

# RAYS CLIPS



May 8, 2010

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## Tampa Bay Rays open series in Oakland by improving to 13-1 on road

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

Some lineup tweaks pay off as Tampa Bay keeps up its astonishing start.

OAKLAND, Calif. - The decisions are made for various reasons, whether it be recent play, complex data and statistical matrixes, or even an occasional old-fashioned hunch.

Friday, manager Joe Maddon said he kept Willy Aybar in the lineup because he looked good the night before and he likes his swings against left-handed pitchers. And he put Sean Rodriguez in the lineup, ahead of Ben Zobrist, based on research of Rodriguez's success against Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez in the minor leagues (4-for-5).

And as good as the Rays are going, it only figures both ended up delivering key hits in the 4-1 victory that improved their baseball-best record to 22-7.

"Pretty nice," Maddon said.

David Price had something to do with it, too, sputtering a bit early but going on to pitch into the eighth in dominating style, allowing only three hits, to improve to 4-1. And when he left, after a career-high 119 pitches, with the bases loaded and two outs, Randy Choate took it from there.

"David's the story," Maddon said. "We get that kind of starting pitching once again."

Choate did his job twice, actually, as Evan Longoria's throwing error on the first ground ball Choate got from Daric Barton allowed a run to score. But Choate came back and got another, getting Ryan Sweeney to bounce out to shortstop Jason Bartlett. Rafael Soriano finished for his eighth save.

The Rays are off to the best overall start since the 2005 White Sox, who were also 22-7, but more stunning is their 13-1 road mark. Depending on how you count it, they are either the fourth, or fifth, major-league team since 1900 to start that well, joining the 1984 Tigers (14-0), 1976 Phillies (13-1), 1923 Giants (13-1) and 1912 White Sox (12-1-1, then 13-1-1).

The Rays had only three hits over seven innings against Gonzalez, but taking their efficient approach to an extreme, they made them count.

In the fourth, Longoria - whose 12-game hitting streak ended - walked and scored when Aybar singled to right for their first hit.

In the seventh, after Gabe Kapler singled with one out and Dioner Navarro walked, Rodriguez - who struck out the first two times up - delivered a drive over centerfielder Rajai Davis' head that scored both, though Rodriguez was thrown out trying for third.

"I was feeling good the whole game, it's just he was making good pitches on me," Rodriguez said. "I told myself that AB, stay aggressive, and a couple guys told me that too going up there. ... I was fortunate I got one of those good pitches I had been getting, and I didn't miss it."

Rodriguez and Gonzalez actually go back to youth leagues and high school ball in Miami, and have remained close. "We get along well," Rodriguez said. "We always have good battles against each other. He's definitely going to call me soon and give me a hard time."

Maddon said he considers all kinds of input in making his lineup decisions: "Most of the time it's just based on information I'm reading. Part of it also is to make sure that all our players feel ownership in what's going on here. And also to rest guys. ... It's probably least of all hunches."

Price, one of three Rays among the AL top 10 in ERA going into the game, was a little shaky early but ended with an impressive line: one unearned run on a season-low three hits, with six strikeouts and four walks and an ERA down to 1.91.

He wasn't pleased, though, saying: "I wasn't too impressed with my pitching."

Price walked the first batter of the game, then allowed a leadoff single in the second but eventually settled down, retiring 11 in a row and 15 of 16 in one very impressive stretch, and didn't have trouble again until the eighth.

Price said part of the problem was that he was looking ahead too much to a possible complete game: "I s---d myself in the eighth. I was thinking about the ninth when I was out there and it got me tonight and that's frustrating. Very frustrating."

A leadoff walk, a balk and a two-out walk to Eric Patterson (after starting ahead 0-and-2) got him in trouble, and an infield single got him out of the game.

Before Price left, he did provide some entertainment, practically hurdling catcher Dioner Navarro as he fielded' Davis bunt in the eighth.

"That's an impossible play for Price to make," Maddon said. "Hopefully he will learn for the future just to let the catcher have that ball because he pretty much attempted to thwart Navi making that play."

"It was impressive - and I'm glad he got up and he walked back to the mound and he was able to throw the next pitch."

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## Tampa Bay Rays manager Joe Maddon wants Carlos Peña not to worry about batting average

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

Manager Joe Maddon is into all kinds of numbers. But he had a talk with 1B Carlos Peña and told him to ignore the big one that gets flashed on the scoreboard each time he steps to the plate: his batting average.

OAKLAND, Calif. - Manager **Joe Maddon** is into all kinds of numbers. But he had a talk with 1B **Carlos Peña** and told him to ignore the big one that gets flashed on the scoreboard each time he steps to the plate: his batting average.

Maddon's premise is that Peña would have a higher average than his .196 (after an 0-for-4 Friday) if he weren't constantly facing a strong defensive shift that stymies him when he pulls balls to right.

"Against a normal defense, he's probably hitting pretty decently right now," Maddon said. "Against the abnormal defense, he hits into a lot of outs that normally would have been hits. I don't want him to evaluate himself by his batting average; I'd prefer he deal more with an evaluation of the at-bats, the hard contact, those kind of issues.

"If he just looks at his batting average, he's never going to be satisfied and he's going to think he's doing less than he actually is."

Peña said the best he could do is try, and he makes an effort to look at his overall contributions each day.

"In general I can," he said, "but there's no doubt about it, I don't want my batting average there."

As much as he has tried to make adjustments to "beat" the shift by not "rolling over" and pulling ground balls, Peña admits there are days when it beats him.

"There's days when things aren't feeling so right and you have some bad swings and you hit a ball poorly, but because you have a little hole there and it goes through and you're like, 'Yea, I just got a hit,' " Peña said. "I don't have that luxury."

**DIFFERENT APPROACH:** RHP **Wade Davis** felt like he was pitching from behind the whole time in his April 27 start against the A's, and a video review confirmed it as he threw a first-pitch strike only seven times over five innings.

