

J-Ram joins 30-30 club with 30th swipe

By Aaron Rose MLB.com

TORONTO -- With Jose Ramirez's first-inning steal of second in Sunday afternoon's 6-2 loss to the Blue Jays, he became the 39th player in Major League Baseball history to reach 30 stolen bases and 30 home runs in the same season, joining Grady Sizemore (2008) and Joe Carter (1987) as the only Indians players to reach the mark.

"I feel really happy about that," Ramirez said through a translator. "I kind of feel the same way about both [the steals and home runs]." Ramirez added eight steals to his previous season high to join Tommy Harper, Howard Johnson and David Wright as the only third basemen to accomplish the feat. It was just the 60th time the 30-30 mark had been reached in MLB history.

"Not a lot of people do it in history," Francisco Lindor said. "It's a special number, he's having a great season, and I'm very happy for him." After Sunday's game Ramirez has 37 home runs and 30 steals on the season with a .282 batting average.

"It's not just the 30-30," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "Everything he does, he impacts the game in so many different ways."

The stolen base adds another impressive milestone in Ramirez's MVP candidacy. The 25-year-old third baseman entered Sunday ranked third in MLB Wins Above Replacement, according to FanGraphs.

"He's our three-hole hitter," Francona said. "He plays good defense, he runs the bases, he's one of the best players in the league."

MVP candidates Mike Trout and Mookie Betts are both close to eclipsing the 30-30 mark. Trout came into Sunday with 33 home runs and 22 steals, while Betts had 29 homers with 27 steals.

Clevinger strikes out 9, but run support missing

By Aaron Rose MLB.com

TORONTO -- The Indians' offense had been putting up early run support for its starting pitchers all season, but it went quiet in a 6-2 loss to the Blue Jays on Sunday afternoon at Rogers Centre.

Coming into Sunday's game, the Indians had three starting pitchers ranked in the top 10 in the American League in run support. Mike Clevinger ranked eighth in the AL prior to the game, but despite posting his fifth consecutive quality start, he was docked with a loss.

The right-hander allowed a two-run home run in the first inning to Justin Smoak when he left a fastball over the middle of the plate. The homer scored Lourdes Gurriel Jr., who walked earlier in the inning.

"It was supposed to be more up and in," Clevinger said. "[Instead], it was low and middle, bad one. He got it."

The only other run he surrendered came in the third inning when a leadoff walk to Reese McGuire came around to score on a Smoak single to left field that beat the shift.

"I think for any pitcher it's tough to swallow, but when you're really thinking about [the shift] it helps you a lot more times than it hurts you," Clevinger said. "Most of the time it plays in your favor."

He finished the afternoon with six innings pitched, allowing just the three runs on four hits with nine strikeouts.

Offensively, Cleveland couldn't generate any sort of rally against Blue Jays starter Thomas Pannone. Francisco Lindor hit a third-inning solo homer to left field, his 34th home run of the season and third of the series.

"I got the pitch I wanted, on the at-bat before, but I just missed it," Lindor said. "So next at-bat I made the adjustment, and as soon as I hit I knew I got it."

Four innings later, Brandon Barnes went deep for his first home run of the year. The two home runs were all the Indians would get against Pannone.

"[Pannone] doesn't light up the radar gun, but being left-handed, he can spin it," Indians manager Francona said. "It just seemed like he got past our barrels, had us reaching, a lot of popups, a little deception with the fastball and just getting past us enough to kind of take the sting out of our bats."

Pannone held the Indians to just four hits over 6 1/3 innings in his third Major League start.

"He just had that little pause in his delivery," Lindor said. "That was enough [to keep us] off balance, missing the barrel by half an inch." Any chance for a comeback fell apart in the bottom of the eighth. Jon Edwards gave up a leadoff double to Billy McKinney, then after a fielder's choice and a fielding error by Jose Ramirez, Teoscar Hernandez took him deep to center field to give the Blue Jays a late four-run lead.

