the plan is to have Myers begin his minor-league rehab assignment during the weekend.

Noteworthy

Monday's loss snapped an eight-game road winning streak. ... The Tigers-Yankees game was on the clubhouse TV on Tuesday and some of the Rays watched former teammate David Price make his debut with the Tigers. "I saw David. It was weird with the orange thing (logo) on the top of his hat, otherwise the colors were very close," Maddon said. ... The Rays will face another member of the 2008 AL championship team Saturday — Cubs RHP Edwin Jackson.

Hellickson is working hard to earn trust

By Roger Mooney, Tribune Staff

OAKLAND, Calif. — Maybe if Jeremy Hellickson didn't walk the first batter he faced in his last start, and maybe if he didn't allow three first-inning runs or a third-inning home run or walk another batter in the fifth, maybe Hellickson would have pitched deeper, at least finished the fifth inning.

Hellickson has yet to do that in any of his first three starts since returning from offseason elbow surgery.

He has a chance this afternoon when he faces the A's in the finale of this three-game series at the O.Co Coliseum.

"First of all I got to throw more strikes," Hellickson said. "Getting ahead and executing better overall. Obviously walking the first batter the last game was never something you want to do. I just couldn't find it that inning after that. I think I settled down pretty well after that, but I think the main thing is get ahead and attack the zone more."

Hellickson hasn't finished six innings since last Aug. 16 against the Blue Jays. In 10 starts since then, he's averaging a little more than four innings an outing. That doesn't include his start in October's ALDS against the Red Sox, when he failed to record an out in the second inning.

"It's not like a lack of confidence in him," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "I just know what's going on now, and we got to get him beyond that. It's almost like he's teetering and you got to get him beyond that one moment, and all of a sudden there's that breakthrough and heads up, he turns back into what he had been a couple of years ago.

"Coming off surgery there's all kinds of do-dads going on mentally. I want him to go deeper in the game, absolutely. Under a different set of circumstances, probably would have by now."

Hellickson said he understands the motives behind Maddon's quick hooks.

"I haven't pitched well. I haven't really given him a reason to leave me out there," Hellickson said. "Obviously I'd like to get a chance to work out of my own jams and go deeper into games. With the bullpen we have and every game is a must-win, there's not really time to wait around. I got to do better early and give him confidence to leave me out there in the game."

Hellickson's elbow was an issue last season as he tried to pitch through the pain caused by loose bodies floating in the joint. Surgery corrected that.

Now Hellickson is dealing with hitters who have been facing major-league pitching since April, while he is only three starts into his season.

Even with a healthy elbow, Hellickson might not be as ready to pitch in the majors as he thinks he is.

"That's a good way to put it," he said. "I'm healthy. I feel strong, but you can't emulate a big-league game in all the rehab starts I did. Getting out there and facing big-league hitters is different. I just got to keep working and get back to my old self here, soon."

Maddon said Hellickson is throwing well. The velocity on his fastball is up and his change-up looks like it normally does. Maddon said he would like to see Hellickson throw his curveball more. It was the curveball that caused the pain in his elbow.

"More than me trusting him, he's got to trust himself," Maddon said. "That's what it comes down to. He's behind, there's no doubt about that. He's been out that long and guys have been playing all year, that really matters. He didn't have that many starts coming into this thing, and relatively soon I would like to believe he'd be getting into the swing of things — or the swing and miss of things."

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Rays stadium: Hillsborough candidates campaign

By Noah Pransky, WTSP

TAMPA, Florida – The Rays' Stadium Saga may continue to drag on through another summer, but if other stadium stalemates are any indication, progress could be just an election away.

The Rays – and many fans – have expressed a desire for a new, centrally-located stadium somewhere in Tampa Bay. But with St. Petersburg owning exclusive negotiating rights with the team through 2027, Hillsborough County's Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) have been limited to broad speculations about a Tampa stadium.

Yet the next few years could prove to be important for the conversation, so 10 News reached out to every Hillsborough BOCC candidate ahead of the August primary election to see where he or she stood on the topic of building the Rays a new stadium.

Write-in candidates were not included.

