

Rays rock A's Gray, roll to 3rd straight win

By Bill Chastain and Jane Lee, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The hot-hitting Rays took batting practice off of Sonny Gray, tagging the struggling A's starter for nine hits in a 7-3 series-opening victory at the Coliseum on Thursday night.

Gray was responsible for all seven runs in just five innings, surrendering solo home runs to Tim Beckham and Corey Dickerson ahead of a four-run attack in the fifth -- featuring five consecutive hits to open the frame -- that put the Rays ahead for good. They've plated 28 runs in their last three games.

"I felt like I had a good approach coming in, and the ball just wasn't coming out like it has been," said Gray, who has yielded 15 home runs, after allowing 17 all of last year. "My breaking stuff was good, but my fastball just wasn't there tonight. It's tough mentally sometimes, but you just gotta continue to battle through it."

Beckham collected hits in each of his first two plate appearances before popping out in the sixth, halting his streak of consecutive at-bats with a hit at eight, tying a Rays club record.

Tampa left-hander Matt Moore was struck for a three-run homer off the bat of Jake Smolinski in the second but retired each of his next 11 batters and got through seven innings in a solid outing, allowing only three other hits.

"Matt was outstanding again," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "One pitch he'd probably like to have back. But other than that, he was incredibly efficient. I liked that he got through the seventh inning there when his pitch count got up a little bit. Not high, but he was working at that point. Really good offspeed stuff."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Beast mode for Beck: A day after tying a club record with five hits against Colorado, Beckham arrived at the ballpark to find out he would be playing first base for the first time -- ever. And how did he respond? He hit like a first baseman, going deep off Gray in the second to push the Rays' lead to 2-0.

Sonny stumbles: In between home runs by Beckham and Dickerson, Gray fanned four in a row, flashing the kind of stuff that guided him through so many dominant starts of the past. Nearly four months into the season, however, Gray has been unable to find any type of consistency, leaving him with a 5.49 ERA -- which should make it difficult for trade suitors to properly dictate his value. Just last season, he finished third in American League Cy Young voting with a 2.73 ERA.

"Today I thought was one of the best breaking balls he had all year," catcher Stephen Vogt said. "A little bit of fastball command issues at times. Velocity kind of dipped and was a little sporadic. Man, you have to give them some credit, too. Every pitch he missed they hit."

"He always goes out there with good stuff," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It's just a matter of sustaining it multiple innings, multiple games and getting on a roll. At this point he hasn't been able to do that yet."

Moore of the same: Moore continued his consistent run by going seven innings. He has now pitched six or more innings in nine consecutive starts, extending the longest streak of his career. It's the longest streak by a Ray since Chris Archer went 6-plus innings in nine straight starts from June 23-Aug. 9, 2015. Prior to the streak, Moore had lasted six innings just once in his previous six starts and he'd completed six innings pitched only nine times in his first 23 starts after his return from Tommy John surgery.

A's bats silenced again: After combining to score 27 runs in their first five games out of the break, the A's have been held to three total in their last two contests, managing just four hits in seven innings against the opposing starter in each. Outside of Smolinski's home run, the A's other four hits were all singles Thursday. They dropped to 10-15 against left-handed starters this season.

QUOTABLE

"I think [Smolinski's home run] kind of woke me up a little bit. It was early in the game and just trying to set the tone by throwing strikes and pounding the zone early. ... [Smolinski] put it over the wall, which kind of lights a fire under you." -- Moore on his performance.

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Erasmus Ramirez hit a batter and allowed a base hit to start the ninth, prompting Cash to call for Alex Colome, who once again delivered, getting the final three outs to record his 21st save in 21 opportunities. Not since Fernando Rodney converted 22 straight in 2012 has a Rays put together a streak that long.

WHAT'S NEXT

Rays: Jake Odorizzi (4-5, 4.39) makes his second start of the second half as the Rays play the Athletics in the second game of their four-game series on Friday at 10:05 p.m. ET. Odorizzi pitched well against the Orioles on Sunday, staying out of the big inning and showing his best fastball of the season.

A's: The A's will have left-hander Sean Manaea on the mound for Friday's 7:05 p.m. PT matchup with the Rays at the Coliseum. Manaea, who has

a 3.18 ERA in four games since his return from the disabled list, has never faced Tampa.

Beckham ties Rays mark with 8-AB hit streak

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Tim Beckham had an interesting day at the ballpark Thursday before and during the Rays' 7-3 win over the Athletics.

For starters, he played first base and trumping that unique event, he extended his hit streak to a team record-tying eight consecutive at-bats.

Beckham arrived at the ballpark and found his name in the lineup at first base -- a position he had never played, even as a kid. So he worked with infield coach Tom Foley before the game, and Rays manager Kevin Cash told him not to think too much.

While Cash was at it, he might as well have told him to hit like a first baseman, too. Because he did.

In Beckham's first at-bat, he homered to left off Sonny Gray to push the Rays' lead to 2-0. When he singled up the middle to start the fifth, he put himself into the Rays' record book.

The thread began on Monday against the Rockies when Beckham tripled in the seventh inning. He then walked in his final at-bat before a day off on Tuesday. On Wednesday, he went 5-for-5 against the Rockies, which fed into Thursday night's performance.

Ty Wigginton was the last Rays player to accomplish the feat in 2007, and Aubrey Huff also turned the trick in '04.

Beckham also tied a team record for reaching base in nine consecutive at-bats, joining B.J. Upton and Logan Forsythe.

Beckham's streak came to an end when he popped out to second to end the sixth, thereby ending a chance to reach the Major League record of 12. Walt Dropo did it for the Tigers in 1952 and Johnny Kling for the Cubs in 1902.

