



Rays stage long-overdue 9th-inning rally to take down A's 5-4

By Roger Mooney, Tampa Tribune

OAKLAND, Calif. –The Tampa Bay Rays drew a line in the sand Saturday night in Oakland. They may have lost 49 straight times this season when trailing after eight innings. But a 50th straight loss? No way.

And so there they were in the ninth inning, putting together a rally that enabled them to beat the Oakland A's 5-4 on Star Wars Night at O.co Coliseum.

It has to be said: The Force was finally with them.

"Had to happen sooner or later I guess," Logan Forsythe said.

Forsythe and Asdrubal Cabrera followed a one-out walk to Daniel Nava in the final inning with back-to-back doubles. Cabrera's hit drove in the tying and go-ahead runs.

Alex Colome, who pitched a perfect eighth inning, returned to pitch a perfect ninth to nail down the victory.

The Rays moved a game above .500 for the season with their third straight win and picked up another game in the Wild Card standings. They are now 1 1/2 games out of the second of two Wild Card spots.

A win today and they will complete this 10-game road trip at 5-5. Not bad, since it began 0-3 after being swept at Texas on the first leg of the three-city trip.

Manager Kevin Cash called it a "big win," which he's been saying lately after all their wins.

"At this point of the season they're all big," he said.

What made Saturday's win big, besides the first ninth rally of the year, was the power the Rays displayed against Oakland starter Sonny Gray, who allowed three home runs for the first time in his career, and the way Colome handled getting the last six outs of the game.

Erasmus Ramirez went seven innings and allowed four runs, three of them during a six-pitch sequence in the sixth inning that turned a 2-1 lead into a 4-2 deficit.

Colome came on for the eighth with the Rays down a run. When the Rays went ahead, Colome went back out for the bottom of the ninth.

On Wednesday, Colome struck out the side in the eighth inning in Houston. Brad Boxberger had the ninth and blew the save.

Cash, when asked if he entertained the thought of sending Colome back out for the ninth that night, said no because Colome is a converted starter who is not that used to working in relief and not accustomed to pitching in high-leverage situations.

But Boxberger was not available Saturday having thrown 33 pitches in Friday's game.

So, Colome was the man.

"He's in a good spot. We're going to roll with him here now," Cash said. "He's going to get some big outs for us going forward."

Not that there is a closer controversy in Tampa Bay. Cash said Boxberger hasn't been demoted. But Cash also said he won't hesitate to use Boxberger in eighth inning just as he had when Jake McGee was healthy. In those games, Colome will be a candidate to work the ninth.

"He's feeling good about himself as he should be," Cash said. "We want to kind of bottle that and maintain that going forward."

Forsythe, John Jaso and Cabrera homered for the Rays. Forsythe and Jaso put the Rays on top with their homers. Cabrera's came in the seventh and trimmed the A's lead to one run.

The walk by Nava, who entered the game in the sixth inning when James Loney was ejected for dropping his helmet on home plate after looking at a called third strike, drew a one-out walk against Pat Venditte.

Forsythe doubled to put runners on second and third.

Drew Pomeranz replaced Venditte and allowed the game-winning double to Cabrera that scored pinch-runner Tim Beckham and Forsythe and finally gave the Rays a ninth-inning comeback victory.

They had been 0-49 when trailing after eight.

“All right,” Cash said. “Good. Now we’re one and 49, sweet.”

And after a week of seeing other teams mount ninth inning comebacks or try to at least, Forsythe said it was nice to finally turn the tables.

“I think it was something that we need,” Forsythe said. “I think confidence-wise it boosts us up a little bit. It comes at a good time, too, showing that we can come back and win in the ninth, that’s something we need to continue in this race.”

Loney has harsh words for umpire after being ejected

By Roger Mooney, Tampa Tribune

OAKLAND, Calif. – James Loney did not hide his feelings about home plate umpire Paul Nauert, who tossed the Tampa Bay Rays first baseman in the sixth Saturday when Loney dropped his helmet on home plate after looking at a called third strike to end the inning.

Loney, who dropped his bat first, had to be restrained by Rays manager Kevin Cash, third base coach Charlie Montoyo and first base coach Rocco Baldelli before he eventually left the field in a game the Rays won 5-4 with their first ninth inning rally of the season.

“I thought it was a ball when I took it, but I was still like, ‘I struck out.’ You’re kind of mad,” Loney said. “But if I’m not saying anything to you, just relax. You’re an umpire. Nobody is coming to watch you.”

The count was full when Loney took the called third strike. He thought it was a borderline strike at the time. After looking at the pitch on video, Loney said it was an even worse call.

“I’ve heard that guy, I’ve been around him a couple of times, but I heard he doesn’t have much of a personality and kind of a (jerk), so I can’t say I disagree,” Loney said.

Loney said he has dropped his bat and helmet with more force on other occasions and was not ejected. That’s why he was surprised when Nauert threw him out of the game.

Loney, in a rare display of anger if not emotion, made contact with Nauert.

When asked about the bump, which likely draw a fine and suspension, Loney said, “Bumped? I don’t know ‘bumped.’ We touched.”