So when he faces them again today, he plans to be more aggressive from the start. "I think if I can get them on their heels a little bit and get them going, it will be a little different," Davis said.

**NO MINOR MATTER:** Class A Bowling Green RHP **Shane Dyer** realized there really wasn't anything else he could do.

He'd thrown seven innings of no-hit ball against Fort Wayne on Thursday night, but he'd also thrown 96 pitches. And with the Rays maintaining a strict organization pitch limit at that level, he knew he wasn't going to get to throw any more.

So it wasn't a surprise when he was taken out, and he sat on the bench and watched as reliever **Kirby Yates** kept the no-hitter going until there were two outs in the ninth and, after not getting a call on a 1-and-2 pitch that the Hot Rods felt he should have, gave up a single before completing the 1-0 win.

Dyer, 22, a sixth-round pick in 2008, said he'd thought often about how he'd handle that type of situation.

"I always pondered what I'd say or what I'd do, but I took the high road," Dyer said Friday by phone. "It's organization policy, and I'm not one to challenge that. It was bittersweet, but in the end we got the W, and that's what ultimately mattered."

Rays farm director **Mitch Lukevics**, who happened to be at the game, said the minor-league coaches can use "reasonable discretion" on exceeding a pitch count, but "our staff will always err on the side of caution, and our long-term goal is always more important than our short-term goals."

Dyer said he threw three no-hitters in high school, though each in seven-inning games. "It's a good standard," he said.

**MISCELLANY:** Peña remains tied with **Fred McGriff** for the franchise walk record of 305. ... 3B **Evan Longoria's** 12-game hitting streak ended Friday. He went 0-for-1 with three walks. ... Peña will likely get a day off during the Anaheim series, Maddon said.

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## Tampa Bay Rays without Ben Zobrist for first game at A's

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

The manager says not to read anything into the resting of the slow-starting hitter.

OAKLAND, Calif. - Ben Zobrist is still sputtering a bit, failing to produce as a No. 3 hitter typically should with a .266 average, 13 RBIs and nary a home run through 29 games.

But manager Joe Maddon insisted it was just the chance for rest when he left Zobrist out of Friday's lineup, not a sign of any pending change. "Just a day," Maddon said. "Just an absolute day."

Zobrist, who entered as a pinch-hitter in the ninth and singled, said he feels he's improving in adjusting to the steady flow of off-speed pitches he's seeing and trying to cut down on chasing ones out of the strike zone, though his on-base percentage is also down, .336 compared with last year's team-best .405.

"It's definitely getting better with me adjusting to what the pitchers are doing to me," he said.

As much as he'd rather play, he said he has learned not to quibble when Maddon sits him.

"I definitely take these days and really try to give my brain a rest," he said.

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May 7, 2010

## Tampa Bay Rays news and notes

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer

### The dish

#### Rays at A's

**When/where:** 4:07 today; Oakland Coliseum

**Radio:** 620-AM, 680-AM (Spanish)

#### Probable pitchers

##### Rays:

RHP Wade Davis (3-1, 2.79)

##### A's:

RHP Ben Sheets (1-3, 7.12)

#### Listen for ...

**Wadin' in:** Davis beat the A's and Sheets on April 27, but it wasn't pretty as he gave up a 4-0 second-inning lead. The Rays are 4-1 in his five starts, all against opening day starters.

**Gentle Ben:** The A's haven't gotten much yet for their \$10 million investment in Sheets, who has been averaging nearly 12 baserunners a game (five walks and seven hits) and hasn't lasted more than four innings in his past two starts.

#### Key matchups

##### A's vs. Davis

Daric Barton 0-for-3

Cliff Pennington 2-for-3 HR

Mike Rosales 2-for-2

##### Rays vs. Sheets

Jason Bartlett 2-for-3

Pat Burrell 8-for-19 HR

B.J. Upton 2-for-2

#### On deck

**Sunday:** at A's, 4:07, Sun Sports. Rays - James Shields (4-0, 3.15); A's - Dallas Braden (3-2, 4.14)

**Monday:** at Angels, 10:05, Sun Sports. Rays - Matt Garza (5-1, 2.09); Angels - Joel Pineiro (2-4, 5.30)

**Tuesday:** at Angels, 10:05, Sun Sports. Rays - Jeff Niemann (2-0, 2.23); Angels - Scott Kazmir (2-2, 7.11)

**Wednesday:** at Angels, 7:05, Sun Sports. Rays - David Price (3-1, 2.34 through Thursday); Angels - Jered Weaver (3-1, 3.19 through Thursday)

#### In the pink

As part of MLB's Mother's Day salute, Rays players will sport a variety of pink items, including bats, sweatbands, ribbons on their uniforms, and magnetic Phiten necklaces. Some players, such as **B.J. Upton** (but not all due to MLB licensing rules), will also use pink batting gloves. "It's a nice tribute," Upton said.

#### Quote of the day

*"We've adapted. I've always thought I was a warm-weather manager, but we've done okay."*

Manager **Joe Maddon**, on the team's 12-1 mark in visits to chilly and chillier Baltimore, Boston, Chicago and Seattle

#### Chart of the day

The Rays went into play Friday with a run differential of plus-83, which matched the third-best mark through 28 games since 1900. Here are the 28- and 29-game marks

#### Year Team Differential

1902 Pirates +112 +113

1905 Giants +97 +98

1939 Yankees +91 +94

### **Year Team Differential**

1984 Tigers +83 +85

2010 Rays +83 ???

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May 7, 2010

## **Pinellas official open to new Tampa Bay Rays stadium but not in downtown St. Petersburg**

By David DeCamp and Michael Van Sickler, Times Staff Writers

Pinellas might help pay for Rays site, but not in downtown St. Petersburg, he says.

Pinellas County might be willing to help build the Tampa Bay Rays a new stadium, but "probably not in downtown St. Petersburg," County Administrator Bob LaSala said Friday.