The Indians moved to 37-34 on the road this season, the worst record of any playoff team. The series split also meant Cleveland lost its first season series to Toronto since 2015.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Three straight strikeouts end eighth: The Indians had a chance to score the game-tying run in the eighth when Michael Brantley led off with a single, but Blue Jays manager John Gibbons made a pitching change and Jake Petricka retired the next three batters with strikeouts.

SOUND SMART

With Ramirez's first-inning steal of second, he joined Grady Sizemore (2008) and Joe Carter (1987) as the only Indians players to reach 30 stolen bases and 30 home runs in the same season. Ramirez became the 39th player in Major League Baseball history to reach the mark.

More >

UP NEXT

Corey Kluber (18-7, 2.75 ERA) starts the opener of a three-game set vs. the Rays in St. Petersburg at 7:10 p.m. ET on Monday. Kluber is coming off a 10-strikeout performance in which he allowed one run over 6 2/3 innings. He pitched seven shutout innings in his only start against the Rays this season. Tampa Bay will counter with Diego Castillo (3-2, 3.40).

Tribe plans to activate Miller before Rays series

By Aaron Rose MLB.com

TORONTO -- The Indians plan to activate Andrew Miller from the 10-day disabled list prior to Monday's game in Tampa Bay.

Miller previously said he felt ready for game action following a bullpen session on Saturday afternoon.

The 33-year-old reliever has been on the DL since Aug. 29 with a left shoulder injury. He last pitched on Aug. 26, allowing two hits and one run in one inning of work against the Royals.

This season has been Miller's worst as a reliever. He's pitched to a 3.38 ERA over 24 innings and has lost about 1 mph since last year on both his fastball and breaking ball.

Cleveland came into Sunday afternoon's game with the 25th worst bullpen ERA in the Majors (4.69) and the second worst bullpen ERA of playoff teams, leading only Colorado (4.85).

Morgan throws well for Lynchburg

By William Boor MLB.com @wboor

• Indians No. 15 prospect Eli Morgan continued his strong full-season debut with a solid postseason performance for Class A Advanced Lynchburg. Morgan, an eighth-round pick from the 2017 Draft, gave up two runs (one earned) over 5 1/3 innings. The right-hander yielded four hits, walked one and struck out four. In the regular season Morgan posted a 3.91 ERA over 19 starts and pitched across two levels.

Left-hander Thomas Pannone returns to haunt Cleveland Indians in Toronto's 6-2 win

By Paul Hoynes,

TORONTO - Mark Shapiro and Ross Atkins are trying to rebuild the Blue Jays in the image of the Indians' organization they helped build before leaving for Toronto as a package deal in 2015.

On Sunday, a trade they made with their old team, helped Toronto beat the Indians, 6-2, and split a four-game series at Rogers Centre.

Last year the Indians needed bullpen help and talked to the Blue Jays. Toronto sent them Joe Smith for left-hander Thomas Pannone and infielder Samad Taylor at the July 31 non-waiver deadline. On Sunday, Pannone, making his third big-league start, pitched 6 1/3 innings to help beat his old team.

Pannone (2-1, 4.13) allowed two runs on four hits. He struck out two and walked three.

Mike Clevinger (11-8, 3.16) took the loss, but this one should be hung around the offense's neck. Except for home runs by Francisco Lindor and Brandon Barnes, they Indians conducted a clinic on what not to do again a soft-throwing left-hander.

The Blue Jays took a 2-0 lead against Clevinger in the first on a two-run homer by Justin Smoak. Clevinger walked Lourdes Gurriel with one out before giving up Smoak's homer into the second deck in right on a 1-0 pitch. It was the 19th homer he's allowed this year.

Lindor made it a 2-1 game in the third with his 34th homer and third of the series. He homered twice in Thursday's 9-4 win, but Pannone frustrated the rest of the Tribe's lineup. In the fourth he walked Brandon Guyer and Yan Gomes with two out, but Barnes ended the inning with a fly ball to center.