Cash talked to Nauert after the incident.

“Paul felt (Loney) was frustrated with him on the call,” Cash said. “I think talking to Paul after the fact, throwing the bat was one thing but then when he threw the helmet, Paul thought that it was time for him to go. Little unique that he didn’t say anything directly to him, but that was the decision for the umpire to make.”

Rays Notes: Boxberger working through slump

By Roger Mooney, Tampa Tribune

OAKLAND, Calif. — RHP Brad Boxberger struggled again Friday, allowing a run in the ninth inning. But unlike earlier on the road trip, Boxberger was able to close out the 2-1 victory against the A’s because he had an extra run to work with.

For manager Kevin Cash, that was a positive step for his slumping closer.

“Ultimately, his job is to preserve the lead and help us win a ballgame,” Cash said. “He did that.”

Boxberger threw a season-high 33 pitches during the ninth inning. He allowed three hits, though one was an infield single and another was a bloop to shallow center field on a check swing by Coco Crisp that drove in the A’s run.

“You take the end result, definitely. A win is a win no matter how it is,” Boxberger said after Friday’s game. “I still feel I have a lot of work to do. When things are not going your way, you can really tell they’re not going your way.”

Boxberger blew one save and lost another game in Houston earlier on this road trip.

Despite the slump, Cash said he does not plan to remove Boxberger from his role.

“As good as Box’s been early on, there were times throughout the season where it looked like it came easy for him. It’s not coming as easy,” Cash said. “He’s still a guy that’s fairly young and obviously new to this, being his first year pitching in that role. It’s a good thing that he had so much success early on that he could kind of build off that and handle this a little bit, and I think he’s handled it well.”

Mechanically, Boxberger is pitching more side-to-side than up-and-down, which he does when he's on and can work the top and bottom of the strike zone with his fastball and changeup.

"(Friday) night was really, really big," pitching coach Jim Hickey said. "Obviously it got a little sloppier than he would like, but it ain't easy man. It's tough. ... I really think all it's going to take is a nice outing, one, two, three, boom, boom, boom, and here we go."

Boxberger would like some boom, boom, booms.

Friday was Boxberger's 30th save despite allowing a run in his third straight appearance.

"It took me a while to get to it the last couple of weeks," Boxberger said. "I guess now that's it's done, hopefully everything else will start clicking again."

Jennings getting toasty

Since returning from the disabled list on Aug. 14, Desmond Jennings has been one of the Rays' top hitters, with 10 hits in 28 at-bats.

He also became the first player since San Francisco's Cody Ross in May 2011 to drive in all his team's runs in back-to-back wins.

Jennings drove in two runs Friday, the second on his first homer of the year in the ninth inning that gave Boxberger the big insurance run.

"I'm pretty happy about it," Jennings aid. "It's going good so far. Just going to try and keep it going."

Jennings has provided the Rays the spark they were hoping for when he returned from his left knee injury.

"I don't know if we were that sure that he was going to come in and have this immediate impact," Cash said. "But it seems since he's been activated, he's gotten some big hits for us."

Gomes on a roll

RHP Brandon Gomes retired all four batters he faced Friday to run his string of consecutive batters retired to 26.

That tied Kyle Farnsworth for the second-most in team history. RHP Steve Geltz set the team record earlier this season when he retired 32 straight batters.

"He's hot right now," Cash said. "He has a good feel for what he's trying to accomplish."

Moore sets Bulls K's record

LHP Matt Moore struck out 16 batters Saturday against Columbus to set the Durham Bulls' single-game strikeout record.

Moore did it over six innings. He allowed four hits, two runs, walked a batter and allowed a home run.

Noteworthy

RHP Jose Dominguez, who was designated for assignment Aug. 16 to make room on the 40-man roster for LHP Drew Smyly, cleared waivers and accepted an assignment to Durham. ... Steve Geltz entered Saturday's game needing one more appearance to join Ruddy Lugo (64 in 2006), Esteban Yan (64 in 1998) and Lance Carter (62 in 2003) as the only rookies in franchise history with 60 appearances.

Smyly could be key piece as Rays look to make playoff push

By Roger Mooney, Tampa Tribune

OAKLAND, Calif. — The fly ball to left field that settled into Desmond Jennings' glove late Friday night not only put an end to Oakland's ninth-inning comeback attempt, but also it made a winner of Drew Smyly, who picked up his first victory in nearly a year.

"Feels good," Smyly said after the Rays' 2-1 victory. "Wasn't sure if I'd get one earlier in the year, but wins and losses are out of your control. I just try to keep the team in the game, compete and give us a chance to win every night."

Smyly, making his second start since returning from a shoulder injury that includes a torn labrum, pitched 5²/₃ scoreless innings. He allowed seven hits and struck out two. His velocity was up a few ticks from his first start with his fastball in the 89- to 92-mph range.

It was a dramatic turnaround from his previous outing, when he allowed five runs in four innings last Sunday in Texas in his first game since coming off the disabled list.

The difference between the two starts: Smyly was able to command all four of his pitches.

Against the Rangers, he was basically throwing fastballs and sliders because his curveball was no help.

