

S T . P E T E R S B U R G , F L O R I D A

THE TROP REPORT

"A New Team, A New Home, A New Season"

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DEVIL RAYS 12-16, 5TH AL EAST

ROUGH APRIL LEAVES DEVIL RAYS AT 12-16, BUT HELP IS ALREADY ARRIVING

Saunders lands on the DL and Alvarez cools off from his hot start, but Jason Johnson has quietly become the rotation's best arm, Bubba Trammell has emerged as the lineup's best bat, and the organization's first-ever Farm System Review shows real depth building underneath the big club.

BY RAY DELGADO · TROP REPORT STAFF WRITER

The optimism of Opening Week has given way to an expansion team's first real reckoning. Twenty-eight games into franchise history, the Devil Rays sit 12-16, alone in fifth place in a bunched-up AL East where Baltimore and Toronto share the top spot at 19-9. Nobody in the organization is panicking — this is still a roster that didn't exist fourteen months ago — but the record is a real step back from the 3-4 start this paper chronicled in its debut edition.

The rotation absorbed the toughest hit. Tony Saunders, the durable lefty the club was counting on to anchor things behind Wilson Alvarez, landed on the disabled list with roughly forty days still to go. Stepping into his turn has been 24-year-old Jason Johnson, and the early results are hard to argue with — a 2-1 record and a 3.43 ERA that's quietly the best mark of anyone in the rotation right now. That's a real silver lining on an otherwise rough month, and exactly the kind of depth an

BY THE NUMBERS

Record 12-16 (5th, 7.0 GB)

Games played	28
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Boggs	.330, 31 H
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Trammell	.308, 6 HR
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McCracken	.298
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McGriff	.286, 4 HR
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Johnson	2-1, 3.43 ERA
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Hernandez	7 SV, 2.70 ERA
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Carlson	1.00 ERA
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Alvarez	1-2, 4.76 ERA
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expansion club needs to find out it has.

Alvarez himself has come back to earth. The ace who opened the season at a sparkling 1.32 ERA has seen that number climb to 4.76 across his next several turns — still the same stuff by all accounts, but the results haven't followed yet. Rolando Arrojo's slide has been the more concerning one: back-to-back rough outings against Detroit early in the season have snowballed into a 2–4 record and a 6.94 ERA, the one clear problem spot in an otherwise passable five. Tony Coles, the 22-year-old right-hander with the highest ceiling in the entire organization, has been the model of consistency underneath both of them — 3–2, 3.97 ERA, and still just getting started.

The lineup has seen its own shuffle. Dave Martinez was optioned to Durham partway through the stretch, and Bubba Trammell has taken over as the everyday right fielder — and hasn't looked back, hitting .308 with 6 home runs, the best month of production from anyone in the regular lineup. Wade Boggs, at 39, is still Wade Boggs, leading the club at .330;

Fred McGriff (.286) and Quinton McCracken (.298) have given the order some real thump underneath him. Kevin Stocker's bat has struggled to a .161 average, but a fresh look at the club's actual fielding numbers shows his glove is comfortably the best on the roster — a real case that defense alone is carrying his roster spot right now, and worth watching as the season goes on.

The system sent its first reinforcement north this stretch, too: Randy Winn, a 23-year-old outfielder who was hitting .329 in his brief look at AAA Durham, got the call and is just getting his first taste of the majors. Two modest depth trades also went on the books — Bryan Rekar to Colorado for three minor-league arms and bats on April 9, and Herb Perry to Anaheim for three more on April 25 — neither with any immediate big-league impact, but both adding names to an organization still building out its pipeline.

That pipeline got its first real public accounting this same week, in fact: the franchise's first-ever Farm System Review went out covering all 114 players on the club's shortlist,

Arrojo 2–4, 6.94 ERA

AL EAST STANDINGS

Baltimore	19–9
Toronto	19–9
Boston	18–10
New York	18–10
Tampa Bay	12–16

“Johnson has quietly become the rotation's best pitcher — while filling in for the man he replaced.”

STATE OF THE CLUB

Tony Saunders (LHP) on the disabled list, roughly forty days remaining — Jason Johnson has taken his rotation turn in the meantime.

Dave Martinez optioned to AAA Durham; Bubba Trammell now the everyday right fielder.

Randy Winn recalled after hitting .329 in a brief look at Durham — his first taste of the majors.

Two trades on the books since Opening Day: Bryan Rekar to Colorado (Apr. 9) and Herb Perry to Anaheim (Apr. 25), both bringing back multiple minor-league pieces.

top to bottom, from Durham down to the rookie levels that haven't even started their seasons yet. It's an early look, and a light one by design — barely a month of stats exists anywhere in the system — but it's the first real record of where things stand beneath the 25-man, and it'll only get more useful from here. The dugout still has one hole left to fill, too: the Manager's seat remains open heading into May, same as it was on Opening Day.

Nobody expected a perfect month from a team this young, and nobody's gotten one. But between Johnson stepping up, Trammell taking over right field, Winn's arrival, and a farm system that's now on the record for the first time, there's more to like beneath the .429 winning percentage than the standings alone would suggest. The next real checkpoint comes at the middle of the month.

The club's first-ever Farm System Review was published this week, covering all 114 shortlisted prospects across the organization.

The Manager's seat remains open — still the first order of business off the field.