By that time the Jays were leading 3-1 thanks to Smoak's well-placed single with two out in the third. Clevinger started the inning by walked catcher Reese McGuire. He stole second with one out as the infield shifted to the right against Smoak, who was batting left-handed. The shift moved Lindor from shortstop to behind first base, but Smoak singled through the empty hole at short to score McGuire.

Pannone kept getting the Indians out on soft ground balls and pop up until Barnes, making his first start since his promotion from Class AAA Columbus on Tuesday, homered just inside the left field foul pole in the seventh to make it 3-2.

Jose Ramirez stole his 30th base in the first inning to become just the third member of the Tribe's 30-30 club, but the rest of the day did not go well for the third baseman. He went 0-for-4 to continue his slump and was charged with an error in the ninth inning that was followed by Teoscar Hernandez's three-run homer that turned Toronto's 3-2 lead into a 6-2 advantage.

Ramirez is in a 13-for-79 (.165) skid.

Clevinger allowed three runs on four hits in six innings. He struck out nine and walked three.

What it means

The Astros, scheduled to play Boston on Sunday night, have a commanding eight game lead over the Indians regarding which division leader will host the ALDS on Oct. 5. Houston has won seven straight games and could sweep the Red Sox at Fenway with a win on Sunday night.

The pitches

Pannone threw 93 pitches, 60 (65 percent) for strikes. Clevinger threw 108 pitches, 69 (64 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Blue Jays drew 31, 184 to Rogers Centre on Sunday. First pitch was at 1:08 p.m. with a temperature of 67 degrees. The roof was closed.

Next

The Indians open a three-game series against Tampa Bay on Monday night at Tropicana on Monday night. Corey Kluber (18-7, 2.75) will start for the Indians, but the Rays have not announced a starter. They could be going with an opener - a reliever who will pitch the first inning or so before bringing in a pitcher who is stretched out more. They used that strategy against the Indians on Sept. 2 for a 6-4 win at Progressive Field.

Kluber is coming off a win against Kansas City. He is the first Indians pitcher to win 18 games in three straight seasons since Hall of Famer Gaylord Perry did from 1972 through 1974.

Jose Ramirez becomes third Cleveland Indians player to join 30/30 club

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Jose Ramirez recorded his 30th stolen base of the season Sunday when he swiped second against the Toronto Blue Jays in the first inning. Ramirez became the third Indians player with at least 30 home runs and 30 steals in the same season joining Joe Carter (1987) and Grady Sizemore (2008).

Ramirez moved into a three-way tie for second among American League steals leaders with Seattle's Dee Gordon and Tampa Bay's Mallex Smith. Kansas City's Whit Merrifield entered Play Sunday leading the league with 31.

Ramirez ranks third in the A.L. with 37 home runs. He is trying to become the first player to lead the league in homers and steals since Ty Cobb did so in 1909.

It's been 6 years since someone hit 30 home runs and stole 30 bases in the same season.

Let's hear it for the [?] , folks!#JRaMVP | #RallyTogether pic.twitter.com/r8rtfb2IRH

-- Cleveland Indians (@Indians) September 9, 2018

According to the Indians, he becomes the fourth third baseman in MLB history to reach the 30/30 mark, joining David Wright (2007), Howard Johnson (1987, '89, '91) & Tommy Harper (1970). He's the third-fastest third baseman to achieve the feat (140 games), after Johnson in 1989 (114 games) and 1987 (135 games).

Ramirez and teammate Francisco Lindor are the first switch-hitting teammates in history to both record at least 20 home runs and 20 steals in the same season. Ramirez also owns the single-season club record for home runs by a switch-hitter (37). He hit No. 35 in team game No. 118, breaking Carlos Santana's record (34) in '16.