Prior to his hot streak, Beckham had struggled at the plate for most of the season. He has since raised his average from below .200 to .223.

"Just trying to be more short and direct to the ball," said Beckham of his adjustments. "Just trying to stay within myself and not try and do too much. Trust my routine and trust my hands. It's been working out pretty well."

As for first base, Beckham handled the position like a pro.

"Just told myself I trusted my ability," Beckham said. "Trust in my ability and be comfortable being uncomfortable. And it helped out."

Cash praised Beckham's effort.

"We kind of make light of [Beckham playing first]," Cash said. "That's not an easy thing. That's uncomfortable to go play somewhere in a big league ball game. You can imagine, there's probably some nerves and anxiety. He did a really good job of kind of keying in on Foley today. Paying attention to where he needed to be, position-wise."

Beckham smiled when asked about his day at a new position.

"It was fun," Beckham said. "It's always fun when you're winning."

Archer, Rays stay centered as rumors swirl

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Thursday proved to be Chris Archer's day to be front and center with regard to the trade rumor mill.

ESPN's Jayson Stark reported that the Dodgers were the favorite to acquire Archer via a trade before Major League Baseball's Aug. 1 non-waiver trade deadline. According to Stark, a source told him there's a "70 percent" chance Archer goes to the Dodgers.

Archer smiled about that prediction, asking reporters, "How do you even get that, is this a meteorologist?"

The Rays signed Archer to an extension on April 2, 2014 for six years at \$25.5 million with club options for 2020-21. He was asked if he would feel wronged if the Rays traded him after he signed the long-term deal.

"I definitely would like to stay here because I like the people that we have in our organization," Archer said. "But it's a part of the business. I wouldn't feel wronged, because with signing my deal, I knew this was a possibility and would eventually happen."

"I'm halfway through the guarantee. It's not really that surprising just looking at where we're at and how the Rays typically do things. But I do like the guys we have and if the core group of pitchers stay along with Longo and Logan Forsythe, we could have something special here."

Rumors concerning Rays players have swirled throughout the Major Leagues this trade season, primarily because the Rays are lower in the standings than they have been recent years. Prominent among the rumors are Archer and fellow starters Matt Moore, and Jake Odorizzi.

"It's almost entertaining to a point about who is going to be the next person to be out the door," Odorizzi said. "But so far, we're all here and hanging out."

Steve Pearce has also been among the players rumored to be traded. Thursday afternoon when Tim Beckham was penciled in at first base, the idea that Pearce had been traded seemed to have become a reality. But he's just returning from a hamstring injury and came up a little tired after playing two days in a row in Colorado. Pearce said he hopes he's not traded in the coming days.

"I like this team a lot," Pearce said. "And I have fun every day when I come here. I feel like this team is good, really good. Man, we've been hit

with injuries and bad luck all year, that if you had told me this would be our record at the middle of the year, I would have told you you were crazy. No way that our team is as bad as our record reflects.”

Rays manager Kevin Cash knows that the rumors aren't going to stop for now.

“We're going to have 10 days of dealing with this,” Cash said. “...We can't let it become a distraction.

“To me [the rumors are] a credit to the quality of our pitchers and the quality of our players that people are asking about. But until something is done, there's not a ton to be commenting on.”

Archer sounded like a wise man when he noted that he'd been traded twice in the past, and noted, “I know that at the end of the day, each organization is trying to do what's best for them. And if the Rays think that that's what's best for them, then that's what they think.”

Cobb progressing toward return to rotation

By Bill Chastain, MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Alex Cobb, working his way back from Tommy John surgery, threw 28 pitches on Wednesday during a bullpen session at Tropicana Field. On Thursday, Rays manager Kevin Cash noted that, “Cobb went well.”

So the next step for the Rays right-hander is to throw Saturday in live batting practice in Port Charlotte.

“And then we'll kind of go from there,” Cash said.

Earlier this week, Cobb's rehab assignment was put on hold due to fatigue and mechanical issues. Now he appears perched on returning to pitching in games if all goes well on Saturday.

When asked if Cobb could pitch in a game after Saturday's outing, Cash allowed: “I think that's fair. See how he comes in after the sim game.”

Cobb's hiccup likely puts him on a path toward a mid-August return assuming all goes well.

Worth noting

- Desmond Jennings, who is on the 15-day disabled list with a strained right hamstring, is also scheduled to play in Port Charlotte on Saturday.
- Brad Boxberger threw an inning in Port Charlotte on Thursday, starting for the Stone Crabs against Brevard County. The right-hander got three outs on 10 pitches, allowing no hits or walks while striking out two.

“Velo was really good,” Cash said. “Very efficient, two punchouts. So that's a real good sign. The plan would be for him to throw Saturday.”

- First baseman Logan Morrison has been battling a sore right wrist, which prompted the Rays to start Tim Beckham at first base against the A's on Thursday night. Morrison was scheduled to see a doctor prior to Thursday night's game. Cash said he thought the injury was strictly inflammation and that he did not believe Morrison would be headed for the DL.

Brigham, Renfro among top prospect performers Thursday

By Chad Thornburg, MLB.com

It's been a stellar month for Marlins No. 24 prospect Jeff Brigham. Pitching for Class A Advanced Jupiter, Brigham has yet to yield an earned run in July, lowering his ERA from 5.28 to 3.87 in just four starts (21 2/3 innings).

The 24-year-old righty turned in yet another impressive performance Thursday, tossing seven scoreless innings and striking out a season-best 10 batters. Brigham limited the Dunedin Blue Jays to four hits and one walk as the Hammerheads secured a 1-0 victory at Roger Dean Stadium.

