



Near-perfect Archer fires 1-hitter, Rays blank Astros

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

HOUSTON — Chris Archer's Thursday night on the Minute Maid Park mound didn't begin well, a four-pitch walk to leadoff man Jose Altuve that flashed back to the struggles in his previous outing.

But Archer's night couldn't have ended better, celebrating his complete-game one-hitter in the Rays' 1-0 victory over the Astros in a group jump with three other starting pitchers.

"It felt awesome," Archer said. "There's really no better feeling than when you accomplish your goals, and it happens so infrequently. It's exhilarating."

A Rays pitcher hadn't thrown a complete game in nearly a year, since Drew Smyly's gem at Toronto on Aug. 22, 2014, the 154 games in between the longest running streak by an American League team.

But the Rays (60-61) needed Archer's masterful performance for more than a historic significance, coming off back-to-back extra-inning walkoff losses that taxed their bullpen and the news that top lefty reliever Jake McGee needed knee surgery and would miss most of, and potentially all of, the rest of the season.

Manager Kevin Cash praised Archer for responding to the situation with his 98 pitch, 11-strikeout masterpiece.

"It was kind of like an ace knowing what we were faced up against with our bullpen being stretched out the last two nights and he kind of took the game on his shoulders and really delivered," Cash said. "We needed that game."

Archer, coming off a rough last outing Saturday against the Rangers, allowing 11 hits and eight runs (seven earned) while lasting only 5½ innings, said he was well aware.

"I'm human, so I thought about the fact that our bullpen needed to breathe a little bit," he said. "It was either get 130 pitches and go six or seven, or go eight or nine and give everybody a complete blow. Yeah, I thought about it. I didn't let it really affect how I was pitching, I pitched normal, with the same mentality, but I knew that was going to be important."

After the leadoff walk (erased by Rene Rivera catching Altuve trying to steal second), Archer retired 11 straight. That got him to the fifth with a no-hitter, but he allowed a leadoff single to Colby Rasmus, who grounded an 0-and-1 pitch to right. Then Archer retired the final 15 to finish the third complete game of his career, with the Rays bullpen not even stirring, and Cash — who has had a quick hook much of the season — saying, "It was going to be his ball game."

Archer reached another milestone, his sixth strikeout getting him to 200 for the season, joining Scott Kazmir (team-record 239 in 2007), David Price (2011-12) and James Shields (2011-12) as the only Rays to do so.

The Rays got their only run in the fourth, Desmond Jennings singling in Logan Forsythe, who took advantage for the second straight night of a second chance at-bat when his foul ball drifted just into the stands and out of Rasmus' reach in right. He singled on the next pitch, went to second on a Collin McHugh wild pitch and came around on Jennings' two-out, two-strike single.

Add in some excellent pitch-calling by Rivera and dazzling defense all around the field. Then all it took was Jake Odorizzi explaining to Erasmo Ramirez and Nathan Karns what to do when they got to the mound, and Archer's night was complete.

Rays' McGee injured, might be out for season

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

HOUSTON — The depth of the Rays' bullpen will be further tested with top lefty reliever **Jake McGee** sidelined for potentially the rest of the season due to a meniscus tear in his left knee that requires surgery today.

"It (stinks), that's probably the easiest way to put it," All-Star reliever RHP **Brad Boxberger** said. "We lost (RHP **Kevin Jepsen**) earlier (when he was traded to the Twins on July 31), and now we lose McGee. It's definitely going to be a different look in the bullpen for the rest of the year."

Manager **Kevin Cash** said the Rays will continue to make late innings a group effort, with LHP **Xavier Cedeno** and RHPs **Alex Colome**, **Steve Geltz** and **Brandon Gomes** likely to inherit some of McGee's high-leverage duty. LHP **Enny Romero**, who was sent down Tuesday night, was recalled, with McGee going on the disabled list. Romero had returned to Triple-A Durham on Wednesday, and the Rays had him fly back to Houston on Thursday.

"We'll kind of mix and match, kind of as we've done all year long," Cash said, "just with some different names."

Cash also said the absence of McGee won't make Boxberger, who entered Thursday second in the American League with 29 saves, the automatic closer, either. "If we think it's best for 'Box' to come in and get three big outs in the eighth, then we'll do that," he said. And if they do, Cash said, he will pick one from the others to close out the game. "We could see anybody in the seventh, eighth or ninth inning," he said.

McGee, known for his overpowering fastball, felt something give in the knee on the second-to-last delivery of his season-high 33-pitch outing Tuesday against the Astros. The Rays hoped he would need just a few days off, but they sent him back to St. Petersburg for a Thursday morning MRI exam and a visit with team orthopedist Dr. **Koco Eaton**, and the tear was diagnosed.

After today's surgery, the Rays will have a better sense if it's possible for McGee — 1-2, with six saves and a 2.57 ERA — to return before the Oct. 4 end of the regular season. He missed the first month of the season recovering from December elbow surgery. "It's frustrating," Cash said. "Jake is such a big part of our bullpen, part of our team. ... Hopefully we'll see him back."