The two-time All-Star recorded a 32-game streak of reaching base safely from May 22 through June 26. He became the fourth player win MLB history with 30 homers and 20 steals in his team's first 100 games, joining Alex Rodriguez (1998), Jeff Bagwell (1999) and Alfonso Soriano (2006).

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Cleveland Indians expected to activate Andrew Miller on Monday; Josh Donaldson is on deck

By Paul Hoynes,

TORONTO - It appears Andrew Miller got his wish. Miller told reporters Saturday after he finished throwing his second bullpen session in three days that he was ready to pitch in games. The Indians must have agreed because they're set to activate Miller on Monday before they open a three-game series against the Rays at Tropicana Field.

On Tuesday the Indians could activate third baseman Josh Donaldson from the disabled list as well. He's scheduled to join the Indians on Monday for the Tampa series after playing three rehab games with the Class AA Akron RubberDucks and another for Class AAA Columbus.

Miller will be a welcome addition to the late-inning portion of the bullpen. Lefty Brad Hand has been a force since being acquired on July 19 from the Padres. Cody Allen, who earned a save in Saturday's 9-8 win over Toronto, has shown signs of righting himself. Now the Indians need to get Miller, the MVP of the 2016 ALCS, as sharp as possible for the postseason.

This season been a frustrating one for Miller, who made three trips to the disabled list with hamstring, knee and shoulder problems. He's been limited to 27 appearances, covering 24 innings, so getting as many chances to pitch in the Tribe's final 19 games of the season is important.

The same goes for Donaldson, acquired by the Tribe on Aug. 30 from the Blue Jays. He's played four rehab games in the minors, but has not appeared in the big leagues since May 28 because of a strained left calf.

Chris Antonetti, Indians president of baseball operations, said Donaldson got through his final rehab game at Akron on Saturday healthy and is in a "good spot" as he gets ready to join the team in St. Petersburg, Fla.

It will be interesting to see if the Indians move Jose Ramirez from third to second before Donaldson is activated. Ramirez will bump Jason Kipnis off second and Kipnis could see some time in center field. Ramirez has taken grounders at second and Kipnis has taken fly balls in center since the trade, but they've stayed at third and second base, respectively.

When Miller is activated that will give the Indians 10 relievers for September. They are not expected to add more from the minors, although it looked like they were in danger of getting caught short the in Friday and Saturday's games against the Blue Jays. The Indians feel relievers Josh Tomlin, Tyler Olson, Adam Cimber and Jon Edwards are fresh enough to carry the load.

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Cleveland Indians, Tampa Bay Rays series preview, pitching matchups

By Paul Hoynes,

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Here is the preview and pitching matchups for the Indians' series against the Rays.

Where/when: Tropicana Field, Monday through Wednesday.

TV/radio: SportsTime Ohio, WTAM and WMMS will carry the series.

Pitching matchups and starting times: RHP Corey Kluber (18-7, 2.75) vs. RHP Diego Castillo (3-2, 3.40) Monday at 7:10 p.m.; RHP Shane Bieber (9-3, 4.63) vs. RHP Tyler Glasnow (1-5, 4.64) Tuesday at 7:10 p.m. and RHP Carlos Carrasco (16-8, 4.31) vs. undetermined.

Series: The Rays lead the Indians, 2-1, this season. The Indians lead, 94-60, overall.

Hot pitchers: Cody Allen has allowed one run and struck out eight in his last five appearances covering 4 2/3 innings for the Tribe. Castillo hit 101.3 mph on Statcast when he was the 'opener' against the Indians on Sept. 2 at Progressive Field. He's 1-1 with a 2.25 ERA in his last 14 games for Tampa.

Hot hitters: Francisco Lindor set a new career high with his 34th homer on Sunday. Thirty three of those homers have come out of the leadoff spot for the Tribe. Brandon Lowe is hitting .352 (19-for-54) with 15 RBI in his last 19 games for the Rays.