“I think the confidence is high right now; he's attacking the hitters,” Jupiter manager Randy Ready told MiLB.com. “Throwing strikes is the name of the game and his stuff had a lot of life on it with some late movement. He pitched outstanding.”

The rest of the best performances from top prospects Thursday:

- Rays No. 7 prospect Daniel Robertson helped his Triple-A Durham squad to an 8-4 victory over Scranton/Wilkes Barre with a strong offensive performance. He led the way by batting 3-for-4 with a home run -- his fourth of the year -- two RBIs and two runs scored. It's the fourth time this season that Robertson has collected three or more hits in a single game.
- For a second straight start, Chih-Wei Hu, Tampa Bay's No. 12 prospect, did not surrender a run, tossing seven shutout frames -- matching his season-high for innings pitched -- for Double-A Montgomery. Hu gave up just two hits and a walk while striking out six batters vs. Birmingham, lowering his ERA to 2.20 for the Biscuits. The righty didn't get the win, however, as the Barons rallied in the ninth inning for a comeback victory.

Odorizzi faces A's in potential trade audition

By Mark Chiarelli, MLB.com

Jake Odorizzi takes the mound Friday night to face the A's at the Coliseum, and it's a safe bet several contending teams in need of pitching will watch closely.

The Dodgers, Nationals and Rangers are among the teams continuing to vet the starting-pitching market in advance of the Aug. 1 Trade Deadline. Odorizzi was strong in his last outing on Sunday, allowing two runs over six innings while striking out seven against the Orioles.

"I was able to limit the damage," Odorizzi said. "Kind of how I was able to do it last year. I was able to pitch out of some jams and I think that's what you need to do over the course of the season to be successful."

Odorizzi, 26, is considered one of the better starters on the trade market, including teammates Matt Moore and Drew Smyly. After going 9-9 with a 3.35 ERA last year, he's 4-5 with a 4.39 ERA in 20 starts with 105 strikeouts in 110 2/3 innings. He faced the A's on May 13, surrendering five runs on seven hits in four innings, picking up a loss.

The A's will counter with lefty Sean Manaea, who returns to the mound Friday for the first time since being unexpectedly thrust into action last Sunday. He pitched five innings of emergency relief against the Blue Jays following first-inning injuries to Rich Hill and Andrew Triggs, and pitched well, allowing only a two-run homer to Troy Tulowitzki, while striking out four.

Manaea's made three starts since returning from the disabled list June 29. He held both the Giants and Astros scoreless, but he allowed six runs to the Twins in a start that was delayed nearly three hours by weather.

"The Minnesota game was pretty weird," Manaea said. "I had never done that before, and I had never done [the Toronto appearance] before. It's all about making adjustments and trying to make things work. The next time something like that ever happens, I'll be prepared."

Things to know about this game

- Odorizzi has never beaten the A's, going 0-2 with a 6.14 ERA in three starts. He's made one career start at the Coliseum, allowing three runs in six innings.
- Marcus Semien has faced Odorizzi only four times, but he's made them count, going 3-for-4 with a home run and a double.
- The A's announced Thursday afternoon that Jesse Hahn, who was drafted by the Rays in 2010, will be recalled Sunday to face his former team in the series finale.

Rumor roundup: White Sox could be sellers

By Andrew Simon, MLB.com

With the Aug. 1 non-waiver Trade Deadline approaching, many teams have decisions to make about whether to buy, sell or hold.

One such club is the White Sox, who have not reached the postseason since 2008. Chicago has sputtered after a strong start and now sits under .500, far behind in both the American League Central and the AL Wild Card race, with general manager Rick Hahn saying Thursday that his team is "mired in mediocrity."

Hahn acknowledged that the club's slide means he won't be trading for short-term solutions to help down the stretch. So could the club instead ship off attractive pieces, such as left-handers Chris Sale and Jose Quintana? Bob Nightengale of USA Today reported that everyone except rookie shortstop Tim Anderson is "in play." For his part, Hahn said the Sox need "to stay open-minded," but suggested a dramatic sell-off may be a step too far.

It certainly appears the Sox will be a team to watch in the coming days, but they are far from the only ones. Here are some of the other rumors that were circulating on Thursday:

Dodgers leading charge for Archer

Despite being out of the playoff chase, the Rays don't need to trade right-hander Chris Archer, a talented starter who is signed to an affordable contract that runs through 2019 and includes club options for the following two seasons. But that doesn't mean Tampa Bay won't capitalize on the market if the right opportunity arises.

An ESPN report Thursday quoted an unnamed baseball executive who estimated that the Dodgers have a "70 percent" chance to acquire Archer. While other clubs reportedly believe their chances of landing Archer are low, the Dodgers have a president of baseball operations (Andrew Friedman) with strong ties to the Rays, a starting rotation that has been ravaged by injuries and the prospects to get a deal done.

Archer, 27, finished fifth in the AL Cy Young Award voting last year, when he posted a 3.23 ERA, but he's been inconsistent this year. In 21 starts, he owns a 4.60 ERA, though his strikeout rate has held steady at 10.7 per nine innings.

Dream Trade Deadline scenarios for 10 GMs

By Richard Justice, MLB.com

In a perfect world, what would your favorite team do? Forget fallback positions. Let's go for something that might just be the final touch. Let's attempt to put ourselves in the shoes of 10 executives as the Aug. 1 non-waiver Trade Deadline approaches.

One point to make: Andrew Miller and Aroldis Chapman might be the two most hotly pursued players in baseball. But the Yankees may not be selling, especially after winning four in a row before Thursday's loss and getting to within 5 1/2 games of a Wild Card spot.