Furthermore, LaSala would not rule out the possibility that the county might support a stadium in Hillsborough County, but added "it's too early" and "there are too many unknowns."

LaSala stressed that he was not speaking for the County Commission, but was basing his opinion on a recent report about drive times and demographics that indicated that a mid-Pinellas location would draw more support than one in downtown St. Petersburg.

"I am only reiterating the obvious data from the report," he said.

For several years, county officials have expressed a preference for a stadium site in the mid-county Gateway area, such as the old Toytown landfill or Carillon, both of which are within the St. Petersburg city limits.

But LaSala's comments mark the first time a ranking county official has indicated the county might spurn a downtown St. Petersburg site - a potential blow to city officials.

LaSala first made the remarks at a St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce breakfast Friday, and confirmed them when questioned by the *St. Petersburg Times*.

The County Commission controls the hotel tax that pays for about half of the bonds on Tropicana Field. Financing a new, \$550 million, retractable-roof stadium might be difficult even if the hotel tax once again underwrites construction costs.

Without the hotel tax, public financing would fall almost entirely on St. Petersburg's shoulders and likely would encounter huge political opposition.

St. Petersburg Mayor Bill Foster was at a city news conference when he was told about LaSala's comments. He said he was surprised by LaSala's stance on not supporting a downtown stadium.

"We haven't talked about stadiums and funding," Foster said.

When told that LaSala didn't dismiss Pinellas support for a Hillsborough stadium, Foster objected in blunt terms.

"If that's true, then he and I will discuss some legal issues," Foster said. "That's a mistake. He's our partner, and I've ruled (a Hillsborough stadium) out. It's a mistake."

Rays senior vice president Michael Kalt declined to comment about a new stadium, continuing to stress that the team's "focus remains on the field." However, Kalt did say this of LaSala: "We're glad he's engaged in the conversation."

In March, the County Commission heard a report by the ABC Committee that reviewed stadium options, but only after weeks of considering how it might play politically. Even then, commissioners didn't give much feedback because of St. Petersburg's hands-off approach to the committee's work.

County Commissioner Nancy Bostock called LaSala's comments premature given the board hasn't had a chance to talk about options, but stressed she had no qualms about LaSala addressing the issue.

"I think it would be a great time for the County Commission to sit down and have a work session and talk about this," said Bostock, noting that nothing has been discussed in her 18 months on the board.

But discussing paying for a new stadium when a budget shortfall causes job cuts at the Sheriff's Office is a nonstarter, said Commissioner Neil Brickfield. "We're getting way ahead of ourselves."

Nonetheless, Brickfield and County Commissioner Ken Welch emphasized keeping the Rays inside the county, not the city. In fact, the companies that would redevelop Toytown made sure a stadium would be allowed under their plans.

"I actually spoke to the developers early on, and frankly they were excited about a stadium," said Welch, who lives in St. Petersburg.

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## **Price spectacular in win over Oakland**

By ROGER MOONEY | The Tampa Tribune

Sean Rodriguez was in the Tampa Bay Rays' lineup Friday night because he's been getting hits off Oakland Athletics starter Gio Gonzalez since junior high.

Willy Aybar was in the lineup because of the way he swung the bat in Thursday's win at Seattle.

David Price was on the mound because, well, it was his turn to pitch.

Mix them together and you got some clutch hits, some runs and another strong outing by a Rays starting pitcher, and you know what that means?

Start reaching for the record book.

The Rays beat the A's 4-1 at the Oakland Coliseum to improve their major league-best record to 22-7.

It was their fifth straight win, fourth straight on this nine-game West Coast road trip, sixth straight on the road and 13th out of 14 away from Tropicana Field this season.

"We expected to win every game," Price said when asked about the Rays fast start to the season.

Here is how the Rays place among the best starts in baseball history:

They are tied with the 2001 Mariners for the second-best record after 29 games since the turn of this century. They trailed only the 2003 Yankees, who were 23-6.

They are tied for the fourth-best 29-game start over the past 50 years with 2001 Mariners, 1990 A's, 2005 White Sox, 2002 Red Sox and 1988 A's, trailing only the '84 Tigers (25-4), '81 A's (23-6) and '98 Yankees (23-6).

Their 13-1 road record to start the season is tied with the 1923 New York Giants and the 1976 Phillies for the second-best 14-game start away from home to begin a season. The 1984 Tigers hold the all-time mark with a 17-0 start away from Tiger Stadium to begin the year.

"It's been the typical combination," Rays manager Joe Maddon said.

And that combination is pitching, hitting and defense - though the Rays made a pair of errors, one of which led to the A's lone run.

Price threw a season-high 119 pitches and allowed a season-low three hits to improve to 4-1 and lowered his ERA to 1.91.

"I wasn't too impressed with my pitching," Price said. "At some points, yes. At some points, no."

One person who was, besides Maddon, who called Price "the story of the game," was Randy Choate, who replaced Price with two-out in the eighth and the bases loaded.

"He might be the biggest competitor I've ever met in my life," Choate said. "He doesn't want to lose at anything."

Choate, a teammate of Price at Triple A Durham last season, said Price is light-years ahead of where he was a year ago.

"He had a curveball tonight that I've never seen from him before," Choate said.

Choate almost helped preserve the shutout by getting Daric Barton to ground out to third, but Evan Longoria's throw to first was high and pulled Carlos Peña off the base.

"That happens, but I made my pitch," Choate said.

Actually, Choate made his pitch again, getting Ryan Sweeney to bounce to Jason Bartlett for the final out of the inning.

"After he made the error, Evan said, 'My bad,' and I said, 'I'm going to get you another one,' and I almost did," Choate said.

Now, for the offense.

Rodriguez started in place of Ben Zobrist at second because Maddon wanted to give Zobrist a night off, and because Rodriguez has seen the left-handed Gonzalez often - "in junior high, in high school in the Miami-area and in the minor leagues.