"I was getting in there on some of those righties, throwing my curveball down and away. It just helps when you can locate all your pitches," Smyly said.

The Rays were encouraged after Smyly's first outing despite the results. He was healthy, the shoulder felt fine. It was just a matter of getting his curveball in order and knocking some of the rust off since he hadn't faced major league hitters since May 5.

"I think we all said we were very optimistic that after that start (at Texas) he would bounce right back, and he made us all look smart because he did," Rays manager Kevin Cash said.

Smyly ran into trouble twice.

The A's reached him for a pair of two-out singles in the fifth inning, and they loaded the bases with one out in the sixth.

Smyly was able to get out of the fifth by getting Billy Butler swinging through a 92-mph fastball for the third strike.

He got Brett Lawrie swinging for the second out of the sixth. That was his 91st and final pitch. Brandon Gomes came in from the bullpen and retired former Ray Stephen Vogt on a pop-up to Asdrubal Cabrera.

Smyly hopped and pumped a fist after striking out Butler.

"It feels good," he said. "I feel like I needed this game. I needed an outing to bounce back. I felt like I've been throwing a lot of strikes, but for whatever reason been giving up some hits, timely hits. It went my way, so it felt good to get those outs, those big outs when you needed to it. Someone gets a hit right there, it could have been a different story, I was able to bear down right there and hit my spots."

If Smyly can come close to pitching the way he did in seven starts in 2014 after coming to the Rays from Detroit in the David Price trade — 3-1, 1.70 ERA with one shutout — then the Rays have a better shot at chasing down a playoff spot.

A healthy Smyly makes the rotation deeper, and the Rays' postseason chances rest on the starting pitchers.

"I thought Drew Smyly bounced back nicely like we thought he would," Cash said. "He provided us a big boost."

Rays Beat: Relievers have to learn to shake off bad pitches

By Roger Mooney, Tampa Tribune

OAKLAND, Calif. — Steve Geltz has a Lokai bracelet that he keeps tucked in the back pocket of his uniform pants. It's made of 26 clear beads. One contains mud from Death Valley and one contains mud from Mount Everest.

The mud from Death Valley is to remind the wearer that there are lows in life, so stay hopeful. The mud from Mount Everest symbolizes the highs in life and the need to stay humble, according to the Lokai website.

Geltz says it's perfect for relief pitchers, who can go from Mount Everest to Death Valley in a matter of pitches.

"It's bittersweet," Geltz said of his line of work. "Sometimes it's really sweet, and sometimes it's really bitter."

The Rays saw the bitter side last week in Houston when Jake McGee, Brad Boxberger, Boxberger again and Matt Andriese allowed runs as the bullpen coughed up leads and then the game on back-to-back nights.

Rays fans turned off the HD TVs and went to bed, while the men responsible for the losses had to, as they say in baseball circles, wear it.

How long do they wear it?

Not as long as you'd think.

Some relievers leave the outing behind them as soon as they reach the clubhouse. Some take a little longer. But most will tell you they are looking forward to their next outing by the time they leave the clubhouse.

"You have to have a short-term memory," Brandon Gomes said.

"And as short as possible," Geltz added. "I'm talking about as short as the next pitch."

Boxberger said it's the side of the game few see.

"The more experience you have, the easier it is to deal with it," Boxberger said.

Easier, he said. Not easy.

"I go out there expecting to keep the lead or keep the game tied," Boxberger said. "And if I don't do that, I'm hard on myself, because I don't expect to fail."

Geltz experienced the sweet and the bitter in one outing this year. It happened July 3 against the Yankees in New York when he retired the side in order in the bottom of the 11th inning, then couldn't protect a two-run lead in the 12th and allowed a three-run walk-off home run to Brian McCann.

Geltz was visibly upset as he changed after the game and left without talking to reporters.

"It hurt. It was demoralizing," Geltz said. "I felt like I let my guys down, and that was hard for me to take more than the runs I gave up, the fact I felt like I let them down."

It was the first time Geltz failed like that at the major league level, but it wasn't the first time he failed as a pro.

"These are my teammates. They're not mad at me. It happens. It's baseball," Geltz said. "It was one of those things that made me stand back and realize it's just a game. There's a lot of things in life you can get mad about, but at the end of the day am I going to get mad that I played in a big-league game whether I did good or bad? I'm in the big leagues. What am I going to get mad at? I fully know going in that I can pitch bad. Nobody is perfect in this game."

Relief pitchers are a lot like kickers in football, Gomes said. Make a field goal, big deal? They're supposed to do that? Miss one at the end of the game? Oh boy.

The only grades given are pass or fail.

"It's a lonely place when you're not throwing well out of the bullpen and it seems that you're the reason that the game was lost, whether that's true or not, because there's always points in the game you can point to," Gomes said. "But you're the most recent reason of why you lost."

You either learn to bounce back or you learn to do something else.

"You develop into your role by how you can bounce back," Boxberger said. "I guess that's what makes and breaks a pitcher as he develops through the minor leagues."

Mount Everest or Death Valley.