Is a Yankees playoff push a long shot? Sure it is. But it simply is not in their makeup to cash in a season. While it would be tempting to put one or two players -- Miller, Jay Bruce -- on a half-dozen teams, that's not what we've done here.

However, if the Cubs throw Kyle Schwarber into a deal for Miller ...

Anyway, here goes:

1. Jon Daniels, Rangers

White Sox LHP Chris Sale and Rays RHP Jake Odorizzi

Yes, both of them. Did I mention bullpen help? Daniels is looking for that, too, which emphasizes how fragile things are for a club that has spent virtually the entire season atop the American League West. The Rangers desperately need to shore up a starting rotation that has been the worst in baseball the past three weeks. Daniels is thinking big, too, gauging the price for three elite starters: Sale, Sonny Gray and Chris Archer. So far, the White Sox have said Sale is unavailable. But Daniels' farm system is deep enough to make it tempting for the White Sox. That would mean giving up Joey Gallo or Jurickson Profar.

5. Neal Huntington, Pirates

Rays RHP Chris Archer

This one isn't complicated. Huntington wants a rotation upgrade to line up behind Gerrit Cole as we head toward October. And he has the prospects to get any of the best ones, including, not just Archer, but also Gray and Sale. Huntington may settle for something less dramatic, but mindful of playing in a division with the Cubs and Cardinals, he knows he may have to get outside his comfort zone. This one might turn out to be a pipe dream for Pittsburgh, as the Dodgers are apparently making a strong push for Archer.

Rays keep rolling, run winning streak to 3 by beating A's

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — Matt Moore's biggest mistake Thursday also may have been the biggest reason he and the Rays ended up winning the game, beating the A's 7-3 for their third straight victory.

The fat fastball he threw to Jake Smolinski in the second inning turned into a three-run homer that cost the Rays the lead at the time, but it also propelled Moore to what turned out to be another impressive chapter in his mid-season resurgence.

"I think that kind of woke me up a little bit," Moore said. "It was early in the game, I was just trying to set the tone by throwing strikes, pounding the zone early, and Smolinski ended up getting it out of there. It kind of lights a fire up under you."

With scouts from at least a half dozen interested teams watching, Moore continued what has been a month-plus long impressive run, working seven solid innings to improve to 6-7, 4.31.

"Matt was outstanding again," manager Kevin Cash said. "There's one pitch that he'd probably like to have back but other than that he was just incredible. Incredibly efficient. I like that he got through the seventh inning right there.

"Really good off-speed stuff. The fastball sets everything up and then that's where you see those guys expand on those really tough breaking balls below the zone, and the change-ups also."

Moore wasn't the whole story, as the Rays brought their hot bats with them Colorado, rallying to tie in the fourth and take control with a four-run fifth.

Corey Dickerson led the way, knocking in three runs, with two hits and a sac fly. Tim Beckham rapped hits in his first two at-bats, tying the team record by recording eight straight going back to Monday.

"Somewhat telling - the team wins and everybody is kind of playing a part," Cash said.

The last time the Rays won three straight – June 12-15 – they went directly into the terrible tailspin that trashed their season, losing 24 of their next 29. Having won four of their last five to improve to 38-57 they hope to keep going that direction.

The Rays took the lead in the first on a two-out single by Dickerson and made it 2-0 in the second on a homer by Beckham, who was playing first base for the first time in his career.

Moore then made the one big mistake, following a pair of singles by allowing a three-run homer to Smolinski, Oakland's No. 8 hitter.

But Moore didn't let it get him down.

"He didn't let it faze him, he didn't carry it over," Cash said.

And then Moore's teammates picked him up.

They got back to even in the fourth when Dickerson led off with a homer, his 14th.

And then they got back ahead with a four-run fifth, rapping five consecutive hits off Oakland's Sonny Gray. Beckham got them started with a record-tying single, then catcher Luke Maile followed with a single. The runs started coming with a double by Logan Forsythe, a single by Brad Miller, and a single by Evan Longoria. Dickerson – on an 8-for-12 run - followed with sac fly to make it 7-3.

"It's nice to see what he's been doing lately," Cash said. "That's the type of hitter that we know he is. It just hasn't shown up as consistently. But it's never too late. Love the way he's swinging the bat right now."

Kevin Jepsen, making his fourth appearance since re-signing, and Xavier Cedeno combined to work the eighth. Cash turned first to Erasmo Ramirez in the ninth with a four-run lead, but when he allowed a hit to the first Oakland batter in the ninth and then hit the second, Cash summoned All-Star Alex Colome came on to finish it.

Moore allowed only four hits, walking two and striking out six while throwing 103 pitches (69 for strikes), over the seven innings. He is 4-3, 2.68 over his last eight starts, and has worked at least six innings in nine straight.

With the Aug. 1 trade deadline looming and rumors flying, Moore, who returned last season from Tommy John elbow surgery, could have been making his last start with the Rays.

He didn't want to look at it that way.

"I kind of revert to being out of the game as long as I was and I'm just thankful at the end of the day to be back in here with these guys and to be counted on and to be healthy week to week," Moore said.

"The speculation this time of year, I think it's pretty normal for each club to have it, whether or not they are buyers or sellers. It's definitely new for my name to be thrown into the mix.

"But at the same time my heart and my mind are in this clubhouse, and I think that's where all my focus is right now."

Trade rumors swirl around Rays pitchers

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — Matt Moore took the mound Thursday night hoping it wouldn't be his last start in a Rays uniform, and Jake Odorizzi will do the same tonight.

As the two Rays starters who have generated the most interest from other teams, both Moore and Odorizzi have heard and read their names connected to multiple teams in myriad trade rumors.