"We always have some battles," Rodriguez said.

Gonzalez struck Rodriguez out during Rodriguez's first two trips to the plate, but Rodriguez got him in the seventh inning, sending a line drive over the head of A's center fielder Rajai Davis to score Gabe Kapler and Dioner Navarro.

"I got one pitch to hit every at-bat," Rodriguez said. "But he doesn't let you off the hook."

Based on their history, Rodriguez knew what to look for during that third at-bat â “ a fastball.

"I was looking for it and hit it well," he said. "I was fortunate I didn't miss it."

Call it a hunch, call it good scouting, call it simply wanting to give a starter a day off, but Maddon playing Rodriguez over Zobrist came up big.

"It was probably least of all a hunch," Maddon said. "It's primarily based on information and wanting to keep guys involved."

Maddon wanted to keep Aybar's bat involved in the offense based on the way Aybar swings against lefties. Aybar singled home Longoria in the fourth inning to give the Rays a 1-0 lead.

The Rays tacked on another run in the eighth when Zobrist, batting for Rodriguez, singled and eventually scored on a pinch-hit single by Reid Brignac.

All that was left was for Rafael Soriano to nail down his eighth save in eight opportunities, which he did with a perfect ninth inning.

The only downside to the night was Longoria's hitting streak ended at 12 games.

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## Longoria not trying to start a trend

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

3B Evan Longoria sported a new 'do before Friday's game with the A's. It was sort of a cross between a Mohawk and mullet. A Mollet? Mullahawk?

"I'm going for more of the mullet," Longoria said. "I'm not going Mohawk this time. But I'm not trying to start any trends. It was just something I decided to do."

The Rayhawks were all the rage during the run to the 2008 World Series, with the players and the fans.

Longoria said he isn't trying to rekindle that fad, though C Dioner Navarro, DH Willy Aybar and LHP David Price sport some version of the Mohawk.

"It was cool," Longoria said of the Rayhawk fever that swept Tampa Bay. "But we're trying to get past the whole '08 thing. I think the guys are trying to take it to the next level themselves. It's do your own 'do and express yourself."

Longoria said he was just looking for something different, but he did question his logic making such a drastic change while riding a 12-game hitting streak that matches his career high and is the longest current streak in the majors.

(Go to [TBO.com](#), Keyword: Rays to see video of Longoria's new hairdo.)

Zoby's turn to sit

Rays manager Joe Maddon gave 2B Ben Zobrist the night off Friday because INF Sean Rodriguez had success against Oakland starter LHP Gio Gonzalez during their minor-league careers.

"Honestly, it's an equal thing," Maddon said. "We're going well right now and I want everybody to be included. I want everyone to be involved in ownership right now. And when you don't play guys, you sit them on the bench or you don't pitch them, they don't feel included and I don't like that."

Zobrist was due a day off, and, much like Maddon did Tuesday with CF B.J. Upton and SS Jason Bartlett and will do with 1B Carlos Pena during one of the games at Anaheim next week, he wanted to give a starter a rest during the long trip.

"I know it's early, and I know these guys are young, but I think it's important to try to pick the right day against the right pitcher to give them a day off," Maddon said. "I also think it benefits them to sit and watch a major-league baseball game. I believe that matters. I believe that reenergizes you. You see that you're part of this. This is what I do, this is what I love to do, and I believe that matters, too."

A call to arms

The Rays woke up Friday with three starting pitchers in the American League's top 10 in ERA and four in the top 12.

RHP Matt Garza is seventh with a 2.09 ERA. RHP Jeff Niemann moved into eighth place Thursday night after lowering his to 2.23 after seven shutout innings. Price, who faced the A's on Friday night, was 10th at 2.34. RHP Wade Davis, who starts this afternoon, is 12th at 2.79.

Hitting in the clutch

The Rays lead the majors in hitting with runners in scoring position with a .317 average prior to Friday's game. Crawford is second in the AL with .474. Bartlett dropped to sixth with a .458 average. John Jaso is ninth with a .385 average and Reid Brignac is 10th at .375.

That's impressive considering the Rays are 12th in the AL in batting.

Odds and ends

Pena drew a pair of walks Thursday to move into a tie with Fred McGriff for the franchise record with 305 walks. Pena snapped an 0-for-24 skid Thursday with a ninth-inning double ... The Rays entered Friday's game 41-72 all-time against the A's. That .363 winning percentage is their third-worst among AL opponents ... The Rays entered Friday's game plus-83 in run differential through 28 games. That's tied with the 1984 Tigers for the fourth-best since 1900. The 1902 Pirates were plus-112. The 1905 Giants were plus-97. The 1939 Yankees were plus-91. ... The Rays entered Friday night's game having allowed 85 runs. That's the fewest by an AL team since the 1990 A's, who allowed 84.

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## Rays' pen awaits their phone call

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

Do not confuse them with the Maytag repairman, who sits alone waiting for a phone that will never ring.

The Rays' relief pitchers gather in a group during the middle innings in bullpens across the American League waiting for a phone that does ring, but not very often.

That's what happens when your starting rotation leads the major leagues in ERA and wins and is tied with the Cardinals with a major league-best 62/3 innings per outing.

Yes, the Rays' bullpen gets innings, but not as many as they are accustomed to working.

"It's definitely great right now," Grant Balfour said. "But you don't want to get too many days off. Too many days off can affect you. Sometimes you sit too long and you don't feel good. You think, 'Oh, he hasn't pitched in a week, he's got to feel strong, his arm has to feel good.' But you don't feel good, you almost need to get in games to keep your arm strong from throwing."

It's a good problem to have, especially when an overworked bullpen was seen as one of the problems in 2009.

"That's the way it comes across," Balfour said. "You never know what it is. Were we out of gas? I didn't feel like I was out of gas. We just weren't getting it done, a few of us. Maybe we were tired. Maybe we were overworked. It's nice the way it's working out right now."