District 2 (No Primary)

Elizabeth Belcher (D) – Belcher says she is cautious against public handouts for retail developments, such as the money she says was wasted on county's Bass Pro Shops subsidies. But she says she is open to stadium discussions if the project can prove positive return on investment. However, she would like to see any new stadium project ultimately funded by user fees on tickets, concessions, parking, and merchandise.

"The people who are using the stadium should be the ones paying for it," she said. "After all, the county charges taxpayers user fees to use of the county parks" (albeit not the full cost to maintain the parks).

Victor Crist* (R) – In his four years in office so far, Crist has been lukewarm on the idea of a new Rays stadium, saying Hillsborough County's role should be to support Pinellas' efforts and that trying to lure a resource from one Tampa Bay community to another is like "competing against yourself." However, he has shown more support for a stadium if it is built in a blighted area of his district. Or, if the county could swap its seaport to Pinellas County for the Rays.

In 2014, Crist says "Hillsborough County should have a back-up plan in the event St. Petersburg and the Rays are unable to come to a satisfactory agreement" and although he doesn't support any new taxes, he indicated existing revenues, such as a TIF district and brownfield tax credits could help bond stadium construction. He also called on the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council to help break the current stalemate.

District 4

Rick Cochran (R) – In a crowded field, Cochran differentiates himself with an aggressive approach toward keeping the Rays. "If the City of St. Petersburg is not willing to amend the Rays contract language to allow them to look elsewhere within the region, then Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa should have whatever discussions are necessary to ensure the Rays remain in Tampa Bay," he said in an email.

His ideas to finance a stadium include existing tax dollars from the Downtown TIF district and private EB-5 investments, but Cochran says he does not support any additional taxes in Hillsborough County.

Janet Dougherty (R) – A self-proclaimed Rays fan, Dougherty said she wants to keep the team somewhere in Tampa Bay, but did not support spending county tax dollars on a Hillsborough stadium.

"Hillsborough County has critical infrastructure needs that should be funded before a stadium," Dougherty said, adding that Raymond James Stadium upgrades may be necessary as well.

Stacy White (R) – White, a Hillsborough County school board member, did not respond in time for inclusion.

District 5 (Countywide)(No Primary)

Ken Hagan (R) - Hagan will cruise to re-election without any opposition. Which likely means the county's most outspoken cheerleader for a Rays relocation will continue to "flirt" with the team, as he has proudly boasted. Back in 2010, he said he opposed any tax dollars going to a new Rays stadium, but more recently said he could support public subsidies in a deal that "furthers county goals." There are few leaders who have shown more public support for a Tampa stadium than Hagan.

District 7 (Countywide)

Al Higginbotham (R) – The two-term commissioner, now running for a county-wide seat, did not return requests for comment. But he has indicated as important as it is for the region to keep the Rays – it's not Hillsborough County's job. He was one of only two commissioners who voted against inviting the Rays to the table back in 2012, telling 10 News, "the county should respect the terms of the current contract."

Robin Lester (R) – Advocating a regional solution, Lester says public contributions – including bed taxes, new car rental taxes, "reasonable" tax credits, and even a multi-county tax effort – could help make a new stadium happen...as long as the private sector steps up too. She mentioned personal seat licenses (PSL) as a way to put more of the cost burden on the fans who would attend the games. Lester also says "there are no sacred cows" on the topic of saving the Rays and improving mass transit, but all expenditures should be thoroughly vetted.

Tim Schock (R) – A believer that baseball is both viable in – and important to – the region, Schock says Hillsborough County should open up more dialogue with St. Pete, Pinellas, Tampa, and state officials to "ensure the regional perspective is maintained without causing interference in ongoing discussions." He says it's important to recognize new stadiums are often not a cure-all and economic projections are often inaccurate. But Schock also kept the door open for public investment in a new stadium in Hillsborough County.

Don Krise (R) – Did not respond to requests for comment.

Patricia Kemp (D) – Did not respond in time for inclusion.

Mark Nash (D) – Nash says Hillsborough County should have a number of options already ready to present the team the moment talks fall apart with St. Pete/Pinellas. "We must, we should, be prepared to act fast," he said. Nash doesn't want to see another stadium financed 100% by public dollars, but is open to a public referendum on using city/county contributions toward a new baseball facility. He also stressed the importance he believes transit will play in the future success of both the team and a new stadium.