SMYLY A GO: LHP **Drew Smyly** is hoping tonight's second start after his three-month DL stint for shoulder issues goes better than his first on Sunday, when he allowed five Rangers runs and lasted only four innings.

"I'm healthy, and I feel good, my arm feels good," Smyly said. "I had a bad game. I'm looking forward to Oakland. I'm not thinking about the injury; I'm not thinking about Texas. It's one game. People have bad games. Hopefully I can pitch better. That's what it comes down to. ... And I think with more repetitions and more bullpens and more games, I can only go up."

Smyly's fastball was clocked mostly in the 88-91 mph range on the stadium board, which Cash said is known to be a few mphs slow. But Smyly said velocity isn't as much a concern as command and that getting his curveball under control will be a big plus.

ABOUT WEDNESDAY NIGHT: After Boxberger gave up a one-run lead in the ninth against the Astros, the Rays ended up walkoff losers for the second straight night and MLB-most 10th time overall. Rookie RHP **Matt Andriese** allowed an RBI single to **Carlos Correa** that scored **Colby Rasmus**, who drew a leadoff walk and went to third on **Jose Altuve's** single. ... Cash said he understood the morning-after debate over not walking the hot-hitting Correa but said Thursday he still felt it was the right move not to take away Andriese's margin for error by loading the bases. He did say if Andriese had fallen behind 2-and-0, he would have put Correa on. ... Cash also said it would have been "absolutely ridiculous" to extend Colome into the ninth after he worked a dazzling eighth, striking out Houston' 1-2-3 hitters on 10 pitches. ... Cedenro set a team record with his 15th straight appearance with no walks and no runs.

MISCELLANY: The Rays' 10 walkoff losses are one shy of the team record set in 2002; Wednesday marked the eighth time they've had consecutive walkoff losses, the second time this season (July 3-4 at Yankees). ... The Rays are a majors-worst 2-10 in extra innings and have lost a team-record-tying eight straight in extras, the longest such streak in the majors since the Mariners lost eight in 2013. ... The Rays' 22-52 record in Oakland is their worst in any AL road city.

Archer breezes through one-hit shutout as Rays earn split at Houston

By Roger Mooney, Tampa Tribune

HOUSTON -- Chris Archer took a selfie in Cincinnati with sisters Haley and Kaitlin, who he met at the All-Star Game, and promised them a good outing when he pitched in their town.

That came Thursday, and Archer delivered one of the best of his career, a one-hit shutout to pace the Tampa Bay Rays to a 1-0 victory against the Houston Astros, the team managed by A.J. Hinch, who happens to be Haley's and Kaitlin's father.

"I'd like to have them in the stands or at least watching every game I throw from here on out, because the outcome's good when they're watching," Archer said.

It was the third complete-game shutout of Archer's career, his first since 2013. It was also the first complete game by a Rays pitcher since Aug. 22, 2014 when Drew Smyly beat the Blue Jays 8-0 in Toronto.

Archer's gem ended a stretch of 154 games by the Rays without a complete game, the longest in the American League.

Archer walked Jose Altuve to start the first inning, allowed a leadoff single to Colby Rasmus to start the fifth inning and otherwise breezed through the game. He retired 11 straight batters after Altuve's walk and the final 15 after the single by Rasmus.

Archer threw 98 pitches and struck out 11, a total that pushed him over the 200-strikeout plateau for the first time in his young career.

"In the zone. In the zone," Nathan Karns yelled in the clubhouse afterwards. "That's cruising."

The lone run came in the fourth inning when Logan Forsythe reached on a one-out single against Astros starter Collin McHugh, moved to second on a wild pitch and scored on a single by Desmond Jennings.

Archer gave the Rays just what they needed – a night off for the bullpen that picked up 10 innings during the previous two games.

"It was like an ace knowing what we were up against with our bullpen being stretched out the last two nights, took the game on his shoulders and really delivered," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "We needed that game."

Archer said he knew the bullpen could use a night off, but that didn't change the way he approached the start. What enabled him to go the distance was his changeup that kept the Astros hitters from sitting on his fastball and slider. That proved big in the early going when Archer said his fastball was not as sharp. The changeup and slider got him through the first few innings before his fastball caught up.

"It was one of those days, man, you know," Archer said. "The mentality is the same, but I knew that all three pitches were working and I wasn't going to fight anything (catcher) Rene (Rivera) called, and I was just going to do it. I was going to execute."

Archer had help from his defense and he credited them afterwards, citing the ball Kevin Kiermaier ran down in deep center field and the line drive Forsyth ran down before it could get out of the infield, the grounder James Loney smothered at first base, and the slow roller by Altuve with two outs in the ninth that Evan Longoria barehanded and threw to first for the final out.

"This wasn't about me," Archer said. "This was a team effort."

And he credited Rivera for calling a good game and helping him get those borderline strikes.