James Shields, Matt Garza, Jeff Niemann, David Price and Wade Davis have combined to eat 71 percent of the innings prior to Friday's game with the A's at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

The bullpen has picked up 74 innings through the first 28 games. The relievers are 4-4 with seven saves from Rafael Soriano and have a 3.65 ERA.

But can too little use be a bad thing for a bullpen?

"I'm not really concerned," Manager Joe Maddon said. "The bullpen guys are still able to do their little work, their little side pieces and come out and are able to throw strikes. I'm not as concerned about that. Right now our starting pitching is well. There's going to come a time when we're going to need all of them more often than we want to, so let's just enjoy it right now."

Shields pitched into the ninth inning Tuesday in Seattle, Garza went eight the next night and Niemann pitched seven innings Thursday, meaning the bullpen was asked to pick up four innings.

Maddon used the final two innings Thursday to give Joaquin Benoit and Andy Sonnanstine some much-needed work. Each responded by pitching a scoreless inning.

"I was concerned about Joaquin and Sonny," Maddon said. "That's why I got them involved (Thursday) night. Those are the two guys sort of on the outside of things right now. In a normal game, in a normal evening, the other guys have a much better chance of becoming involved."

Benoit has pitched twice since joining the team April 2. Both were scoreless innings.

Sonnanstine, who is making the transition from the rotation to the bullpen, is still viewed as the long man. Four of his nine appearances have been for at least two innings.

"It's kind of a Catch-22 for me," Sonnanstine said. "I want to be able to get in there and pull my weight and help the team. At the same time, if you're not getting in, that means these guys are doing their job well. So it's a win-win situation. If I go in I have the possibility of doing well and helping us out. If I don't get in it means they're doing great and the team is doing great."

Sonnanstine said this topic came up one night in Seattle, and the guys reached this conclusion:

"Why not go ahead and be fresh in late October?" he said. "You've got to think big picture with the amount of talent we're bringing to the table."

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## **Pena remembers his brief Oakland stint**

### ***Slugger played 40 games for the A's early in his career***

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When he was riding on the team bus from San Francisco to the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum for Friday night's game against the A's, Rays first baseman Carlos Pena couldn't help but think back to 2002.

Pena played 40 games that season for the A's, after coming to Oakland from Texas in a six-player trade. But the A's sent him to Triple-A Sacramento, then shipped him to Detroit on July 6 that year as part of a three-team deal that netted Oakland left-hander Ted Lilly.

"I was sad, but it was one of those moments you learn from and keep on going," Pena said before Friday night's game.

Pena slugged seven home runs and drove in 16 in those 40 games for the A's, showing off the power stroke the Rays know so well. But he hit just .218 with 38 strikeouts to go with 15 walks.

"I did well," Pena said, looking back. "Maybe it wasn't what I thought that mattered. I wasn't the one making the decisions. I would have kept me.

"I was still trying to establish myself. It just wasn't my time."

Pena hit 27 home runs and drove in 82 runs for the Tigers in '04 but was released in March '06. After spending time in the Yankees' farm system then with the Red Sox, he wound up with the Rays in '07. He hit 46 home runs and drove in 121 that year. The next year he homered 31 times and drove in 102, and then hit 39 home runs and drove in 100 last season.

"I've been blessed," Pena said. "A lot of changes and a very interesting journey, that's for sure."

### **Zobrist rests, Rodriguez gets start**

OAKLAND -- Friday turned out to be a day of rest for Ben Zobrist.

Zobrist was out of Tampa Bay's starting lineup for just the second time this season. Sean Rodriguez started at second base and Gabe Kapler in right, with Willy Aybar remaining at DH against the Oakland A's.

Rays manager Joe Maddon said he wanted to give Zobrist some rest and Rodriguez, who has good Minor League numbers against A's starter Gio Gonzalez, some action.

"We're going well right now and I want everybody to be included, I want everybody to be involved in ownership right now," Maddon said before the game. "And when you don't play guys, you sit them on the bench, or you don't pitch them, they don't feel included, and I don't like that. To me, it's important to keep everybody included, and during this whole trip I've been trying to get everybody rest.

"I'm just trying to spread it out. I know it's early and I know these guys are young, but I think it's important to give them a day off. And I also think it benefits them to sit and watch a Major League baseball game. I really believe that matters. I believe when you sit down it re-energizes you. You see that you're a part of this, this is what I do, this is what I love to do."

"He's actually had some success against this guy, so we wanted to involve him today. I just want to keep Willy out there. Willy looked really good yesterday, and the fact that they're throwing a lefty, I kind of like that, too."

Zobrist is still looking for his first home run, but he went 2-for-4 Thursday against Seattle and 4-for-13 in the series.

"I think sometimes it's nice to take a rest after a day like that," Zobrist said. "If you go oh-for the day before, you're chomping at the bit to get back in there, whereas if you had a good game, it's easier to take a rest. Dwell on the positives from yesterday. We had a good win, and getting a couple knocks always feels good."

Rodriguez made his 12 start of the season and 11th at second base.

### **Rays pitchers pushing each other**

OAKLAND -- Peer pressure has been a good thing for Rays starting pitchers this season.

Entering Friday night's game against the Oakland A's, Tampa Bay's starters were a combined 17-3, with a Major League best 2.61 ERA.

James Shields was 4-0 with a 3.15 ERA, Matt Garza (5-1, 2.09), Wade Davis (3-1, 2.79), Jeff Niemann (2-0, 2.23) and David Price (3-1, 2.34).

"Everybody's throwing so well you don't want to be the guy that's holding everybody down," said Davis, who starts Saturday against the A's. "It's definitely been fun and hopefully we can keep it going."

Before Price's start Friday night, the Rays' starters led the majors in wins and were tied with St. Louis with an average of 6 2/3 innings per start. Their last loss was April 23, when Garza took the defeat against Toronto.