And that is only going to increase as the Aug. 1 deadline for nonwaiver deals approaches and contenders shift in the next few days from considering their options to actually making deals.

"I haven't been around all that long, but every time something like this does happen and there is this deadline, or we may need something, it does kind of shake you up a little bit and make you appreciate your teammates and where you're at even more," Moore said.

Moore and Odorizzi have been the "most popular" topics among teams calling the Rays, though there is discussion on all their starters, including Chris Archer, who seems unlikely to be moved barring a massive return. There also has been interest in Erasmo Ramirez, who can relieve or start, and might be in lefty Xavier Cedeno. Infielder Steve Pearce is expected to be another sought-after player.

Because so many teams need pitching, the Rays would seem to be in somewhat of a position of power in that they provide multiple options. Among the half-dozen or so teams that have been scouting them heavily, the Rangers and Dodgers (scrambling with Clayton Kershaw hurt) would appear to be the best matches, as they have farm systems stocked with position players, which the Rays could use. The Pirates are another. Others seriously interested include the Astros, Marlins, Nationals and Red Sox.

As a result, Rays players are also hot topics in the rumor mill. Just Thursday, for example, there was one national report that Archer was likely headed — with a 70 percent chance — to the Dodgers and another report that he was unlikely to be traded anywhere.

Archer said he hadn't heard anything about any deal and, like his mates, "definitely would like to stay." But he also said he is not surprised to be rumored to be going elsewhere.

"It's just the nature of the business," he said. "I've been traded twice. At the end of the day, each organization is trying to do what's best for them. And if the Rays think that's what's best for them, then that's what they think."

Plus, he pointed out, at the end of this season he will be halfway through the six guaranteed years of his long-term deal, playing three years for \$4.25 million and due \$18 million for the next three, with \$9 million and \$11 million options after that.

"With signing my deal, I knew that this was a possibility, and I knew eventually it would happen," he said. "So it's not really that surprising, to be honest, looking at where we're at and how the Rays typically do things."

Contract status is always a factor. Moore has a \$7 million option for 2017, and two others for \$19 million total; Odorizzi will be eligible for arbitration for the first of three times.

Odorizzi said there isn't much they can do but wait, wonder — and sometimes laugh.

"If we didn't, we'd go crazy by now because this has been ongoing for however many weeks, and we still have 10 days to go," he said. "We'll pull our hair out. We might run out of jokes before the actual D day gets here. It's almost entertaining to the point of who's going to be the next person to be 'out the door' already. But so far we are all still here and hanging out."

Manager Kevin Cash said he knows there is going to be a lot of chatter.

"I think we're going to have 10 days of dealing with this as a club, inside our clubhouse," he said. "These guys, a lot of them, have been a part of it before being here. We cannot let it become a distraction."

Rays' Beckham debuts at first base, continues hot hitting

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

OAKLAND, Calif. — Playing first base for the first time at any level turned out not to be the most noteworthy thing Tim Beckham did Thursday.

That's because by homering in his first at-bat and singling in his second against the A's, he tied the Rays franchise record by rapping eight consecutive hits; he had one Monday and five Wednesday. Beckham then popped out to end his streak.

"I didn't know about it until after the game — it's a pretty cool thing to be a part of," Beckham said. "Just trying to put the ball in play."

The hit record was shared by Aubrey Huff (2004) and Ty Wigginton (2007). Beckham (who walked after his triple Monday) also tied the team mark of reaching base nine straight times, shared by Logan Forsythe (2015) and B.J. Upton (2011).

Beckham ended up at first due to ongoing inflammation in Logan Morrison's right forearm and slight fatigue in Steve Pearce's right hamstring.

Morrison saw a doctor Thursday night in Oakland as a result of inflammation in the forearm/wrist area that started bothering him July 15 in the first game after the All-Star break and did not improve with two days' rest.

"It slowly started building and getting worse and worse," he said.

Manager Kevin Cash said they got the good news head athletic trainer Ron Porterfield anticipated, with Morrison receiving an injection and potentially returning in the next day or two. Cash said they did not anticipate him going on the disabled list.

Morrison's status factored into the decision to bring Pearce back Tuesday after just two rehab games following a monthlong DL stint for a hamstring strain. Pearce said after playing two games in Colorado he was feeling something in the hamstring — "not barking, just tired" — so the Rays opted to be cautious. Pearce said he was available to come off the bench Thursday and expects to play tonight against A's LH starter Sean Manaea.

"It made sense to give him a day," Cash said. "He had a very short, abbreviated rehab. I'm sure he has some general overall body soreness."

Beckham, normally a middle infielder, handled himself well at first base. He did some pregame work with infield/bench coach Tom Foley after getting the news upon arrival at the Coliseum and said he didn't consider it a big challenge.

"I'll be fine," Beckham said. "The biggest thing is the comfort level. I'm looking forward to it."

He presented well, taking batter-by-batter positioning instruction and making the plays he had the chance to.

"I kept telling myself to trust in my ability, and to be comfortable over there," he said.

Another option would have been to move second baseman Forsythe, who has played first before but was not comfortable doing so. Cash said they did not want to weaken their up-the-middle defense by doing so.

SAFE AT HOME: Cash called MLB officials for clarification on the odd ruling Wednesday in Colorado, in which an out call for the Rays was overturned when replay showed the Rockies runner was not tagged but also did not touch the plate. Cash said he was told the umpires got it right under rules governing replay challenged calls, that the runner could be safe even though he didn't touch the plate. Cash said Rays catchers will check with the umpire on close plays, then step on the plate to initiate an appeal.