"Before every game I tell the catchers, 'Hey, good fingers tonight.' It's kind of a joke," Archer said, "but at the same time it's very important that they call a good game."

Archer joined Scott Kazmir, James Shields (twice) and David Price (twice) as the only pitchers in team history to strike out 200 batters in a season.

"That's elite company," Archer said.

Kazmir holds the team record with 239 in 2007.

Archer said there really wasn't a moment during the game that he knew he was going to pitch a complete game. That's his goal every time and he thinks that way during most games, whether he's retiring the batters in order or whether he's allowed a few runs.

"Most of the time it doesn't work out," Archer said, "but you set your standards as high as you possibly can, and if you come up short you still have an incredible game."

On Thursday, with the Hinch sisters watching, Archer didn't come up short.

Rays notes: McGee to undergo knee surgery, likely out for season

By Roger Mooney, Tampa Tribune

HOUSTON — Tampa Bay Rays left-hander Jake McGee will have arthroscopic surgery today to repair a tear in the meniscus in his left knee. He is expected to miss six to eight weeks, though the team will learn more about the timetable when the extent of the tear is determined.

If the original prognosis holds, McGee likely will miss the remainder of the regular season, which ends Oct. 4.

"For it to be surgery-related is a devastating blow to us," right-hander Brad Boxberger said.

McGee was injured in the ninth inning Tuesday while throwing the 32nd pitch of his 33-pitch, 12²/₃-inning outing. He told trainers he felt something wrong in his knee while pushing off the rubber. McGee flew to St. Petersburg on Wednesday and was examined Thursday by team physician Koco Eaton. An MRI revealed the tear.

"We were kind of hopeful this was going to be a week, take some time, let it rest," manager Kevin Cash said. "But he went and saw the doctor, and he is going to have the procedure done and we'll see where he's at."

McGee began the season on the disabled list after offseason elbow surgery.

Serving mainly as the set-up man for Boxberger, McGee was 1-2 with six saves and a 2.57 ERA in 43 games. He had a streak of 21 straight scoreless appearances snapped July 27 when he allowed a run against the Tigers. McGee threw what was at the time a season-high 31 pitches. He allowed seven earned runs in 11 ¹/₃ innings over his next 11 appearances. He allowed a run on three hits in the eighth inning Tuesday as the Astros rallied to tie the score at 2, and he set a season high with those 33 pitches.

The Rays recalled left-hander Enny Romero to take McGee's spot in the bullpen. Romero, who was optioned back to Durham on Wednesday when the Rays recalled right-hander Matt Andirese, was summoned back to Houston on Thursday.

Cash said it will be a group effort to replace McGee's work in the eighth and sometimes ninth inning.

Lefty Xavier Cedeno and right-handers Steve Geltz, Brandon Gomes and Alex Colome will all get chances.

"We'll kind of mix and match, kind of as we've done all year long, just with different names," Cash said.

Cash said he will still use Boxberger in the eighth if the matchup warrants that move, meaning any of those five relievers could work the ninth.

"We could see anybody in the seventh, eighth or ninth inning," Cash said.

Even Colome?

Yes, Cash said, even Colome, who had an impressive 10-pitch outing Wednesday in the eighth inning when he struck out the top of the Astros order.

"You're not going to see a better performance against the 1-2-3 of that lineup," Cash said.

Despite the near-perfect outing — Colome did throw one ball — Cash said he did not entertain thoughts of sending Colome back out for the ninth.

"That would be absolutely ridiculous," Cash said. "He had his one inning. We just put him in a role that he's never been in and he was outstanding."

But Colome could be pitching in a ninth inning soon, especially if he continues to pitch like he has recently.

"Feel really comfortable," Colome said. "I feel, like, really good. I only need the chance to pitch. I don't care what situation. I need the chance to pitch, and I know I can do my job."

Colome throws a high-90s fastball and a curveball that Gomes called a "wipeout pitch."

Having reduced his selection to those two pitches, Colome appears to be making a smooth transition to the bullpen.

"Not to get too far ahead of ourselves, but you look at a lot of starters, young starters that kind of go to the bullpen and maybe they simplify some things," Cash said. "Hopefully that's what he's doing, because the weapons are there. I have no idea what the future entails for him, starter or reliever, but right now he's in our bullpen and he seems to be really taking to it."

Smyly ready

LHP Drew Smyly expects to pitch better tonight against the A's than he did Sunday, when he allowed five runs in four innings at Texas during his return from a shoulder injury.

"I'm healthy and I feel good, my arm feels good," Smyly said. "I had a bad game. I'm looking forward to Oakland. I'm not thinking about the injury, I'm not thinking about Texas. It's one game. People have bad games. Hopefully I can pitch better. That's what it comes down to, just pitching better. And I think with more repetitions and more bullpens and more games, I can only go up."

Smyly's fastball velocity against the Rangers was in the high 80s, which he said is normal for him.

"That's not going to make or break anything," he said.