Did Davis see this type of performance coming from Tampa Bay's starters?

"No doubt," Davis said. "They're all super competitive. They go out there to win every game."

### Worth noting

Third baseman Evan Longoria's 12-game hitting streak, matching his career high, ended Friday night. He went 0-for-1 with three walks. He's hitting .420 over his past 13 games. ... The Rays are off to the hottest start in baseball, but they haven't been able to put much distance between themselves and the Yankees.

"That's beautiful," Rays manager Joe Maddon said before Friday night's game of the tight race in the AL East. "I actually love it. It's going to make for an interesting summer. They're very formidable. There's no question, but that's OK. Again, it's about us and what we do and what we think about on a daily basis. Toronto's also playing well. I like that too. I like the fact we play in this division. I like the fact it keeps you on your toes every day. It's exciting, and I know our guys love the challenge."

Carlos Pena entered Friday night's game with 315 walks, tied for the franchise record with Fred McGriff, and went 0-for-4 without a walk. ... Willy Aybar went 1-for-4 and is batting .393 in his last eight games. He started the season 1-for-12. ... Rafael Soriano had a one-two-three ninth with two strikeouts and recorded his ninth save in nine chances.

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## Pitching-rich Rays are a problem for Red Sox—and everyone else

Tom Verducci, SI.com

Here's a little reminder for the Boston Red Sox to post on the clubhouse fridge: Of the past 14 AL East teams to reach the postseason, all did so with at least 94 wins. Translation: There is no back door to October when you play in that division. And after five weeks of the season, the Tampa Bay Rays and New York Yankees look so good that the threshold number is likely to be even higher than 94.

Yes, it's not too early to say that the Rays are for real. They are so good that they have interjected urgency to Boston's season in early May. The Red Sox have already had one bad month. Another will doom them. They have to play .600 ball for five months to have a chance -- not impossible, but the sword of Damocles will be hanging over them.

For all their early problems, Boston's biggest problem is the Rays. In its first 28 games Tampa Bay outscored its opponents by 83 runs. That's such an absurd pace that if the Rays kept it up they would finish with a run differential of +480. For context, it would blow away the run differentials of the 1998 Yankees (+309), 1927 Yankees (+376) and 1939 Yankees (+411), three of the greatest teams of all time.

The key for the Rays is that they have five starting pitchers between ages 24 and 28 with smooth deliveries who pitch off their fastball -- all good markers for holding up over the course of the season. **Wade Davis**, **Matt Garza**, **David Price** and **Jeff Niemann**, for instance, rank 6-7-8-9 in the league for greatest percentage of fastballs. And **James Shields** (4-0) is nearly as aggressive. The Rays' starters are 17-3 with a 2.51 ERA -- and had extra rest for 18 of their first 28 starts.

And if the Rays need another starter, they have top prospect **Jeremy Hellickson**, 23, sitting in Triple-A. He began the year 5-0 with a 2.57 ERA. Those starters should keep Tampa out of any lengthy tailspin.

The Rays even get a break with the interleague schedule. The Red Sox play 12 games against defending NL playoff teams (Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Colorado). The Rays have none.

I liked Tampa Bay over Boston before the year started because I thought their speed and power right-handed pitching made for a mismatch in their head-to-head series. (The Rays are 4-0 thus far vs. the Red Sox, outscoring them 24-9.) It turns out that the Rays have been trouble for just about everyone. They are as good as any team in baseball right now.

### Hot start is a good omen

The Rays' 21-7 start sounds pretty impressive, right? But what does it mean? We've all seen fluke teams get out of the gate quickly and fade. But here's the thing: Fluke teams don't start a season 21-7.

The Rays are only the seventh team in the 15 full seasons with the wild-card format to go 21-7 at the start of a season. Of the previous six, five won their division, including two eventual world champions. Only the 2002 Red Sox started 21-7 and didn't make the playoffs -- and they won 93 games. And the average win total for those six teams? Try 103.

Here is the track record for teams in the wild-card era that started 21-7:

Year	Team	Start	Final Record	Finish
1998	Yankees	22-6	114-48	Won World Series
2000	Braves	21-7	95-67	Won division
2001	Mariners	22-6	116-46	Won division
2002	Red Sox	21-7	93-69	2nd place
2003	Yankees	22-6	101-61	Won pennant
2005	White Sox	21-7	99-63	Won World Series
2010	Rays	21-7	?	?

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## Rays' roster holes (excerpt from blog)

ESPN.com / Buster Olney

As they have amassed a 22-7 record, the [Tampa Bay Rays](#) have two possible needs in their current roster: They could use a right-handed reliever and a left-handed DH-type. The left-handed hitter may well come from outside the organization, and undoubtedly, there will be an opportunity that would present itself during the year; as one GM mentioned on Friday, Berkman would be an exceptional fit as a DH if the Astros ever decided to move him and the money could be worked out.

The right-hander reliever could come from within. Jeremy Hellickson, one of the top pitching prospects in baseball, could become the Rays' version of [Joba Chamberlain](#). So far this season, Hellickson has been dominant in Triple-A, walking just seven and striking out 35 in six starts, posting a 5-0 record and a 2.57 ERA.

The challenge for the Rays will be in deciding when to begin transitioning Hellickson into this role for the team's stretch drive. Right now, he is the effectively the No. 6 starter in the Rays' organization; if any of Tampa Bay's starters in the major leagues goes down with injuries, Hellickson is prepared to step into Tampa Bay's rotation. If the Rays were to shift him into a relief role, they would lose that capability.

Unless Hellickson is needed in the major league rotation sometime in the next few months, he probably would shift into a relief role sometime in late July or early August.

The Rays are an incredible 13-1 on the road so far, after [another dominant outing](#) from [David Price](#). Joe Maddon doesn't want [Carlos Pena](#) to [worry about his batting average](#).