"It's just a state-of-mind thing," Geltz said. "As little and stupid as it may seem, it's a reminder if you're aggravated, just remember it could be worse, it could be better. Just ride the natural. Be a person who can't be judged on what you did that game. It's a job. It doesn't define you. That's how I look at it."

Rays rally in ninth to beat A's

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — There were a few unusual sights around the O.co Coliseum, in addition to Darth Vader hanging out for a while with Brian Anderson in the TV booth, as the Rays rallied to beat the A's 5-4 Saturday night.

And at the top of the list was how the Rays pulled it off, coming back to win in the ninth inning for the first time this season, having been 0-49 when trailing after eight.

"It had to happen sooner or later I guess," Logan Forsythe said. "It comes at a good time, showing that we can come back and win in the ninth. That's something we need to continue in this race."

Down 4-3, the Rays rallied when Daniel Nava drew a one-out walk and Forsythe laced a double that sent pinch-runner Tim Beckham to third off switch-pitcher Pat Venditte, then Asdrubal Cabrera greeted lefty reliever Drew Pomeranz with a first-pitch double to right.

"A great comeback," manager Kevin Cash said. "We needed that one."

Alex Colome finished it off for the Rays, Cash deciding on this night, with usual closer Brad Boxberger unavailable, that it wouldn't be so ridiculous to let Colome work two innings, as he retired all six A's he faced in the stiffest test so far in his transition to high-leverage reliever.

"Alex Colome looked outstanding, building confidence, I would say, by the pitch, and by the outing," Cash said. "He continued to look really poised out there, his pitches were obviously extremely effective. ... He is feeling good about himself, as he should be. We want to try to kind of bottle that up and maintain that going forward. ..."

"He's in a good spot. We're going to roll with him here now, and he's going to get some big outs for us going forward."

Colome said he welcomed the opportunity to get the final outs.

"I feel so excited to do that," he said. "Tonight when I go out I said, this is the time, I have to do the best I can do."

Also interesting, as the Rays improved to 62-61 and moved to within 1 1/2 games of the second AL wild-card spot:

- The Rays became the first team to hit three homers in a game off A's All-Star ace Sonny Gray, with Forsythe taking him deep in the second, former Athletic John Jaso in the third and Cabrera in the seventh.
- Rays starter Erasmo Ramirez had a 10-pitch sixth inning, and all strikes at that, yet gave up three runs — on two home runs — in the pivotal sequence that saw the Rays go quickly from up 2-1 to down 4-2.

- Typically mellow Rays first baseman James Loney got ejected in the sixth for objecting to a strike three call, then got really upset with home-plate umpire Paul Nauert.

The Rays struck first when Forsythe homered with one out in the second, the 14th of his breakout season, more than any Rays player but injured Steven Souza Jr., who has 15.

The A's came right back to tie it, but the Rays took the lead back on another homer, as Jaso took Gray deep to right.

The game then changed dramatically in the sixth inning.

Loney was called out on strikes to end the top of the inning, and when he flipped his bat and helmet to the ground in disgust, he was ejected by Nauert, who told Cash the helmet toss was the trigger.

Then Loney got demonstratively upset, going face-to-face with, and appearing to bump, Nauert. Cash interceded, but it took coaches Rocco Baldelli and Charlie Montoyo to restrain Loney.

Loney said he disagreed with the call and the ejection, claiming, "If I'm not saying anything to you, don't throw me out." And, among other things about Nauert, "You could tell his personality is not the best, and he's just kind of there."

Ramirez had been pitching relatively well to that point, but that all changed rapidly in the bottom of the inning.

Ramirez gave up an 0-and-2 homer to Mark Canha, got a first-pitch flyout by ex-Ray Stephen Vogt, then gave up a first-pitch double to Brett Lawrie and a first-pitch two-run homer to Josh Phegley, putting the A's up 4-2.

But Cabrera homered in the seventh to make it 4-3, and then the Rays, playing their fifth consecutive one-run game, staged their unprecedented rally.

"I think that shows a lot about our team," Forsythe said. "That's how we've been playing all year — we're never out of it and we keep grinding. ...

"It was nice to come back in the ninth finally and try to get some momentum."

Rays' Smyly shows progress in second start back

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — As poorly as Drew Smyly seemed to pitch last Sunday in his first game back after a three-month disabled list stint rehabbing his sore left shoulder, Rays staff insisted it saw reasons to be encouraged and to expect better his next time out.

Friday night, that was exactly what happened. Smyly looked much sharper, working five-plus shutout innings, allowing seven hits but no walks and getting two huge outs when he needed to in the Rays' 2-1 win over the A's.

"We didn't really read too much into one start coming back," manager Kevin Cash said. "I think you've got to allow these guys coming back from injury and extended time off a little bit of leeway to let them get back into the big-league atmosphere and on the mound, all of those things factor into it.

"I think we all said we were very optimistic that after that start that he would bounce right back, and he made all of us look smart because he did."

Smyly had also spoken confidently going into the start against Oakland that he expected to pitch better, but his words lacked some conviction.

The solid outing was not only a sign of his physical progress but provided a needed boost to his own confidence, tested by the long, mundane process of strengthening and stabilizing his shoulder and four unimpressive minor-league rehab starts on the way back.