Noteworthy

Rays pitchers struck out 19 batters and walked two on Wednesday. They are the fifth team since 1914 to do that and lose. ... The Rays are a major league-worst 2-10 in extra-inning games, having lost their past eight, tying the club mark set over the 1998-99 seasons. ... On Wednesday, CF Brandon Guyer became only the fourth player this season with three hits off Houston LHP Dallas Keuchel.

True ace: Archer answers call and then some

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

HOUSTON -- **Chris Archer** played the role of No. 1 to the hilt Thursday night, crossing off all the items on a staff ace's wish list in the Rays' **1-0 win** over the Astros.

Archer pitched a shutout, he earned his team a split of the four-game series against a tough opponent, he saved the bullpen and he rebounded from a tough outing.

Pretty nice work for nine innings.

Archer's line read like a pitcher's dream: No runs on one hit and a walk with 11 strikeouts, and all on just 98 pitches. He became the fifth pitcher in the Wild Card era to strike out 11 or more on fewer than 100 pitches during a nine-inning complete game.

"I'm human," Archer said. "So I thought about the fact that our bullpen needed to breathe a little bit. It was either get 130 pitches and go six or seven or go eight or nine and give everybody a complete blow. But yeah, I thought about it."

"I didn't really let it affect how I was pitching. I pitched normal with the same mentality, but I knew that was going to be important."

Archer's previous start came Saturday in Texas, and the Rangers roughed him up to the tune of eight runs (seven earned) on 11 hits in 5 1/3 innings.

"You guys always ask which is the best of Arch," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "I can't say that that was the best, but that's got to be right up there at the top, simply because it was kind of like an ace knowing what we were faced with. Our bullpen being stretched out the past couple of nights. He kind of took the game on his shoulders and delivered.

"He was incredibly sharp. For him personally to bounce back from the Texas start the way he did shows a lot about him."

Archer's 11 strikeouts pushed him past the 200 milestone on the season (205 overall) to join **Scott Kazmir**, **David Price** and **James Shields** as the only pitchers in Rays franchise history to record 200 strikeouts in a season.

After walking **Jose Altuve** on four pitches to start the first inning, Archer didn't allow negative thoughts to creep into his mind, but he did go over a few "reminders." Those reminders led to strikeouts of **Marwin Gonzalez** and **Carlos Correa** before Altuve got thrown out attempting to steal second for the third out. He then retired the next nine hitters he faced before **Colby Rasmus** broke the spell with a single to right to lead off the fifth.

Looking unflappable, Archer retired the final 15 batters he faced to finish off his first shutout since July 27, 2013, against the Yankees in New York.

Archer's third career shutout snapped a string of 154 games without a shutout by the Rays dating back to **Drew Smyly's** 8-0 masterpiece against the Blue Jays on Aug. 22, 2014. Typical of Archer, he deferred credit for his feat, first giving some love to catcher **Rene Rivera** for his "unreal" pitch calling.

"Before every game I tell the catcher, 'Good finger tonight,' because -- it's kind of a joke -- but at the same time it's very important they call a good game," Archer said. "And we sat beside each other all three games leading up to tonight. And we talked about how to use my stuff against those guys. I think that really helped. Seeing the guys for three games and then three games prior to the All-Star break helped me to prepare."

Archer then paid homage to the Rays' defense, rattling off all the plays that were made behind him right up until the end when **Evan Longoria** charged Altuve's swinging bunt and threw out the Astros' pesky leadoff man to end the game.

"To cap the night off, the play Longo made, to put an exclamation point on it," Archer said. "This wasn't just me. It was a team effort, I just happened to be the one on the mound tonight."

And that was a good thing, because Archer did exactly what aces do when their team needs a big game.

Archer 1-hits Astros, strikes out 11

By Bill Chastain and Brian McTaggart, MLB.com

HOUSTON -- **Chris Archer** threw four consecutive balls to start his outing on Thursday night, walking leadoff hitter **Jose Altuve**. The Rays' ace was nearly untouchable after that, sending down 26 of the final 27 batters while throwing a dazzling one-hit shutout to beat the Astros, 1-0, at Minute Maid Park.

Archer struck out 11 batters en route to throwing his third career shutout, his first in more than two years. He faced one batter over the minimum and threw the Rays' first complete game in nearly a year (Aug. 22, 2014), needing 98 pitches. Archer also became the fifth pitcher in the Wild Card era to strike out 11 or more batters on fewer than 100 pitches in a nine-inning complete game.

"They're an aggressive team also," Archer said. "Right out of the gate I was mixing my pitches a little bit better. I had my changeup going. And that was a difference-maker."

The Astros, who had posted walk-off wins the previous two nights, squandered a chance to add to their lead in the American League West over the second-place Angels and third-place Rangers, who both lost. Houston has a 2 1/2-game lead over Los Angeles and a four-game lead over Texas.

"That lineup over there is no joke," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "They have the ability to hit the ball out of the ballpark throughout that lineup. And Arch just navigated his way through it."