Team updates: The Indians head to Tropicana Field after splitting a four-game series with the rebuilding Blue Jays. Their magic number to clinch the AL Central is five. The Rays, who won two out of three from the Indians at Progressive Field From Aug. 30 through Sept. 2, have won 11 straight games at Tropicana Field.

Disabled list: Indians - 3B Josh Donaldson (left ankle), LHP Andrew Miller (left shoulder), RHP Trevor Bauer (right fibula), OF Leonys Martin (illness), CF Tyler Naquin (right hip), OF Lonnie Chisenhall (left calf), RHP Nick Goody (right elbow), RHP Danny Salazar (right shoulder) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list.

Rays -- RHP Jose De Leon (right elbow), RHP Wilson Font (right lat), RHP Jose Mujica (undisclosed), C Michael Perez (left hamstring) and 2B Danie Robertson (left thumb) are on the disabled list.

Next: The Indians are off on Thursday before opening their final homestand of the regular season when Detroit visits for a three-game series starting Friday night.

Slumping Jose Ramirez, Cleveland Indians' newest 30-30 man, says he's not frustrated

By Paul Hoynes,

TORONTO - Some players can only dream about a 30-30 season. Thirty homers, 30 stolen bases represents the ideal combination of power and speed.

It happened for just the third time in Indians' history on Sunday afternoon when Jose Ramirez stole his 30th base in the first inning to go along with his 37 homers. After the game, a 6-2 loss to the rebuilding Blue Jays, Ramirez sat on a chair in the middle of the visitor's clubhouse at Rogers Centre.

He was not there to crow about his accomplishment. He was just sitting there in a dirty uniform, staring at nothing. Sometimes he'd shake his head. Thirty-three was the last thing on his mind.

The thousand-yard stare was well earned. Ramirez has been lost at the plate since mid-August. If an MVP season hasn't already slipped away from him, it's close.

When reporters approached, he seemed surprised. Ramirez put his hands up and said, "What?" As in what could you possibly want to talk to me about?

Then he was asked for his reaction about joining Joe Carter and Grady Sizemore as the only 30-30 players in franchise history. He turned to Will Clements, the Indians interpreter, and said, "I feel really happy about that. Thank, God."

It's been 6 years since someone hit 30 home runs and stole 30 bases in the same season.

That was it. Short and sweet, but at that moment, Ramirez looked anything but happy. He was trying to get over another 0-for-4, the first three at-bats coming against rookie lefty Thomas Pannone, who was drafted and developed by the Indians. There was also another error to deal with, this one coming in the eighth inning and immediately followed by a three-run homer by Teoscar Hernandez that turned a one-run game in an easy 6-2 Toronto win.

But the questions kept coming. Did he always feel he had this combination of power and speed?

"I haven't always had that (combination), but everything kind of speaks for itself," said Ramirez. "Everyone can recognize what's going on, on the field now."

Ramirez's numbers still shine. He's hitting .282 (146-for-517) with 34 doubles, 37 homers and 97 RBI. He's scored 96 runs and stolen 30 bases in 36 attempts.

But since Aug. 14, the batting average has dropped from .305 to .282. He's hitting .167 (14-for-84) with one homer, eight RBI and two steals in that stretch. Manager Terry Francona says that as talented as players such as Ramirez are, the season is too long for them to avoid slumps.

And there seems to be an element of frustration creeping into Ramirez's game. He says that is not so.

"Frustration? No," said Ramirez. "I don't feel frustrated. I've never felt frustrated in my career. This is baseball. These things happen. I love baseball. I love to play it. As long as I'm good and my family is good I'll keep playing. We just have to keep battling every day and good results will come out."

Ramirez, like all good hitters, wasn't about to give the pitchers who have been working him over for the last few weeks too much credit. He pointed the finger at himself.

"It's something that's happening with me," said Ramirez. "The pitchers and their pitches are the same since the beginning of the season. I'm looking for a ball on the plate to hit, but sometimes the results don't come out as you want them to."

Slump or no slump, the accumulation of statistics by Ramirez cannot be ignored.