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David Price deals solid Tigers debut

By Andrew Marchand, ESPN.com

NEW YORK -- A few hours before David Price's first pitch as a Detroit Tiger, Derek Jeter walked to Yankee Stadium's home batting cage for some extra BP. The 40-year-old Jeter has seen a lot in his career, so as he spoke with a familiar face he bottom-lined what the Tigers had acquired.

"He is like an old-fashioned power pitcher," Jeter said. "He throws 98 and he doesn't walk you."

On Tuesday night, Price wore a different uniform, but he was the same starter -- a scary mixture of power and precision. He did what the great power pitchers do, almost effortlessly turning a potentially poor start into pretty good one.

Feeling a little "weird" in his new threads, he gave up three runs, two on solo homers, in the first five innings, then went on to pitch until he'd gotten two outs in the ninth. He wasn't flashy, but a final line of three runs on eight hits with 10 strikeouts and no walks is pretty darn good.

"I'm happy it is over and I'm happy we won," Price said after the Tigers took home the victory, won 4-3 on Alex Avila's home run in the 12th. "I finally feel part of the team to contribute tonight. It is always a tough place to pitch. It is always a tough lineup to pitch against."

Price felt a little strange as a Tiger, but he fell back on his "having fun" mantra to ease any awkwardness.

"It was a little weird, absolutely," Price, 28, said. "It probably helped facing a team that I have faced multiple times. It definitely felt weird, wearing the Tigers uniform for the first time on the field. It feels good that it is over."

It really is just beginning for Detroit. It really is still crazy to believe that Tigers president Dave Dombrowski has created such a Frankenstein of a starting five. The fourth starter (Anibal Sanchez) won the AL ERA title in 2013. Rick Porcello, 13-5 with a 3.18 ERA, nearly made the All-Star team. The other two guys go by the names of Scherzer and Verlander. Price may be the best of all of them.

After his good, not great outing against the Yankees, Price's ERA is now 1.83 in his past eight starts. He has struck out 66, while walking 10 in those games. The Yankees actually did a little better against Price than they usually do.

Coming in, the way Price had pitched in the Bronx, they maybe should have stitched "Steinbrenner" on the back of his new Tigers jersey because he had owned the Yankees. In his previous five starts at Yankee Stadium, he went 4-0 with a 1.91 ERA. The Yankees may have nicked Price for a few runs Tuesday, but they are glad they won't see him again unless they meet Detroit in October.

"Same pitcher, different uniform," Brett Gardner said. "I would prefer he went to the National League, but it is nice he went to a team in another division."

For whatever reason, Brian McCann has his way with Price. Normal rules for lefty versus lefty be darned, McCann has gone deep in each of the three games he has faced Price this season. On Tuesday, in the second, McCann turned a 95 mph Price fastball into his 12th home run of the year to tie it at one. Price even noted that McCann has a quarter of his homers against him.

In the third, it was Brendan Ryan and Jacoby Ellsbury combining for a couple of doubles to give the Yankees a 2-1 lead. In the fifth, Martin Prado took Price deep.

Like all the great ones, though, Price is good at controlling the damage. He shut the door in the sixth, seventh and eighth. With two outs in the ninth, he handed the ball to Joba Chamberlain to send the game to extras.

"He did exactly what everyone was hoping he would do," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said of Price. "He pitched deep into the game, into the ninth inning. He gave up three runs against a very good team."

It may only just be August, and the Yankees' overall record may not be great, but these past two nights have had a playoff-like atmosphere. On Monday, the Yankees squeaked by Max Scherzer, 2-1. Next up is Justin Verlander on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the two teams played late into the night until Avila finally hit a solo shot off Matt Daley in the 12th. It ended a game filled with highlights. From Dellin Betances electrifying the crowd by lighting up the scoreboard gun at 100 to strike out Miguel Cabrera to end the eighth, to Chamberlain hearing boos and mistakenly hitting Derek Jeter -- "the worst moment of my life," Chamberlain described -- this game delivered.

Still, one guy subtly stood above them all. The 6-foot-6 Price wasn't his best, but he was still plenty good. That is why the Tigers have to scare everyone in baseball -- and they haven't even started dominating yet.

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