Archer didn't allow a baserunner after the walk to Altuve until **Colby Rasmus** led off the fifth with the Astros' lone hit. It was the third time this year the Astros have been held to one hit.

"He's the story of the game," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "He was in complete control. He's the real deal. He's got every pitch and he had it tonight. I don't know if that was his best because I'm not around him on a day to day basis, but it's the best we've seen and certainly he was in total command. His first four pitches were his worst four pitches, and after that he was very dominant."

Astros starter **Collin McHugh** pitched well in defeat, allowing one run, five hits and two walks in seven innings. He has allowed three earned runs or fewer in 11 of his last 12 outings, going 7-4 with a 2.84 ERA in that span.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

McHugh on the spot defensively: McHugh pitched well in defeat, and he made a pair of eye-popping defensive plays in the fourth. He reached behind his back to snag a **James Loney** grounder to start the fourth, and he ended the inning by tripping while he was throwing a pitch, a soft toss that **Kevin Kiermaier** tapped back to the mound for the third out.

Jennings back on track: **Desmond Jennings** went 6-for-13 when he first returned from the 60-day disabled list (left knee bursitis), but carried an 0-for-7 mark since then entering Thursday night's game. Jennings snapped that skid with singles in his first two at-bats. The second one came in the fourth and drove in **Logan Forsythe** to give the Rays a 1-0 lead.

QUOTABLE

"It feels good. We played some good baseball games here. To split the series, that team is a very talented team. We can say coulda, shoulda, woulda all day long. We're happy with the way we played here. We just have to carry it into Oakland." -- *Cash, on earning the series split with the Astros*

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The Rays won their third 1-0 game this season. The win marked their 69th game this season (35-34) that has been decided by two runs or fewer. Fourteen of their last 19 games have been decided by one or two runs.

WHAT'S NEXT

Rays: **Drew Smyly** (0-2, 4.35 ERA) will make his fifth start of the season and second since returning from the 60-day disabled list (torn left labrum) on Friday against the A's at 10:05 p.m. ET. He came through his first outing healthy but had some command issues, mostly with his offspeed stuff. When Smyly is in charge, he commands the strike zone and changes speeds well.

Astros: Right-hander **Mike Fiers** (5-9, 3.87 ERA) will make his third start with Houston since coming over in a trade with the Brewers when the Astros open a three-game series against the Dodgers at 7:10 p.m. CT on Friday at Minute Maid Park. He's posted a 0.75 ERA over 12 innings in two starts with the Astros.

McGee has torn meniscus, out 6-8 weeks

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

HOUSTON -- Bad news hit the Rays' bullpen on Thursday. Reliever **Jake McGee** will miss 6-8 weeks after being diagnosed with a torn meniscus in his left knee, putting his return this season in question.

"It's frustrating," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "Jake is such a big part of our bullpen, part of our team. We were kind of hopeful this was going to be more of a week, take some time, let it rest. But he went and saw the doctor and he's going to have the procedure done and have the rehab and hopefully we'll see him back."

McGee, who was placed on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to Wednesday, will undergo arthroscopic surgery on Friday. Tampa Bay called up lefty Enny Romero from Triple-A Durham in his place.

McGee served as the team's closer in 2014, and he's largely been used as the setup man for **Brad Boxberger** this season. The Rays must now deal with filling the hole left by McGee.

"I think we've got some guys who are throwing the ball really well in the bullpen right now," Cash said. "Obviously, Alex [Colome] is. [Xavier] Cedeno continues to do that. And **Brandon Gomes**, his last three or four outings have been really good. We'll kind of mix and match, kind of like we've done all year long. Just some different names."

Cash was asked if McGee's absence would bring a different game plan for how he uses Boxberger.

"Not really, I don't think," Cash said. "If we think it's best for Box to come in and get three big outs in the eighth, then we'll do that. So, no, I don't think it's any different going forward."

Colome, who **struck out the side** on 10 pitches in the eighth inning of Wednesday night's **3-2 loss**, seems to be the guy the Rays are most excited about right now. When pressed if Colome could see action in the ninth inning, Cash said: "We could see anybody in the seventh, eighth or ninth innings."

Colome began the season in the rotation and made 13 starts before moving to the bullpen. Though he had to make some adjustments to the new arrangement, the Dominican right-hander has done particularly well since the All-Star break.

"You look at a lot of young starters who go to the bullpen and maybe they simplify some things," Cash said. "Hopefully that's what he's doing, because the weapons are there. I have no idea what the future entails for him -- starter or reliever. But right now he's in our bullpen and really seems to be taking to it."

Cash noted that there are plenty of stories about starters who become relievers and have success. Colome has the physical tools to make that possibility a reality.

"You're talking about a power fastball and what he's shown lately, a power slider," Cash said. "Another thing he does really well, and he did this as a starter, he holds runners really well. He's so quick with his delivery. And that's a big, big asset to have when you're pitching in tight ballgames."

McGee first felt the injury toward the end of his 33-pitch outing on Tuesday in Houston. In 36 appearances for the Rays this season, he has a 2.57 ERA and a 0.91 WHIP.