"Thirty-three is a special number," said teammate Francisco Lindor. "He's having a great season. I'm very happy for him."

Lindor has 34 homers and 23 steals with 19 regular season games left. What would it mean to him if he could join Ramirez as a 30-30 man? "It means I'd tie my teammate," said Lindor with a smile.

TRIBE NOTES Blue Jays 6, Indians 2: Tribe gets a thumping but Blue Jays' Randal Grichuk the one hurting
Ian Harrison | The Associated Press Published on Sept. 10, 2018 | Updated 6:45 a. m.

TORONTO — Blue Jays right fielder Randal Grichuk had to be checked for a concussion but the Cleveland Indians were the ones who got beat down Sunday.

Grichuk was injured in a bizarre collision with a security guard's chair, and his replacement Tesocar Hernandez hit a three-run homer as Toronto beat the Indians 6-2.

The Indians' magic number to lock up their third straight AL Central title stayed at five.

Grichuk was being checked for a possible concussion after slamming face-first into the guard's metal stool while chasing Brandon Guyer's foul fly in the fourth inning.

As Grichuk and first baseman Justin Smoak sprinted toward the ball, a security staffer seated along the wall stood up and backed away from the area, carrying his stool and seemingly unaware the outfielder was closing in.

Grichuk slid and made the catch, but crashed into the stool the staffer was holding by his side.

"I peeked at him and I saw him sliding, trying to make a play there, so I peeled out," Smoak said. "All of a sudden I heard him get clocked with a chair in the face. Scary right there for a second, but hopefully he's all right."

Grichuk stayed down for several minutes and was treated on the field by Blue Jays trainers. When he stood up to walk off, television images showed a long, swollen mark on his face, running across his nose and between his eyes.

Smoak said it's difficult to be aware of obstacles, especially because Toronto's domed roof makes it hard to look away from fly balls.

"We're worried about each other and the ball at the same time," Smoak said. "There's no chance either of us was thinking about the security guard."

Manager John Gibbons said he saw Grichuk in the clubhouse following the game.

"He was laughing a bit, so that was a good sign," Gibbons said. "He's a pretty boy, you don't want to hurt that face."

Hernandez entered the game when Grichuk exited, and homered in the eighth. Smoak connected off Mike Clevinger (11-8) in the first, his team-leading 24th.

To add to the Indians' pain, a guy they traded away shut them down. Making his third career start in place of right-hander Marcus Stroman (blister), Thomas Pannone (2-1) allowed two runs and four hits in 6 1/3 innings against his former team.

A Double-A All-Star in the Indians organization last season, Pannone was dealt to Toronto for reliever Joe Smith on July 31, 2017.

"It was a great opportunity to go out there and face the team that traded me last season," Pannone said. "It was definitely extra special."

Indians manager Terry Francona said Pannone "took the sting out of our bats."

"He doesn't light up the radar gun," Francona said, "It just seemed like he got past our barrels, had us reaching. A lot of popups."

Francisco Lindor hit a solo homer off Pannone in the third, his career-best 34th and third of the series. Smoak answered with a two-out RBI single in the bottom half.

Brandon Barnes chased Pannone with a one-out homer in the Cleveland seventh, his first since 2015. Ryan Tepera came on and struck out the next two batters.

Michael Brantley singled off left-hander Jose Fernandez to begin the eighth but righty Jake Petricka came on and struck out Jose Ramirez, Edwin Encarnacion and Yandy Diaz.

David Paulino got two outs in the ninth but put two runners on before Ken Giles came on and got Lindor to ground out, earning his 20th save in as many opportunities.

30-30

Cleveland's Jose Ramirez stole second base in the first, becoming the third 30-homer, 30-steal player in Indians history. Joe Carter did it in 1987 and Grady Sizemore in 2008. Ramirez is the first 30-30 player in the big leagues since 2012, when Ryan Braun and Mike Trout both reached the mark.

