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THE TROP REPORT

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

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DEVIL RAYS 3-4, 5TH AL EAST

DEVIL RAYS CHRISTEN THE TROP IN FRANCHISE'S FIRST WEEK

Sellout crowd of 43,008 witnesses history at Opening Day; club takes 2 of 3 from Chicago before a rough getaway to Detroit

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Major League Baseball arrived in Tampa Bay for good on March 31, and 43,008 people packed Tropicana Field to see it happen. It was the largest crowd in the building's short history, and by the time the Devil Rays took the field for the first pitch in franchise history, the noise inside the Trop's dome felt like it belonged to a pennant race, not an expansion debut.

Wilson Alvarez got the ball for that first start and gave the new franchise exactly the kind of outing it needed from its ace — sharp stuff, a manageable jam here and there, nothing to suggest this was a team playing its very first game. The bullpen couldn't hold the lead late, though, and Detroit's Justin Thompson outlasted him as the Tigers escaped St. Petersburg with a 6-4 win. Dave Eiland took the loss in relief. It wasn't the storybook opener the sellout crowd came for, but nobody in the building seemed to mind much — the history was in the building, not the box score.

The Tigers took the next one too, 5-2, as Rolando Arrojo ran into the first of two rough afternoons against Frank Castillo. But the home crowd got its signature moment in the rubber game of the series: rookie right-hander Tony Coles, the

highest-upside arm in the system at 22 years old, out-dueled Brian Moehler for a 4-3 win — the first victory in Tampa Bay Devil Rays history, and the first of Coles' career. Roberto Hernandez closed it out for the save.

Chicago came to town for the weekend and the Devil Rays announced themselves as more than just an expansion punching bag. The White Sox took the opener comfortably, 11-4, behind Jaime Navarro, but Tampa Bay answered by taking the final two: Dennis Springer spun eight strong innings of one-run ball in a 2-1 win, and Alvarez came back on regular rest to close the homestand with his best start yet, seven-plus innings in a 7-2 win over James Baldwin. The Devil Rays left the Trop having won the season-opening homestand's back half, 3 of 4 after the Tigers' first two.

The good feeling didn't survive the trip north. Arrojo and Castillo met again in the getaway game at Detroit on April 7, and the result was the same: Tigers 5, Devil Rays 2, Arrojo's second loss in as many turns. It leaves the club 3-4 through its first week and change, in last place in a crowded AL East where nobody has separated from the pack —

BY THE NUMBERS

Record: 3-4 (5th, AL East, 3.0 GB)

Home opener attendance: 43,008 (sellout)

Avg. attendance, first homestand: 24,491

Trammell	.429, 2 HR, 7 R
Martinez	.304
Ledesma	.280
Sorrento	.217, 2 HR
McGriff	.231

Alvarez	1.32 ERA, 15 K
Coles	W, 3.00 ERA (1st MLB win)
Springer	W, 1.12 ERA
Hernandez	2 SV
Arrojo	0-2, 6.75 ERA

AL EAST STANDINGS

Baltimore	6-1
Toronto	5-1
New York	4-3
Boston	4-3
Tampa Bay	3-4

"The history was in the building, not the box score."

STATE OF THE CLUB

Budget \$57.0M against a projected \$53.7M payroll, one of the more modest outlays in the

Baltimore (6–1) and Toronto (5–1) are hot out of the gate, but the Devil Rays sit only three games back of the top with a long season ahead.

Individually, the early returns are encouraging. Bubba Trammell has been the best bat in the lineup, hitting .429 with two home runs and seven runs scored in the club's first seven games. Dave Martinez (.304) and Aaron Ledesma (.280) have given the lineup some stability underneath him, while Fred McGriff and Wade Boggs — the two most recognizable names on the roster — are still finding their timing,

both hitting under .240 through the first week. On the mound, Alvarez has been every bit the horse the club needs at the top of the rotation, posting a 1.32 ERA with 15 strikeouts across his two starts, and Hernandez already has two saves locked down in the ninth.

It's one week of an expansion season, and nobody in the clubhouse is reading too much into it in either direction. But for a franchise that didn't exist a year ago, an Opening Day sellout, a first win delivered by a homegrown rookie, and a series win over an established American League club is about as good a first

league — ownership's expectations remain patient for a first-year club.

The dugout still has an opening: the club has yet to fill its Manager's seat. Bench coach Mike Harris and the rest of the staff have things running smoothly in the meantime, but it's the first order of business off the field.

9,122 season tickets sold ahead of the opener — a promising number for a market seeing its first taste of the big leagues.