McGee will become the fourth Rays player to undergo surgery during the season, joining outfielder **Desmond Jennings**, left-hander **Jeff Beliveau** and right-hander **Alex Cobb**.

Romero, meanwhile, has made six appearances for the big league club this season, allowing nine earned runs in 11 1/3 innings. This will be his fifth tour of duty with the Rays this season.

Often good, Archer shows his greatness

By Richard Justice, MLB.com

HOUSTON -- There was a point in the fourth or fifth inning on Thursday when there was little doubt where this one was headed. Rays ace **Chris Archer** wasn't just good. He has been good plenty of times. He's usually good. That's why he's one of those guys that prompts baseball fans to stop channel surfing and check him out.

On this night, Archer was better than good during the Rays' **1-0 win** against the Astros. That's why we love this stuff. Show up at the park and see something extraordinary. You never know.

Perhaps Archer was driven by his previous start, when he allowed seven earned runs against the Rangers. Perhaps he understood that his team's tired bullpen needed a day off.

Anyway, Archer had one of those nights in which one of baseball's best performed at the highest level. Someday, he may toss a perfect game or a no-hitter. Archer's stuff is that good. His makeup is, too.

Until that happens, this one will do. The 26-year-old right-hander controlled the Astros from start to finish in tossing a beauty of a one-hit shutout.

Archer brought his entire catalogue to the ballpark. He had the wipeout slider that former teammate **David Price** calls the best pitch in baseball. Archer got seven of his 11 strikeouts on that slider and the other four on fastballs, two clocked at 97 mph, two at 96.

Archer had his changeup going, too. Early in the game when he fought his fastball command, he stuck with that changeup and that slider. Once Archer got control of the fastball, it was over, and he needed just 98 pitches to finish the deal. He became the fifth pitcher in the Wild Card era to strike out 11 or more in fewer than 100 pitches during a nine-inning complete game.

"It was just one of those days," Archer said. "I knew that all three pitches were working, and I wasn't going to fight anything [catcher] Rene [Rivera] called. I was just going to execute."

Archer was so good that Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash never came close to having someone up in the bullpen. Archer's teammates scored a run for him in the fourth inning, and that was that. Houston never had a runner in scoring position.

"We needed a really good performance, and we got a great one," Cash said. "There is definitely a vibe that we get and an energy when Arch is on the mound for us."

Archer walked **Jose Altuve** on four pitches to open the first. Altuve was thrown out trying to advance to second on a ball in the dirt. Here's what happened after that walk. Archer retired 11 Astros in a row, allowed a **Colby Rasmus** single in the fifth, then got 15 in a row to finish the game.

"The funny thing about Chris is that this is not some outlier-type of performance," Rays pitching coach Jim Hickey said. "He is capable of things like this every single time out. As he gets that better fastball command, it's just going to be boring."

The Rays did their usual thing on defense. **Kevin Kiermaier** made a nice leaping catch in center field on an **Evan Gattis** fly ball that came with Rasmus on first. Another center fielder might not have caught the ball, and if it's not caught, it probably changes the outcome.

Second baseman **Logan Forsythe** and third baseman **Evan Longoria** also made nice plays, and afterward, Archer offered a tip of the hat to his catcher, Rivera.

Mostly, though, this was Archer showing the world that he's one of the special performers in this game.

"He's good, man," Rasmus said. "When he's on, he's tough. He was throwing everything for strikes where he wanted it. Three good pitches, somebody like that, when he's on, he's tough to beat."

Before the game, Archer sent an autographed copy of Baseball America to Astros manager A.J. Hinch. That was a gift to Hinch's daughters, Haley and Kaitlin, who took a selfie with Archer at the All-Star Game.

Afterward, Archer said he appreciated their support. Meanwhile, their dad appreciated how good Archer is.

"He was in complete control," Hinch said. "He's the real deal. He's got every pitch and he had it tonight."

Robertson among 10 top prospect performers Thursday

By Alex M. Smith, MLB.com

Daniel Robertson is getting comfortable, which is great news for Double-A Montgomery.

The Rays' No. 5 prospect (No. 89 overall) had a career-high four hits in Thursday's 17-4 blowout win over Tennessee. In the lineup as the designated hitter, Robertson finished 4-for-6 with two doubles, a two-run homer and four RBIs.

He's hit in eight straight games, and has three multi-hit contests since returning from a broken hamate bone in his left hand on Aug. 4.

"Once I was up here, it took me a couple more games to settle in," Robertson told MiLB.com. "All in all, it's baseball. I'm just trying to have fun. When you're away from the game for two months, it puts thing into perspective."

Montgomery also got a strong performance from starter -- and **No. 6 prospect** -- Taylor Guerrieri.

The 6-foot-3 right-hander allowed one run on three hits in five innings of work and struck out three. He's 2-1 with a 2.35 ERA in five starts since getting a promotion from Class A Advanced Charlotte in late July.