Why Price won, from Albert Larcada of ESPN Stats and Information:

- Hitters were 1-for-8 against curveball (.125). Entering Friday, batters were hitting .400 (6-15) against his curve. According to Inside Edge, hitters had zero well-hit balls in 24 at-bats. Including Friday's 0-for-4, hitters are now 2-for-29 (.069) on the season when *ahead* in the count versus Price.
- The Rays' hitters are trusting each other -- they're taking walks and passing the baton during rallies, rather than expanding the strike zone and swinging at bad pitches. Tampa Bay currently ranks [third in the majors in walks](#), behind the Twins and the [Atlanta Braves](#).

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## Gasp, could it be that the Yankees-Red Sox are simply playing for a wild-card spot?

Bob Nightengale, USA Today

The Yankees-Red Sox rivalry may be the greatest in all of sports, but sorry if the Tampa Bay Rays sit back, shrug their shoulders, and yawn this weekend

The Rays just happen to be the best team in baseball, and are off to one of the greatest starts in recent history.

The Rays are sitting in first place with a 21-7 record, 1 1/2 games ahead of the Yankees in the AL East. Their start leaves the Yankees and Red Sox playing for only the sixth time since 2005 without either team in first place on May 1 or later. Four of those times occurred in 2008 when the Rays won the AL pennant.

"They're [Tampa] going to struggle at some point, too," Red Sox first baseman Kevin Youkilis told *MLB.com*. "They can't go the whole season the way they are right now, or they would set a record. If they do set a record, we're not going to catch them anyway."

The way the Rays are playing, there's no evidence they'll ever struggle this year. They are only the fourth team since 1961 to start 12-1 or better on the road. The last team to accomplish the feat was the 1981 Oakland Athletics.

Oh yeah, and the Rays have now won 18 of their last 22 games. Their ERA is 2.94, the lowest by an AL team since 1995, and they have had a starting pitcher lose a game since April 23. In the last eight games, the Rays' starters are yielded a 1.43 ERA.

"We're just playing," says Rays starter James Shields, 4-0, 3.15 ERA. "We're going out every night and playing hard. That's all you can ask. Right now we're in a groove and just running with it. We're not looking back."

If they do gaze in that rear-view mirror, they'll see the rest of the AL East suffocating on their exhaust.

"Right now we're going to ride this as long as we can," Rays manager Joe Maddon says. "'Starting pitching, obviously, has been fabulous, there's no other way to describe it. Offensively, we get really hungry when the situation arises. When we get some runners out there the quality of the at-bats rises. Defensively, we keep catching the ball. We're playing well on all cylinders right now."

And then, Maddon offers this kicker for the Yankees and Red Sox to chew on this weekend:

"I believe," Maddon says, "we can play to this standard for a long time."

Gulp.

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## Catching rivals tough task for BoSox

Ken Rosenthal, FOXSports.com

Don't look now, but Team Run Prevention is scoring at a high rate. The Red Sox, for all their fretting over designated hitter David Ortiz, all their scrambling without injured outfielders Jacoby Ellsbury and Mike Cameron, rank third in the American League in runs per game.

The Sox's starting pitching is returning to form. Their defense finally is settling down. Boston, winner of 11 of its last 16 games entering their weekend series with the Yankees at Fenway Park (MLB on FOX, Saturday, 3:10 p.m. ET) is going to be fine.

Alas, fine might not be good enough.

The Sox's enemy within is formidable; prominent veterans are struggling to adapt to reduced roles, making for an uncomfortable clubhouse. But while the internal issues are daunting, the external threats from the Rays and Yankees represent an even greater challenge.

To win 95 games — the likely minimum for a postseason berth out of the AL East — the Sox will need to finish 80-53. They already trail the Rays by 6-1/2 games and the Yankees by five, and have yet to play either of those teams on the road. In fact, after this weekend, they will not face the Yankees at home again until Oct. 1-3.

The Sox's schedule through May 26, meanwhile, is brutal — the Yankees and then the improved Blue Jays to complete the current homestand, followed by a five-game trip to Detroit and Yankee Stadium, a two-game homestand against the Twins and a six-game trip to Philadelphia and Tampa Bay.

Surviving all that will not be easy — and even after the schedule becomes more bearable, the Sox might find it difficult to keep pace with the Rays and Yankees.

A year ago, the Rays experienced the same type of early malaise as the Red Sox, stumbling to a 23-27 start. From May 29 through Aug. 5, the Rays went 37-21, the third-best record in the majors, pulling within three games of the Sox and 5 1/2 of the Yankees. But then they faded, going 24-30 the rest of the way.

The Sox, a much older club, are even more unlikely to sustain such a frantic charge. This year's Rays do not figure to maintain their 122-win pace. But the Sox's best hope is that the Yankees become vulnerable to their own age/injury questions, a possibility that seemingly is increasing by the day.

One rival executive already projects that the battle for the wild card will come down to Yankees vs. Red Sox — wheezers vs. geezers. The sudden injuries to three members of the Yankees' Core Four — left-hander Andy Pettitte, catcher Jorge Posada and closer Mariano Rivera — actually might be the Red Sox's most heartening development of the season.

The team that advances could very well be the one that stays the healthiest — and makes the best in-season adjustments. One thing we know about the Red Sox — and for that matter, the Yankees. Neither club will look the same on Aug. 1 as it does today.

The Sox's turnaround should, at least for now, buy more time for Ortiz, who no longer is starting against left-handed pitching. Red Sox DHs rank eighth in the AL with a .710 OPS -- not great, but not as bad as, say, the Mariners, whose .456 OPS out of the DH spot is worse than six NL teams are getting from their pitchers.

A Jeremy Hermida-Mike Lowell platoon might be an upgrade over the current Ortiz-Lowell combination -- Hermida is slugging .472 against right-handers to Ortiz's .426, though the samples consist of only 53 and 54 at-bats. Lowell, 36, is too physically fragile to handle the position full-time. The Sox might end up juggling DHs all season.