REHAB REPORT: RHP Alex Cobb (Tommy John surgery) came through his 28-pitch Wednesday bullpen well and next will throw a live batting practice Saturday in Port Charlotte. Cash said the next step could be to resume pitching in minor-league games, as Cobb was returned from his first rehab assignment after experiencing fatigue in his second start. ... RHP Brad Boxberger (oblique) was "really good" Thursday in his second rehab appearance for the advanced Class A Stone Crabs, striking out two in a 10-pitch inning, Cash said. He will make at least a third appearance Saturday. ... OF Desmond Jennings (hamstring) will be among the hitters facing Cobb.

GOOD DEEDS: RHP Chris Archer will visit and talk with kids today in the RBI program at the YMCA in nearby Richmond, Calif., as he has done in Cleveland, New York, Toronto this season. "Oakland was at the forefront of my brain," he said. "We rarely come here, I'm not pitching (this series) so I have a lot of time and I know some of the communities here are rough, so all those things went into consideration."

GOOD DEEDS: RHP Alex Colome converted his 21st save in his 21st opportunity, their longest streak since Fernando Rodney ran off 22 straight 2012. ... First pitch temperature was 66 degrees, a dropoff of 25 degrees from Wednesday in Denver. .. Forsythe logged his third straight multi-hit game.

Midtown wants say in what come next for Tropicana Field site

By Charlie Frago, Tampa Bay Times

ST. PETERSBURG — The city kicked off its public discussion this week on how to reimagine the 85 acres around Tropicana Field as planners and city officials promised a dense, walkable destination that, for now, includes a baseball stadium.

That message met two very different receptions.

On Monday, a large mostly white crowd at the Coliseum wanted to know about transit options, parking and more details about the retail mix on the site. The next day, a smaller, more racially-mixed crowd at the Campbell Park Recreation Center, just south of the Trop, wanted to know how the billion-dollar project would benefit Midtown, where many families of black residents were displaced when the domed stadium was built in the 1980s now live.

"If Midtown is happy, everyone will be happy," Irene Pridgen said at the Campbell Park meeting.

A group of Midtown residents asked to meet with HKS Architects to discuss how the project can help improve their neighborhoods' economic prospects. The planners agreed.

The Coliseum event followed the script of residents sketching out their ideas on cards that were collected and summarized by the planners. At Campbell Park, in a meeting room without lights or air conditioning because of a storm, residents spoke freely about their concerns.

“There was a different kind of feel in the two meetings,” said Dave Goodwin, the city’s planning and economic development director.

The city’s black community, he said, has made it clear that it wanted to be part of the discussion about the Trop’s makeover.

“They have a desire to be a big part of what it becomes in the future,” Goodwin said.

The city has paid \$320,000 (with the Tampa Bay Rays kicking in \$100,000) to HKS to come up with a master plan for the Trop site. Originally due by the end of September, HKS said it was working with the Rays to extend the deadline by about a month.

Deputy Mayor Kanika Tomalin urged the Coliseum crowd to dream big.

“What you think absolutely matters and it’s how we get to the right place,” she said.

Architect Randy Morton said the emphasis would be on a pedestrian- and bike-friendly landscape. He pointed to another plan the firm had done for the Atlanta Braves on a slightly smaller site in Cobb County outside Atlanta as an example of having a site that isn’t dominated by parking lots.

Properly done, Morton said, the redevelopment would link Campbell Park and more affluent neighborhoods to the north and east. The Trop also would be linked to the city’s prosperous waterfront, he said.

If the Rays decide to move out of the Trop, HKS would start another plan, this time without a ballpark.

At the end of the Coliseum event, Morton answered questions on cards from residents. Many were about parking, but one reached for the wider frame: “What’s the biggest challenge?”

“Getting everyone to believe that something great can happen here,” Morton said.

A successful redevelopment depends on building the political will, he said.

Mayor Rick Kriseman, who spoke at the Campbell Park event, said the history of displacing black residents from the Gas Plant neighborhood to build the Trop won’t be forgotten.

He said Midtown’s concerns would be addressed

“Anyone who has heard that what’s going to happen on that site is a done deal, it’s already been decided? That’s not true,” Kriseman said.

Rays-Athletics Friday preview

By Marc Topkin, Tampa Bay Times

Tonight: at A's

10:05, Oakland (Calif.) Coliseum

TV/radio: Fox Sports Sun; 620-AM

Probable pitchers

RAYS: RH Jake Odorizzi (4-5, 4.39)

A'S: LH Sean Manaea (3-5, 5.13)

On Odorizzi: Snapped six-start winless streak Sunday in beating Orioles. Completed six innings for just eighth time in 20 starts. Is 0-2, 6.14 in three starts vs. A's, including May 13 at Trop.

On Manaea: Former top Royals prospect acquired in Ben Zobrist deal. Made five-inning relief outing Sunday. Is 1-1, 3.18 in four games since DL stint. Is 3-2, 3.93 at home, 0-3, 7.89 away from Oakland.

Key matchups

RAYS VS. MANAEA

None have faced

A'S VS. ODORIZZI

Billy Butler 2-for-8

Coco Crisp 2-for-6

Marcus Semien 3-for-4, HR

Danny Valencia 2-for-8, HR

Extra special

Evan Longoria logged his 50th extra-base hit Wednesday, the sixth player in the majors to get there. Here is a historical look at how long it took top third basemen to get to 50, since 1913:

Player, team, year Games

Alex Rodriguez, Yankees 200783

Ken Keltner, Indians, 1941 87

Miguel Cabrera, Tigers, 2013 88

Troy Glaus, Angels, 2000 88

Hank Blalock, Rangers, 2004 90

Red Rolfe, Yankees, 1936 94

Evan Longoria, Rays, 2016 94

Source: Rays

On deck

Saturday: at A's, 9:05. Rays — LH Drew Smyly (2-11, 5.64); A's — RH Kendall Graveman (6-6, 4.25)