The rest of the 10 best performances from top Minor Leaguers

- **D-backs No. 1 prospect (No. 11 overall)** Dansby Swanson went yard for the first time in his pro career on Thursday night. The top overall pick in this June's Draft swatted a three-run shot in the eighth inning of Class A Short Season Hillsboro's 5-3 loss to Boise. He finished the night 1-for-4, bumping his batting average up to .172 after seven games with the Hops. His three RBIs **were a new career-high for the 21-year-old shortstop**, who now has two doubles, a triple, a homer and eight RBIs for Hillsboro.

- Dodgers farmhand Alex Santana went off for Rookie Level Ogden, going 4-for-5 with a triple, two homers and a career-high six RBIs in the Raptors' 13-8 win over Helena. A second-round pick by the Dodgers in 2011, Santana spent most of this season with Class A Great Lakes -- where he hit .238/.282/.324 with four homers -- before getting sent to Ogden on Aug. 9. His previous career-high was four RBIs, which he had accomplished twice.

- **Giants No. 15 prospect** Andrew Suarez made a splash in his debut for Class A Advanced San Jose. The southpaw allowed just one hit while striking out five in four shutout innings, continuing a strong season that's featured just four earned runs in 28 1/3 total innings. San Francisco drafted Suarez No. 61 overall this summer after an excellent career at the University of Miami. The former Hurricane received third-team All-ACC honors this spring after posting a 9-2 record in 15 starts.

- **Mariners No. 7 prospect** Tyler O'Neill moved into sole possession of third place in the Minor League home run race. The designated hitter cracked his 28th homer of the season for Class A Advanced Bakersfield, vaulting him past Double-A Chattanooga's Adam Brett Walker. He's only one behind Double-A Corpus Christi's A.J. Reed for second and two behind the Minor's overall leader - - Triple-A Louisville's Adam Duvall. O'Neill has been on a tear over the past month, ripping 12 dingers since returning from the Pan-Am Games on July 23.

- **Nationals No. 1 prospect (No. 3 overall)** Lucas Giolito picked up his second win for Double-A Harrisburg, collecting five strikeouts against five hits, three walks and one earned run in five innings of work. The 6-foot-6 right-hander moved to 2-1 with 3.77 ERA in five starts for the Senators. Giolito missed the first month of the season while in extended Spring Training to limit his innings this year and then recorded a 3-5 record with a 2.71 ERA in 13 appearances for Class A Advanced Potomac before getting a promotion to Double-A in late July.

- Orioles farmhand Mikey O'Brien was dominant for Class A Advanced Frederick on Thursday night, tossing a seven-inning no-hitter as the Keys took down Lynchburg, 2-0. The 5-foot-11 right-hander struck out nine batters while allowing just one walk as he breezed through seven frames. **He has not surrendered an earned run in his past three starts**, a total of 19 1/3 innings. Thursday's performance puts him at 3-4 with 1.76 ERA in 10 appearances for Frederick. O'Brien was a ninth-round Draft pick by the Yankees out of high school in 2008 and spent time in several farm systems -- most recently Tampa Bay this season -- before the O's signed him on May 31.

- **Rockies No. 1 prospect (No. 10 overall)** Brendan Rodgers recorded his third multi-hit game in his past four contests for Rookie Level Grand Junction, finishing 3-for-5 with a triple and two RBIs. Drafted No. 3 overall this June, the shortstop is hitting .259 with three doubles, two triples, two homers and 15 RBIs in 30 games for the Rockies. Thursday snapped an eight-game streak without an RBI for the 19-year-old.

- **Rockies No. 28 prospect** Helmi Rodriguez couldn't quite make history for Class A Asheville in a 3-1 win on Thursday night. The lefty hurler had Rome on the ropes with a no-hitter through 8 1/3 innings, but gave up a double to Luke Dykstra. Yoely Bello relieved Rodriguez and allowed a triple to Ryan Stephens as the Braves tied the game, 1-1. While he fell a bit short of nine no-hit innings, Rodriguez still turned in perhaps his best performance of the season. The 22-year-old struck out

four while allowing four walks in the longest outing of his career. The Venezuelan did not earn a decision on Thursday so his record remains 8-7. However, **he cut his ERA from 3.86 to 3.68 through 24 starts** for the Tourists.

Smyly, Bassitt to face off in series opener

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

The Rays and A's begin a three-game series on Friday night at the Coliseum, with Oakland right-hander Chris Bassitt starting opposite Tampa Bay left-hander Drew Smyly. The teams split a four-game series in May in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Since Bassitt was recalled from Triple-A Nashville on July 25, he has the seventh-best ERA (2.34) in the American League. During that span, though, Bassitt has only picked up one win in five starts. The A's will look to give him some more run support to try and help him pick up another victory.

Smyly is coming off a poor outing against the Rangers in Arlington on Sunday, when he returned from the 60-day disabled list (torn labrum) and yielded five earned runs in four innings in a loss. He has made four starts for the Rays this season.