Rowdy's run ends

Blue Jays rookie Rowdy Tellez went 0-for-4, his first hitless game since making his debut last week. Tellez set a Blue Jays record Saturday, becoming the first player in team history with eight hits in his first four games.

Homer dome

The Blue Jays have 103 home runs at home, second in the AL to the Yankees (127).

Trainer's room

INDIANS: LHP Andrew Miller (left shoulder) is expected to be activated off the 10-day disabled today.

BLUE JAYS: Hernandez went to left field after Grichuk's injury, with Billy McKinney moving from left to right.

** Toronto activated INF Yangervis Solarte off the 10-day DL. Solarte suffered a strained right oblique in an Aug. 11 game against Tampa Bay.

Up next

INDIANS: RHP Corey Kluber (18-7, 2.75) starts the opener of a three-game series at Tampa Bay tonight. The major league leader in wins, Kluber is 2-0 with a 0.66 ERA in his past two outings.

BLUE JAYS: After an off day, LHP Ryan Borucki (3-4, 4.39) starts the opener of a three-game series at Boston on Tuesday night. Borucki is 1-0 in two starts against the Red Sox this season, allowing 11 runs in eight innings. LHP Chris Sale (12-4, 1.97) starts for Boston.

Rays rout Orioles 8-3 for franchise-record-tying 11th straight win at home

By Joe Henderson

ST. PETERSBURG — Something contagious is spreading through the Rays clubhouse, but don't fret. They don't want a vaccination to slow down the contagious outbreak of hitting up and down the lineup that has been going on for a while now.

Sunday's 8-3 win over the Orioles at Tropicana Field was a continuation of a trend that has propelled the Rays (78-64) to a season-high 14 games over .500 and kept them on the outskirts of the playoff race.

The also won their 11th straight at the Trop, tying the 2008 AL pennant-winning team for the longest streak in franchise history.

In its past 17 outings, Tampa Bay has averaged nearly seven runs a game, including 11 times with five or more. On Sunday, it reached that figure in the first inning, propelled by rookie Brandon Lowe's three-run homer off Baltimore lefty Josh Rogers.

"Hitting is contagious. Once a couple of guys start swinging and another guy starts swinging, before you know it all nine in the lineup are swinging hot bats," Lowe said. "Nobody is feeling all the pressure to get the job done because they know if they don't get it done, the guy after them will get it done. It makes hitting a lot easier."

The home run, his first in the majors off a left-hander, is the latest example of Lowe's awakened bat. It took him six games to get his first big-league hit after joining the Rays on Aug. 5 amid a bit of anticipation after he hit 22 home runs in combined stops this season at Double-A Montgomery and Triple-A Durham.

It took him almost a month to get his first big-league homer though, and as late as Aug. 21 he was hitting .091. But he has settled down, seems to have adjusted to his new surroundings, and the results are showing. He has four home runs in his past 10 games and is hitting .360 in his past eight.

"I'm not trying to hit the ball a thousand miles an hour, you know," he said. "Just take good swings."

Manager Kevin Cash said a little patience is all that was needed.

"We've learned over the course of time that it does take some time," he said. "Not everybody is going to come up here and just pick up where they were in the minor leagues. More times than not, that's not going to happen. So, good for Brandon to stay poised and not get frustrated."

"He was probably spinning a little bit early, looking up there at the batting average, or lack of hits. ... He's in a better spot now, and it shows. His swings, his at-bats are different, the ball is just jumping off his bat."

Rightfielder Carlos Gomez joined in the fun with a solo homer on the first pitch he saw in the sixth. It was his ninth of the season.

"We're hot right now. We're playing really good games. The pitching has been really awesome," he said. "We don't have a lot of strikeouts, we put a lot of balls in play. That's how you win a lot of games."

"We have the opportunity to make the playoffs, and that is the goal right now — go every single day and finish the season strongly. Everybody believes in this clubhouse that we can win the thing."