"It feels good," Smyly said. "I feel like I needed this game. I needed an outing to bounce back. I felt like I've been throwing a lot of strikes but for whatever reason been giving up some hits, timely hits. (Friday night) it went my way, so it felt good to get those outs, those big outs when you needed to do it. Someone gets a hit right there, it could have been a different story. I was able to bear down right there and hit my spots."

Smyly started strong, retiring 11 of the first 12 A's hitters while working with a 1-0 lead, but found himself twice in precarious positions.

In the fifth, he allowed a pair of two-out singles but came back to get Billy Burns swinging at a 92 mph fastball, slapping his glove in a rare show of onfield emotion.

Then in the sixth, a leadoff single and two more with one out left him with the bases loaded and dangerous Brett Lawrie at the plate. But Smyly, after falling behind 2-and-1, came back to get Lawrie swinging and missing at his 91st and final pitch of the night. Brandon Gomes, Steve Geltz and Brad Boxberger, in a 33-pitch adventure of a ninth, took it from there as the Rays hung on.

"He had a really good feel of his offspeed pitches," Cash said. "He got some weak fly balls, some pop-ups, some misses in there. He was very sharp. He provided us a big boost."

Smyly said the improvement from his first start to his second was significant.

"I thought I threw the ball way better, especially with my offspeed and my curve, my fastball command," he said. "I was getting in there on some of those righties, throwing my curveball down and away. It just helps when you can locate all your pitches. In Texas I was pretty much throwing like two pitches. My curveball wasn't any good, it was pretty much fastball-slider.

"I commanded the strike zone way better with all my pitches."

His next start is Thursday at the Trop.

Rays' Boxberger remains confident through rough stretch

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — RHP **Brad Boxberger** said his struggles in closing out games over the past week have been a challenge, but he remains confident. And Rays manager **Kevin Cash** said he has no plans to give Boxberger a break or change the way he is being used.

"It's all part of the game," Boxberger said. "It's part of the situation I have myself in. I'd rather be doing this than anything else. It's just a test for me to keep going and for us to keep winning games."

Cash said Boxberger, who needed a season-high 33 pitches Friday to navigate a messy ninth for his 30th save after blowing a save and a game in his two previous outings, is handling the rough stretch well.

"As good as Box was early on, there were times throughout the season it looked like it came really easy for him," Cash said. "It's not coming as easy. He's a guy that's still fairly young and obviously new to this being his first year pitching in that role.

"It's a good thing that he had so much success early on that he could kind of build off that and handle this a little bit. And I think he's handled it well."

Boxberger, who ranks second in the American League in saves behind Twins LHP **Glen Perkins**, is the fifth Rays reliever to reach 30. He leads major-league relievers with nine losses, six on walkoffs.

SWITCHED UP: The Rays were prepared for the unusual challenge of facing A's switch-pitcher **Pat Venditte**, Cash saying the key is not rushing any decisions since Venditte is required to indicate which arm he is going to use against each batter.

So Friday, Cash made sure Venditte was going to throw lefty before lifting lefty-swinging **Grady Sizemore** then sent up switch-hitter **Daniel Nava** to pinch-hit. Venditte stuck with left-handed, so Nava hit right-handed.

Nava had to get ready to hit either way, having both helmets and two bats ready in the dugout and wearing a leg guard on his right leg and an elbow pad on his left so he would have to change only one when Venditte declared.

"You just have to be ready for anything," Nava said. "It was unique because most of the time you pinch-hit, you know who you're facing. That time you didn't."

With all that went into the at-bat, Nava said it was disappointing to fly out. The Rays got to him Saturday during their ninth-inning rally.

Cash said the switch-pitcher concept is interesting, joking: "I don't know why we don't have a couple guys like that."

GO-GO GOMES: RHP **Brandon Gomes** isn't too caught up in the novelty but said retiring 26 straight batters — one shy of a reliever's "perfect game" — over nine appearances through Friday was positive reinforcement for changes he made to his delivery.

"I'm just glad my mechanics are back where they need to be and I'm helping do my part down in the bullpen, like I was early in the year," Gomes said. "For whatever reason they kind of got off a little bit in late June/early July and now I'm back focused on getting extension again, which is making everything a little sharper."

RHP **Steve Geltz** earlier had a streak of 32 straight retired.

NOT-SO-MINOR MATTERS: LHP **Matt Moore** was on point in a dazzling fourth start since his demotion to Triple-A Durham, striking out 16 in six innings, though he left trailing 2-1. ... RHP **Jose Dominguez**, designated for assignment last Sunday, cleared waivers and was outrighted back to Durham. "It's a good thing," Cash said. "He's a big power arm, this gives him some more chances to get some consistency." ... INF **Jake Elmore** picked up a win for the Bulls after pitching the 14th inning Friday.