Sunday: at A's, 4:05. Rays — LH Blake Snell (2-4, 3.11); A's — RH Jesse Hahn (2-4, 6.49)

Monday: Off

Tuesday: at Dodgers, 10:10. Rays — RH Chris Archer (5-13, 4.60); Dodgers — TBA

Wednesday: at Dodgers, 3:10. Rays — LH Matt Moore (5-7, 4.33); Dodgers — TBA

Thursday: Off

Rays disabled list

- RHP Brad Boxberger, left oblique strain, eligible June 16, on rehab, targeting late July
- RHP Alex Cobb, Tommy John surgery, 60-day, eligible June 2, targeting mid August
- OF Desmond Jennings, left hamstring strain, eligible July 16, targeting late July
- OF Mikie Mahtook, left hand fracture, eligible July 6, targeting August
- RHP Chase Whitley, Tommy John surgery, 60-day, eligible June 2, targeting mid August

Trade Deadline Daily: High chance Chris Archer ends up with Dodgers?

By ESPN.com

The Los Angeles Dodgers could use an impact starter -- and an executive of another team that's been in talks with the Tampa Bay Rays tells Jayson Stark that he believes a deal between Tampa Bay and Los Angeles for ace Chris Archer is looking increasingly likely.

Jayson Stark's take: Most clubs that have asked about Archer have come away with the impression Tampa Bay is highly unlikely to move him. So why would the Dodgers be a different case? This executive's take? Because Dodgers president Andrew Friedman and Rays president Matt Silverman are so close. Because the Dodgers have an extreme need for an impact starter they could control beyond this year. And because the Dodgers "have prospects that fit" what the Rays would need to get back in order to move their ace.

Nevertheless, the Rays have been telling teams the Dodgers don't have any advantage over anyone else, despite the history and friendship of Friedman and Silverman. So if the Dodgers were able to pull this off, it would take a massive package, one that separates them from teams like Texas, another club with an excellent farm system that hasn't been able to match up with the Rays on Archer.

MLB Trade Deadline Rumor Buy or Sell: Could the Dodgers land Chris Archer?

By Matt Snyder, CBS Sports

For weeks, reports have indicated that the Tampa Bay Rays weren't interested in dealing their ace -- well, at least he was considered their ace to begin the season -- Chris Archer. Then, on Thursday afternoon, ESPN.com's Jayson Stark dropped this fire emoji on the internet world:

It isn't altogether shocking that we'd hear Archer's name at some point in these last two weeks of July. I mentioned him as part of the top storylines to watch this trade season. So let's dig in.

Background

An awful lot of things line up here. First off, the Dodgers are strong contenders and the Rays are one of the worst teams in baseball. Secondly, Dodgers president Andrew Friedman worked for years with the Rays and current general manager Matt Silverman. The two are said to be close friends. So surely they could have productive discussions about a trade (and, no, this doesn't mean Silverman would give a discount for his friend -- that's ridiculous).

The Dodgers are contenders, as noted, but also are in a bit of a bind concerning starting pitchers. Most notably, All-World lefty Clayton Kershaw is facing the possibility of back surgery. Brett Anderson is hoping to return in mid-August from back surgery, but he's long been injury-prone. Alex Wood is likely out for the season. Hyun-jin Ryu just suffered another injury.

The current rotation -- Kenta Maeda, Scott Kazmir, Brandon McCarthy, Bud Norris and Julio Urias -- is loaded with question marks as well.

Suffice it to say, the Dodgers seem likely to go after starting pitching in front of the Aug. 1 trade deadline. Maybe even a front-line guy, if they can find one.

Would Archer qualify? It probably depends on your point of view. He was an All-Star and finished fifth in AL Cy Young voting last season. This year, though, he's 5-13 with a 4.60 ERA (89 ERA+), 1.40 WHIP and an AL-most 51 walks in 123 1/3 innings. He does lead the AL with 147 strikeouts. The league switch could help, especially since three of the five NL West parks traditionally favor pitchers (San Diego's Petco Park has actually slightly favored hitters so far this season, though).

As for Archer's contract? He's on an extremely club-friendly deal for a while. His six-year, \$25.5 million contract runs through 2019, and there are club options for 2020 (\$9 million) and 2021 (\$11 million).

We also know the Dodgers have what is considered a rich farm system, so they could deal a big prospect package back to the Rays, which is what would be required to move Archer.

Buy or Sell?

Can I hold? No? OK, I'll sell, but it's a reluctant sell.

I know the report said 70 percent chance, but that came from an executive that works for another team. Seems like it's a strong gut feeling more than true knowledge of the situation.

I know there are a lot of reasons this makes sense, but the Rays haven't given any indication they want to move Archer. If they did, would the timing be best right now? Not only is he having a bad year, but he had a 4.38 ERA in his last 18 starts last season. From the Dodgers side, it's been a long time since he was consistently dominant to the point that I'd worry about coughing up a gigantic prospect package for him.

Speaking of which, we know that Friedman and company last year declined to give either Corey Seager or Julio Urias for Cole Hamels. Joc Pederson was long untouchable, regardless of the target.

So now the philosophy is going to change for Archer?

It might, as every situation is unique and there would be reasons to make this move. It's just giving me pause here. My best guess is Silverman will want more than Friedman is willing to give and they'll end up at an impasse, if they are even seriously discussing a deal.

Again, I'll sell the chances of Archer going to the Dodgers before the deadline -- especially if I'm selling at 70 percent.