Not to be forgotten in the crush of runs was the work of Yonny Chirinos. He came on with one out in the first after opener Ryne Stanek walked all three he faced, although Baltimore's Cedric Mullins was thrown out trying to steal second by catcher Jesus Sucre.

Chirinos got out of that mess unscathed and gave the Rays a solid 6⅓ innings to pick up his fourth win.

"A strong performance by Yonny," Cash said.

A strong performance up and down the lineup, actually, at a time when the Rays need to keep it going. They have six more home games this week — three with Cleveland, then three with Oakland — a stretch that could determine if their hope of playing in the postseason is realistic.

All Lowe knows is he hopes this contagious streak continues.

"It's fun to be in this locker room with some of the guys in here," he said. "It's a fun locker room to be in and a dangerous team on the field."

Rays journal: The bare facts of streaking at home

By Joe Henderson

ST. PETERSBURG — Tropicana Field has more than its share of critics.

Former Rays manager Joe Maddon, after losing a game because of an infield popup that hit a catwalk and fell in safely, famously grumped, "It pretty much can't happen anywhere else but here in Major League Baseball."

But the current Rays think the place is just dandy. They ran their home winning streak to 11 Sunday after beating the Orioles 8-3 to complete a three-game sweep. It tied the Yankees for the longest home streak in the majors this season.

It was also their third consecutive home series sweep, having also swept the Royals in four games and the Red Sox in three.

They have outscored opponents 76-26 during that stretch.

It's the fourth time this season the Rays have gone on a home winning streak of at least six games. And, while we're talking numbers, there is this:

Since May 26, the Rays have played 46 home games and have won 35.

Bye-bye birdies

Sunday was the last game this season against the majors-worst Orioles. The Rays won the season series 11-8, including five of the past six.

For the record

The Rays have proven they can hang with the big boys this season. They have gone 25-23 against the five American League teams currently leading the playoff spots, although the Rays' wild-card chances remain remote (7½ behind the A's for the second wild card). On June 20, the Rays lost 5-1 to the Astros, falling to 34-40. Since then, they're 44-24 (.647) but still have lost ground to the East-leading Red Sox (48-20, .705 in that span). The Yankees were atop the East on June 20 but have gone 40-37 since then.

Walk this way

Ryne Stanek's opening act didn't go so well. The right-hander made his 25th start of the season as the opener but didn't have much. He threw 15 pitches, 12 of which were balls, and walked three before giving way to RHP Yonny Chirinos with one out, thanks to C Jesus Sucre throwing out Cedric Mullins trying to steal second. Fortunately for the Rays, there was no damage as Chirinos got a strikeout and flyout.

Stanek did mark one milestone though. He became the first pitcher with 25 starts and 25 relief appearances in one season since the Phillies' Hugh Mulcahy in 1937.

Pham-tastic

OF Tommy Pham's single in the second inning extended his hitting streak to 13, tying his career high.

Thievery, times two

OF Mallex Smith got his first career steal of home in the second inning on the back end of a double steal. Tommy Pham stole second base, and Smith took off for home on the throw. It was Smith's 31st steal of the season, and it was the first Rays steal of home since Desmond Jennings pulled it off on July 3, 2012, against the Yankees.

Minor developments

The Triple-A Durham Bulls face Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (Yankees affiliate) in the Governors' Cup final for the second straight season. The best-of-five series in the International League begins Tuesday. Scranton/Wilkes-Barre hosts the first two games, with the remainder in Durham, N.C. ... Double-A Montgomery played the decisive fifth game of its playoff series Sunday night against Jackson (Diamondbacks) in the Southern League. ... Class A Bowling Green led its best-of-three playoff series in the Midwest League against West Michigan (Tigers) 1-0, with a Sunday game scheduled. ... Short-season Class A Hudson Valley played Game 2 of its best-of-three playoff series in the NY-Penn League against Tri-City (Astros) on Sunday. Hudson Valley lost the opener 3-0.

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