MISCELLANY: LF **Desmond Jennings** became the first Ray to drive in all the runs (three total) in back-to-back wins and the first big-leaguer to do so, per the Elias Sports Bureau, since **Cody Ross** for the Giants in May 2011. ... A scoring change from Friday gave Sizemore an error in rightfield and took a hit away from A's C **Josh Phegley**. ... The Rays will keep their

rotation in order through Monday's off day, starting RHP **Nathan Karns** on Tuesday against Minnesota, followed by RHP **Chris Archer** and LHP **Drew Smyly**, who was much sharper Friday than in his return from the DL last Sunday.

Rays Tales: Six Rays who have run with their opportunities

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

The Rays have had plenty go wrong, starting with the slew of injuries that started in spring training and have pockmarked much of their season. As a result, they already have used 49 players (three shy of their 2000 team record) including 17 rookies, eight of whom made their major-league debuts. They have had 21 players serve 23 stints on the disabled list, third most in the majors. And they have made a dizzying 129 roster moves since opening day. • But from all that change came opportunity. And here are six of the players who somewhat unexpectedly took advantage, ranked (with all stats through Friday) by the impact they've had thus far:

1. INF Logan Forsythe

Stats: .279, 21 2B, 13 HR, 51 RBIs, .787 OPS in 119 games

How it happened: Slated for reserve duty going into the season then a job-share at second base with **Nick Franklin** (after **Asdrubal Cabrera** emerged as the obvious shortstop starter), he was elevated to full-time duty when Franklin strained an oblique late in the spring and never let go with a tremendous breakout performance.

What he's done: Quietly emerged as one of the top all-around second basemen in the majors, ranking in the top six in RBIs (51), HR (13), OPS (.787) and wins above replacement (4.4) in the most extended big-league opportunity of his career. Has been one of the most valuable Rays, sharing team lead in homers and second in RBIs while hitting everywhere from 2-8 in the lineup, playing elite level (Gold Glove?) defense and filling in at 1B when asked, ranking second on team in games played (119).

2. RHP Erasmo Ramirez

Stats: 10-4, 3.57 in 26 games (19 starts); 87 K, 32 BB in 116 IP*

How it happened: Acquired late spring to supplement injury/illness-ravaged pitching staff (for LHP **Mike Montgomery**) from Mariners, who had little use for him as he was out of options.

What he's done: After two rough initial outings that had a certain *Tampa Bay Times* beat writer cracking smart that they should "erase Erasmo," Ramirez has been one of the most effective pitchers not just on the Rays (with a 2.52 ERA) but in the whole AL. Since going into the rotation full time May 14, working under the tutelage of pitching coach **Jim Hickey** and the team's short-leash philosophy, Ramirez's 10 wins have matched the most in the AL, his .205 opponents' average tops and his 2.61 ERA fourth.

3. RHP Steve Geltz

Stats: 2-4-2, 3.39 in 59 games; 54 K, 18 BB in 581/3 IP

How it happened: An intriguing September 2014 callup was on the bubble for one of the final bullpen spots until the end of spring training, then quickly worked his way into extensive, versatile and eventually higher-leverage duty, leading the AL with 59 appearances.

What he's done: Featuring a fastball he uncannily locates at the top of the strike zone, the 27-year-old rookie has straight up become an integral and durable part of the staff, starting twice and pitching everywhere from the fourth through 11th innings, though primarily in the seventh, and 15 times bridging innings. Allowed only two of first 23 inherited runners to score, tops in AL. Retired 32 consecutive batters in one stretch.

4. LHP Xavier Cedeno

Stats: 2-1-1, 1.83 in 49 games; 35 K, 10 BB in 341/3 IP

How it happened: Early injuries to **Jeff Beliveau** (which became season-ending shoulder surgery) and **C.J. Riefenhauser**, and **Jake McGee's** recovery from offseason elbow surgery, left the Rays with no lefties, so they took a cheap flier on Cedeno. He was acquired in late April for cash from the Dodgers (imagine those **Matt Silverman-Andrew Friedman** negotiations), who got him days earlier from the Nationals, who gave up on him after five so-so appearances.

What he's done: Pretty much become one of the most consistent lefty relievers around. Leads AL with 48 appearances since joining Rays, 43 scoreless, including his past 15. Allowed only three of first 35 inherited runners to score. Went team-record 15 straight games without a run or walk.

5. RHP Nathan Karns

Stats: 7-5, 3.44 in 24 starts; 133 K, 50 BB in 136 IP

How it happened: Rookie was slotted sixth on starting pitching depth chart going into spring, slated, at best, to fill in until LHP **Matt Moore** returned midseason. But injuries/illness issues with **Alex Cobb**, **Drew Smyly** and **Alex Colome** thrust him into more prominent role, starting Game 2, and he has been a key part of rotation.

What he's done: Relying more on curveball than any AL pitcher, he has made an AL-most 18 starts allowing two runs or fewer and five allowing two or fewer hits. Prime subject of Rays' strategy not to go through opposing orders a third time, he has AL-most 12 no-decisions, five when he left in line for a win and bullpen blew it. Leads MLB rookies with 133 strikeouts.

6. C Curt Casali

Stats: .240, 9 HR, 17 RBIs, .885 OPS in 36 games

How it happened: Opened season at Triple A but was called up in mid June to replace **Bobby Wilson** (who was struggling after winning the backup job), then moved into the lineup in late July to replace **Rene Rivera** (who was struggling after being handed the starting job after offseason acquisition from Padres).