The most valuable MLB trade deadline candidates by position

By Brett Smiley, FOX Sports

As MLB's August 1 nonwaiver trade deadline looms, general managers are furiously placing and field phone calls as they seek to position their teams for a run in October, or build for the future. This piece will not examine the likeliest destinations for some of the top players on the market (go here for some of that), but rather will take a look at the top talents who are most likely to change uniforms. Basically, this is the grocery list. Let's go shopping.

Starting pitcher: Chris Archer, Tampa Bay Rays

A Cy Young Award candidate at one point in 2015, the 27-year-old righty has disappointed in 2016 with a 4.60 ERA and 1.39 WHIP. He's still missing a ton of bats (147 strikeouts in 123.1 innings), but he's gotten into trouble because he's walked a lot of batters (51) and he's allowed 20 home runs. As far as front-of-the-rotation talents go, Archer is earning a relatively modest salary through 2019 (with two club options following that). If the Rays don't get offered a package they like for Archer, there's a good chance his rotation mates Jake Odorizzi or Matt Moore will get shipped out.

Rays are wisely playing hardball with pitching in demand at deadline

By Ken Rosenthal, FOX Sports

Some quick notes on the trade market:

- The Rangers are not optimistic that they will acquire one of the Rays' starting pitchers, according to a source with knowledge of the discussions.

The teams are struggling to match up on a deal, and the reason could be the Rangers' reluctance to part with a top youngster such as Jurickson Profar for a modestly accomplished pitcher such as Rays left-hander Matt Moore or right-hander Jake Odorizzi.

The Rangers remain more likely to keep Profar, 23, than move him, unless they could package him in a deal for a top starter such as the White Sox's Chris Sale or Rays' Chris Archer.

Profar, in the view of club officials, would fit even on next year's club -- he has played all four infield positions this season and recently began working in the outfield. The team also values his plate discipline in a lineup full of free-swinging power hitters; Profar's 4.28 pitches per plate appearance easily would lead the club if he had enough plate appearances to qualify.

The Rays, who would want Profar to fill their longstanding hole at shortstop, obviously could improve their offer beyond Moore or Odorizzi to land him, likely by including a reliever.

- The non-waiver deadline is still 10 days away, and one executive says there is no motivation for a seller such as the Rays to move quickly unless a team overpays. By waiting, a seller could land an extra player in a deal, or gain from a new team jumping into the market.

The Rays, for example, could benefit from the zero-sum game between the Astros and Rangers in the AL West; both teams are eyeing the few controllable starters that are available. A deal to a non-contender also is possible; the Rays are drawing interest in their starters from teams that are not currently competitive but expect to be over the next three years, sources say.

The other option for a team such as the Rays is to wait until the offseason, when their starters still will be in demand due to the weakness of the free-agent market. Moore and Archer are signed to exceedingly club-friendly deals, Moore through 2019, Archer through '21. Odorizzi is eligible for arbitration for the first time this offseason.

- Another factor in the deadline calculus: The possibility of higher luxury-tax rates in the new collective-bargaining agreement could make players signed to below-market deals even more valuable.

If high-revenue clubs pay stiffer penalties for exceeding the luxury-tax threshold, it would significantly add to the cost of those teams signing free agents -- assuming, of course, the current system remains in place, which is likely.

Clubs are operating blindly, not knowing what the specifics of a new CBA might be. But suffice it to say that lower-cost players will remain at a premium under virtually any new economic structure.

The current CBA expires Dec. 1.

- One rival executive reasons that the Dodgers, given the uncertainty surrounding left-hander Clayton Kershaw, have almost no choice but to overpay for a controllable starter such as Archer or Sale.

Think about it: The Dodgers already have spent about \$250 million on this year's club. Their rotation is a hodgepodge of uncertainty. The addition of another top starter would give them a puncher's chance this season and make them that much stronger next season, when their rotation would include the new pitcher, plus Kershaw and left-hander Julio Urias.

The Rangers followed a similar thought process when they added left-hander Cole Hamels at last year's deadline; they were a sub-.500 team at that point but knew they could at least pair Hamels with right-hander Yu Darvish this season. As it turned out, they won the AL West.

Obviously, acquiring a pitcher such as Archer or Sale would be easier said than done. An Archer deal would be complicated by his uneven 2016 performance; the Rays still would place high value on him, citing his recent improvement and his five additional years of control. The price for Sale, who is more accomplished than Archer and under control through '19, likely would be even higher.

- The Cubs' interest in Athletics outfielder Josh Reddick, as first reported by MLB Network's Jon Morosi, appears to be a stretch at first glance. But the Cubs have been seeking to bolster their lineup against right-handed pitching ever since losing Kyle Schwarber, and Reddick certainly could help in that regard.

The question is whether the Cubs would be the high bidder for Reddick when they also are trying to obtain an impact left-handed reliever; the Athletics at minimum want to beat the value of the draft pick they would receive if they made Reddick a qualifying offer.

Then again, the market is so thin on quality talent, teams might simply decide to upgrade wherever possible, regardless of need. If the Cubs, for example, cannot get the Yankees' Andrew Miller or Aroldis Chapman, perhaps they would settle for a lesser reliever and obtain a hitter such as Reddick, who would be an improvement over the currently injured Chris Coghlan.

- The Astros are looking for a left-handed reliever, and they've touched base with the Braves about Hunter Cervenka as a possible fallback option, sources said.

The Braves, who continue to insist that they will hold right-hander Julio Teheran, are drawing interest in controllable pieces such as Cervenka and fellow left-handed relievers Ian Krol and Dario Alvarez, plus right-handed starter Lucas Harrell.

Other Braves who could be on the move: potential free agents such as infielder Gordon Beckham and outfielder Jeff Francoeur and right-handed reliever Jim Johnson.