"I mean, I'm healthy and I feel good," Smyly said. "My arm feels good. I had a bad game. I mean, I'm looking forward to Oakland. I'm not thinking about the injury. I'm not thinking about Texas. It's one game. People have bad games. Hopefully I can pitch better.

"The thing is just more commanding the strike zone. Throwing quality strikes. I got behind a few hitters. I put my back up against the wall pretty much every inning with guys getting on base. I just have to pitch better."

Things to know about this game:

- Bassitt has tossed at least six innings and allowed six hits or fewer in each of his past five starts.
- Smyly hasn't thrown 100 or more pitches in any of his four starts this year, but his pitch total has increased every start.
- The Rays have not won a season series against the A's since 2010. Oakland is 9-4 in its past 13 games against Tampa Bay.

Rays' Chris Archer 1-hits Astros after allowing 11 hits, 8 runs in last start

By Kristie Rieken, The Associated Press

HOUSTON -- Tampa Bay's Chris Archer gained a pair of young fans at this year's All-Star Game and gave them a shout-out after pitching a one-hitter in a 1-0 win over their father's team on Thursday night.

"I was motivated by Haley and Kaitlin, A.J. Hinch's two daughters, who ever since we took a selfie together at the All-Star Game, they've adored me," Archer said before flashing a huge grin. "So I wanted to -- I was in their hometown and I wanted to perform well for two of my biggest fans."

Archer, allowed only a fifth-inning single by Colby Rasmus, and struck out 11 to lead the Tampa Bay Rays over the Houston Astros.

Anthony Rizzo is a rarity these days: a power hitter who doesn't strike out once or more a game.

Hinch had talked about the affinity his daughters had for Archer all week and said they weren't allowed to root for him against the Astros. Archer, who sent over signed copies of the Baseball America he's on the cover of to the girls, laughed when told of Hinch's comments.

"I'd like to have them ... at least watching every game I throw from here on out because the outcome is good when they're watching," Archer said.

It was Archer's third career shutout and second against the Astros, having also blanked them in 2013. Archer's complete game ends a streak of 154 games without one for the Rays, which was the longest span in the AL. Their last one came when Drew Smyly did it against the Blue Jays on August 22, 2014.

Archer (11-9) retired the final 15 batters, fanning five. Rasmus led off the fifth with a groundball single and was the last runner for the AL West leaders.

"His pitches were low, he was extremely efficient," manager Kevin Cash said. "He was efficient even with the high strikeouts. It was going to be his ballgame."

Archer walked Jose Altuve on four pitches to begin the first. Later, Altuve tried to advance on a pitch in the dirt and was thrown out. That was Archer's only walk.

"He was in complete control," Hinch said. "He's the real deal. He's got every pitch and he had it tonight. I don't know if that was his best because I'm not around him on a day-to-day basis. But it's the best we've seen and certainly he was in total command. His first four pitches were his worst four pitches. After that, he was very dominant."

In his previous start, Archer allowed 11 hits and eight runs in 5 1/3 innings of a 12-4 loss to Texas. Cash thinks he had a little something extra on Thursday because of that start.

"He takes a lot of pride in every five days going out there and giving us an opportunity to win, and by knowing what he says and what he's about, he was definitely motivated simply because he expects a lot of himself to help this team," Cash said.

Desmond Jennings got two hits for Tampa Bay and drove in the lone run with a single in the fourth off Collin McHugh (13-7).

McHugh yielded five hits in seven innings of his second straight loss.

This was the ninth start this year Archer hadn't allowed a run, which tops the AL.

Archer reached the 200-strikeout mark for the first time in his career when he fanned Altuve in the fourth. Archer ended the night with 205 -- he joined Scott Kazmir, David Price and James Shields as the only pitchers in franchise history with 200 Ks in the a season.

"There's really no better feeling than when you accomplish your goals and it happens so infrequently that it's very exhilarating," Archer said.

McHugh escaped a bases-loaded jam in the third. Logan Forsythe singled with one out in the fourth and moved up on a wild pitch with two outs. The Rays took a 1-0 lead on the single to center field by Jennings.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Rays: Reliever Jake McGee will have surgery on his left knee Friday and could miss the rest of the season. The Rays said McGee is expected to miss from six to eight weeks. The regular season ends on Oct. 4. McGee was injured on Tuesday night and an MRI on Thursday that revealed a meniscus tear in his knee.

Astros: George Springer (broken right wrist) could take batting practice early next week. There isn't a timetable for the return of the outfielder, who has been out since July 1.

UP NEXT

Rays: LHP Smyly opposes Oakland's Chris Bassitt when the Rays open a three-game series with the Athletics. It will be Smyly's second start since returning from a more than three-month stint on the disabled list because of a torn labrum in his shoulder. He allowed seven hits and five runs in just four innings in his last start, a 5-3 loss to Texas.

Astros: Mike Fiers will face Los Angeles LHP Brett Anderson when the Astros open a three-game interleague series with the Dodgers. It will be the third start for Fiers since a trade from Milwaukee.