What he's done: Encouraged to let his power play, leads Rays since his callup with nine homers, is second to Yankees' **Brian McCann** among AL catchers and is close to MLB-leading pace of one per 10.67 at-bats. Has earned praise for defensive improvements, especially game-calling and pitch-blocking. Has thrown out 25 percent (6-of-24) of basestealers.

* Started Saturday

Short stops

- **Ben Zobrist** finally makes it back to the Trop this week with the Royals, his initial May return wiped out when he was on an injury rehab assignment with Oakland, and he deserves a long and loud ovation. Zobrist was one of the best Rays players and one of the best Rays people during a nine-year stint that goes back to the dark-green days, traded in January (with **Yunel Escobar** for **John Jaso** and two prospects, SS **Daniel Robertson** and OF **Boog Powell**) because he was in his last year before free agency. The Rays then spent the \$7.5 million he was to make to sign SS **Asdrubal Cabrera** to a one-year deal, which means he is also in his last year before free agency. Anyway, the Rays have a video tribute of Zobrist planned for Friday's game and maybe another surprise.

- RHP **Kevin Jepsen** also returns this week, to less fanfare but the lingering curiosity of why the Rays would trade a successful high-leverage reliever (for two low-level minor-league pitchers) to a Twins team the Rays are, in theory, fiercely competing with for an AL wild-card spot.

- In dealing **Wil Myers** last offseason, the Rays thought it was wiser to flip two Padres prospects to the Nationals for OF **Steven Souza Jr.** because they wanted to make sure to improve this year's team and not just the future. Souza has been on the DL twice, though, hitting .214 with 15 homers and 39 RBIs in 89 games. And both those prospects are now in the majors with Washington, 22-year-old RHP **Joe Rossa** promising 3-5, 3.86 in his first nine starts, 22-year-old INF **Trea Turner** projected to be a future star.

Rays rumblings

There's some irony that teams managed by **Joe Maddon** (Cubs) and presided by **Andrew Friedman** (Dodgers) have been no-hit and the Rays haven't. ... Chances for promising LHP prospect **Blake Snell** to get promoted in September seem tied to the Rays' playoff chances — the better, the better. ... In case you want to save the date, the AL wild-card game is Oct. 6. ... Besides needing his bat, another reason for the Rays to bring INF **Richie Shaffer** back up from Durham is that they won't be charged with using one of his three options in doing so by Sept. 4 since he would have spent less than 20 days there. ... The Rays, per a *Sports Business Daily* report, will be one of 15 Fox-contracted teams to have games streamed online next season with no blackouts. ... Congrats to baseball ops president **Matt Silverman** and wife **Andrea** on the birth of their second daughter, **Samantha Rose**. ... ESPN's **Keith Law** told WDAE-AM 620 "it's probably time to accept that (3B **Evan Longoria**) is just not going to be *that* player again" and is more likely an "average to slightly above-average regular." ... One early 2016 question: Who plays shortstop?

Rays rally in 9th for first time in 50 tries

By Trevor Hass, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Rays are tied for the most games in the Majors decided by two runs or fewer, so Saturday's **5-4 win** over the A's was nothing new to them in one sense.

But the fashion in which the Rays surged from behind was truly unique. The win marked the first time all season Tampa Bay has gone on to win when trailing after eight innings (1-49), as **Asdrubal Cabrera's** two-run double proved to be the difference.

"I didn't know that [statistic]," **John Jaso** said. "I guess we hit the reset button and hopefully start a new trend right there. That is really important, coming back. Especially when our pitchers do so well up on the mound, it's great to back them up and get some of those guys some wins."

The Rays hit three solo homers off Oakland starter **Sonny Gray**, but they still trailed 4-3 heading to the ninth. In the final frame, **Daniel Nava** walked and **Logan Forsythe** doubled against switch-pitcher **Pat Venditte**.

Drew Pomeranz came in to pitch with one out, and Cabrera delivered the game's biggest hit, perfectly placing a ball that whizzed past first base and into the outfield to score pinch-runner **Tim Beckham** and Forsythe.

Cabrera -- who finished 2-for-4 with a home run and the double -- is now hitting .412 (35-for-85) in 22 games since returning from the disabled list July 28.

"He had a great night," Forsythe said of Cabrera. "Cabby's been swinging the bat so well as of late. We have confidence in all our guys going up to the plate right now. We got some guys that are hot, we got some guys that are back. Just try to keep it rolling."

The Rays have now won their past three games by one run (1-0, 2-1, 5-4), a critical trend for a team hovering around .500 trying to make a playoff push.

Manager Kevin Cash was pleased with his team's ability to come back after surrendering the lead earlier in the game. He was also impressed with **Alex Colome**, who filled in for **Brad Boxberger** after Boxberger threw 33 pitches the night before.

Colome tossed two perfect innings on just 20 pitches and shut the A's down in the ninth after Oakland nearly came from behind in the final inning the night prior.