Ortiz hit 27 homers after May 30 last season, but many within the industry doubted that he was fully back, noting his inability to handle good pitching. Some Sox officials also had their doubts, and the team could have hedged its bets by adding left fielder Matt Holliday in free agency instead of right-hander John Lackey. But Lackey proved less expensive and easier to sign, so run prevention became the new Sox mantra.

The offense enjoyed a massive revival in the Sox's just-completed sweep of the Angels, producing 36 runs in four games. The degree of difficulty, however, will be steeper this weekend against the Yankees' Phil Hughes, CC Sabathia and A.J. Burnett.

Indeed, the Sox's enduring concerns about their offense might discourage them from adding a skilled defensive catcher. For the rest of this season anyway, the run production of Victor Martinez and Jason Varitek might be too valuable for the team to lose. But rest assured, the issue will be addressed over the winter.

The Angels stole three bases Thursday night, making opponents 42-for-47 against the Red Sox this season, a 89.3 percent success rate. Martinez, though, is working hard on his throwing, and he and Varitek have shown improvement of late.

Remember, the Sox made the playoffs last season even though opponents were 151 of 167, a 90.4 percent success rate. If they're below-average — as opposed to well-below average — that will be good enough.

The bottom line: The Sox are good and getting better. The return of Ellsbury and Cameron, perhaps as soon as next week, will make them more athletic. The front four in their vaunted rotation — Lackey, Josh Beckett, Jon Lester, Clay Buchholz — will make them competitive in virtually every game.

"When the starting pitching starts to dominate again, you're going to see a completely different team," one rival executive says. "That sets everything up. The bullpen is not great. But it's a lot better when the starting pitching is doing what it should be doing."

The enemy no longer is within. The enemy is the competition.

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RED SOX NOTEBOOK

## Opportunity arrives with Yankees

By Peter Abraham, Globe Staff | May 7, 2010

The Red Sox beat the Yankees, 9-7, in the first game of the season. The teams veered off in different directions from there, the Sox struggling to find even a modicum of consistency, the Yankees building one of the best records in baseball.

The old rivals meet again tonight to start a three-game series. For the Sox, it represents an opportunity to make up some of the ground already lost.

"It seems like we've taken a collective deep breath and are playing the kind of baseball we're capable of playing," general manager **Theo Epstein** said before last night's 11-6 win over the Angels. "Now the key is to keep it going."

The Yankees, who had yesterday off, are 19-8 and have won seven of their last eight games. But they remain in the second place in the AL East behind the torrid Tampa Bay Rays, now 21-7.

The Sox are aware of how well the Rays and Yankees have played. But they aren't paying close attention to the standings yet.

"They're going to struggle at some point, too," **Kevin Youkilis** said. "They're not going to go the whole season the way they are now. We don't worry about the standings right now because the fraction of how many games you've played in a season right now is very low. We just focus on each game and each pitch."

The Yankees arrive with some injury concerns. **Mariano Rivera** has not pitched since last Friday because of stiffness on his left side. He was cleared to pitch Wednesday but was held out of a save situation against the Orioles as a precaution.

Catcher **Jorge Posada** is questionable because of a strained calf muscle in his right leg. He last played Monday. The Yankees have been using **Francisco Cervelli** in his absence.

**Andy Pettitte**, who was not scheduled to pitch against the Sox in this series, will miss his next start because of elbow pain and could end up on the disabled list.

The Yankees also are playing without center fielder **Curtis Granderson**, who is on the disabled list with a strained left groin.

The Yankees will skip struggling **Javier Vazquez** and start **Phil Hughes**, **CC Sabathia**, and **A.J. Burnett** against the Sox.

### Objective met

Epstein said the changes he wanted to see have come since the team meeting manager **Terry Francona** held Monday. No personnel changes are planned. At this point in the season, the GM said, only cosmetic changes are possible.

Epstein pointed out that the Sox had similar poor stretches in every recent season except 2005. This slump was magnified because it came at the start.

"Getting out of the gates slow means that there's no context," he said. "Things look a lot worse than they are.

"There was a feeling around the team that wasn't quite right, basically because of the way we were playing. No one felt really comfortable because we weren't ourselves."

That changed after the meeting.

"A couple of guys have found that comfort zone," said Epstein. "We're not doing anything we're not capable of. We're just playing good, clean baseball."

### Cameron feels 'great'

**Mike Cameron**, out since April 18 with an abdominal strain, will be examined today by team doctor **Thomas Gill**. If that goes well, the next step would be starting a minor league rehab assignment. "I feel great," Cameron said. "But they need to make sure I'm healing and it's safe to do more." A similar determination will soon be made with **Jacoby Ellsbury**. "We're trying to get the most information, when's the best timetable," Francona said. "I don't think we can force that. We need these guys to be healthy as opposed to having a timetable."

### Triple threat

The Red Sox have two triples, both by Youkilis, an unlikely speedster who hit a ball to the base of the wall in center in the seventh inning and raced to third. His first three-bagger came on Opening Day . . . Fourteen of **Jeremy Hermida's** 16 RBIs have come with two outs . . . **John Smoltz**, who spent part of last season with the Sox before unofficially retiring, was at the game working as an analyst for MLB Network. He has signed up to try to qualify for the US Open golf tournament . . . **J.D. Drew** and former Red Sox stars **Nomar Garciaparra** and **Fred Lynn** were among the 25 players named to the College World Series Legends Team, as announced by the NCAA yesterday . . . Ever sit around with your friends and recite the funniest lines from the classic baseball comedy, "Major League"? That's what **Clay Buchholz**, **Dustin Pedroia**, **Jonathan Van Every**, and Youkilis were doing in the dugout before batting practice. Buchholz does a solid imitation of **Harry Doyle**, the announcer played by **Bob Uecker**.