"Alex Colome looked outstanding," Cash said, "building confidence by the pitch, by the outing, so good for him. Just a good ballgame. We needed that one."

Cash was unaware his team was 0-49 when trailing entering the ninth inning. When asked his thoughts on curbing that trend, he responded with a simple quip.

"Good," he said. "Now we're 1-49."

Cabrera homers, delivers big hit in 9th to sink A's

By Trevor Hass and Jane Lee, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- **Asdrubal Cabrera** homered and drove in the winning runs of a 5-4 Rays victory over the A's with a two-run double in the ninth inning at the Coliseum on Saturday evening.

Tampa Bay trailed by one run entering the ninth against switch-pitcher **Pat Venditte**, who issued a one-out walk to **Daniel Nava** and gave up a double to **Logan Forsythe**, setting the stage for Cabrera's game-changing hit off lefty **Drew Pomeranz**. The Rays **were 0-49** when trailing after eight innings entering the day.

"Good, now we're 1-49," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "This was a big game. They're all big games now going forward."

The late rally **took away a win** from **Sonny Gray**, who remains the American League ERA leader (2.10) after allowing three runs -- on solo homers from Forsythe, **John Jaso** and Cabrera -- across eight innings. Battery mate **Josh Phegley** homered and doubled, finishing with three RBIs for the A's.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Unsafe at home: **Josh Reddick**, who reached first base on catcher interference with two outs in the first, was waved home by third-base coach Mike Gallego on **Mark Canha**'s double down the left-field line -- an aggressive call that didn't end well for the A's, who watched Reddick get tagged out at the plate on a relay throw home from Cabrera.

"I think he was trying to be aggressive there," Melvin said of Gallego. "I thought maybe he thought it was a little farther down the line. I was watching the relay come in and didn't see when he sent him, but they made a couple good throws to get him."

Fighting back: The Rays trailed 4-3 entering the ninth, but rallied to take the lead thanks to a two-run RBI double from Cabrera. Cabrera shot the ball down the right-field line, and pinch-runner **Tim Beckham** and Forsythe came around to score and give the Rays a lead they wouldn't relinquish. Cabrera has been on a hot stretch and is now batting .405 since returning from the disabled list July 28. **Alex Colome** pitched two perfect innings in relief, needing just 20 pitches to mow down the A's in the eighth and ninth.

"Alex Colome looked outstanding," Cash said, "building confidence by the pitch, by the outing, so good for him. Just a good ballgame. We needed that one."

Phegley delivers: Phegley wasn't even supposed to be in Saturday's lineup until **Danny Valencia** was taken out with right hamstring soreness, leading manager Bob Melvin to use **Stephen Vogt** at designated hitter rather than behind the plate, where Phegley assumed duties. The catcher responded with a pair of run-scoring hits, including his go-ahead, two-run homer in the sixth -- his seventh of the season.

Trio of dingers: Forsythe's homer came in the second inning and was his 14th of the season. Jaso's towering blast in the third was his second of the year, after he hit 12 combined homers in his previous two seasons with the A's. Cabrera's shot sliced the A's lead to 4-3 in the seventh.

"We had a pretty decent plan against Sonny," Forsythe said. "His stuff's always good. I think we just got some balls up in the air on him. They just kind of got in that jet stream and got out."

LONEY TOSSED

Loney was ejected in the sixth inning after protesting a called third strike from home-umpire Paul Nauert. Loney bumped Nauert and screamed at him before he was restrained.

"Sometimes people just get bored and want to stir up something," Loney said.

WHAT'S NEXT

Rays: **Jake Odorizzi** (6-6, 3-02) will pitch for Tampa at 4:05 p.m ET on Sunday, coming off an outing in which he yielded one run in six innings to the Astros. The right-hander is 1-1 with a 0.91 ERA in five starts against American League West opponents this season.

A's: Right-hander **Kendall Graveman**, who is 0-5 with a 6.89 ERA over his last seven starts, will look to get back on track in the 1:05 p.m. PT finale against the Rays. Graveman was the winning pitcher in his only career appearance against Tampa on May 23, a six-inning scoreless outing in which he allowed just three hits.

Loney tossed after arguing strike, bumps ump

By Trevor Hass, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- **James Loney** was ejected for arguing a called strike three in the sixth inning of the Rays' **5-4 win** over the A's on Saturday.

After home plate umpire Paul Nauert called Loney out, Loney flipped his bat and slammed his helmet to the ground. Then, after Nauert ejected Loney, Loney approached him and the two touched (as Loney put it) before the first baseman was restrained.

"I've thrown my helmet and bat down plenty of times," Loney said after the game. "I'm not saying anything to you, so just relax. You can tell his personality's not the best. He's just kind of there."

Loney, who finished 1-for-3 with a single to left in the fourth, watched the play on video later and sticks by the fact that it was a ball. He was still frustrated -- though even-keeled -- afterward, saying that Nauert threw him out before Loney said anything to him.

Rays manager Kevin Cash said there are two sides to the story. Loney thought it was a ball, while Nauert was upset at Loney's reaction.

"Sometimes people just get bored and want to stir up something," Loney said.