

THE TROP REPORT

Official Dispatch of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays · "A New Ballclub in the Sunshine State"

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One Trade, No Fire Sale: Rays Ship Boggs to Toronto, Keep McGriff, and Limp Out of July at 43-64

A 10-14 month, with two wins in twelve road games, ends with a deadline that moved exactly one veteran — and nobody calling about Roberto Hernandez

BY RAY DELGADO · TROP REPORT STAFF WRITER

The trading deadline came to the Trop on Friday, took a long look around, and left with a single transaction. Third baseman Wade Boggs, 40, and Princeton right-hander Nelson Carranza, 21, are headed to Toronto for first baseman Jonathan Felton and left-hander Elijah Daniels, both 22 and both assigned to Charleston. The Rays are keeping 95 percent of Boggs's \$3.4 million on their books through 1999 — the one structure that would get a deal done in a market where every club was short on trade cash — so this is a roster-and-farm move, not a payroll one. Scott McClain (.216, 7 HR) takes over at third, and the club leaves the deadline with 24 players on a 25-man roster and one open spot.

What the Rays did not do was just as deliberate. Fred McGriff, 34, who hit .314 with seven home runs in July and is on a one-year, \$5.6 million deal with a no-trade clause, was never shopped; the front office had no appetite for a total fire sale in front of the home crowd. Roberto Hernandez, whose 18 saves make him the best closer on any trade list, drew no calls, and neither did Dave Martinez or anyone else on the club's block. A proposal sending Tony Saunders — out

for the season — to the Cubs for second baseman Bill Young was turned down. Hernandez, with three years and \$3.6 million left, simply goes into the winter as the best chip the Rays have.

"A total fire sale doesn't help anyone buy a ticket."

The month itself was a tale of two ballparks. The Rays went 10-14 in July, 8-6 at home and 2-10 on the road, outscored 120-93 over the stretch. Home cooking included taking three of four from the Yankees (Esteban Yan won it in 12 innings on July 9, and Hernandez closed out a 2-1 win the next night), an 11-1 rout of Atlanta behind Wilson Alvarez on July 1, and an 11-inning 3-2 win over Oakland on July 26 that Albie Lopez finished. The low point at the Trop was an 11-0 loss to the Yankees on July 11.

The road was another story. The Rays were swept in Anaheim, took one of three in Toronto and Texas, and ended the month dropping both games at Chicago, 7-1 and 3-1. Two wins in twelve away from home is not a trend; it is a travel advisory.

BY THE NUMBERS

10-14

July record: 8-6 at home, 2-10 on the road

1

Trade at the deadline: Boggs and Carranza to Toronto for Felton and Daniels

95%

Share of Boggs's \$3.4M the Rays are retaining through 1999

.314

McGriff's July average, with 7 HR in 86 AB

Nov. 10

New date for the amateur draft; the pool publishes Oct. 11

AL EAST STANDINGS

Club	W	L	GB
Toronto	65	44	—
NY Yankees	62	46	2.5
Boston	61	46	3.0
Baltimore	61	47	3.5
Tampa Bay	43	64	21.0

ON THE FIELD

McGriff and Franco Hold the Line; Romero and Stocker Go Cold

For a fifth straight month the lineup ran through its veterans. McGriff's July (.314, 7 HR over 86 at-bats) pushed his season line to .288 with 20 home runs and 59 RBI, and 39-year-old Julio Franco hit .307 on the month. Franco is also the club's best on-base man at .364, which is why the sabermetric card still has him leading off.

The cold side of the ledger was colder. Miguel Romero, the 20-year-old shortstop, went 17-for-95 (.179) in July, taking his

season average from .321 to .243. Kevin Stocker went 0-for-13 and sits at .151, though his glove is still the best on the club by a wide margin: +7.21 zone rating at short. Quinton McCracken (.192 in 52 at-bats), Bubba Trammell (.216, still with 18 home runs) and Russ Morman (.211) all slumped too.

The rotation took the brunt of it. Dennis Springer went 1-4 and watched his ERA jump from 4.32 to 5.19, which means the

threatened designation for assignment has now gone five issues without happening. Coles went 2-3 (3.88 ERA) and Jason Johnson 0-2, though his ERA improved to 4.00 on thin run support. Hernandez added two saves and two wins but his ERA has crept to 4.83, and Mecir's has gone from bad to worse. Saunders is done for the year, so the rotation stays at five.

Two wins in twelve away from home is not a trend; it is a travel advisory.

THE DEADLINE LEDGER

DATE	MOVE	DETAIL
Jul 31	Trade	3B Wade Boggs (40, Rays retaining 95% of \$3.4M through 1999) and RHP Nelson Carranza (21) to Toronto for 1B Jonathan Felton (22) and LHP Elijah Daniels (22); both arrivals assigned to Charleston.
Jul 31	Passed	Offer of SP Tony Saunders to the Cubs for 2B Bill Young declined. McGriff never shopped; Hernandez, Martinez and the rest of the block drew no calls.
Jul 31	Status	C John Flaherty day-to-day (4 days). SP Tony Saunders on the 60-day DL, out for the season. 24-man roster, one open spot.

STATE OF THE CLUB

Rotation: Tony Coles (8-8, 3.88) is still the best arm; Springer went 1-4 in July and sits at 6-10, 5.19.

Bullpen: Hernandez (18 SV, 4.83 ERA) stays put; Jim Mecir's ERA has climbed to 6.68.

Lineup: McClain at third; Flaherty day-to-day.

Roster: 24 of 25 spots filled.

DOWN ON THE FARM & THE AWARDS SHELF

The July Farm System Review (Vol. 1, No. 4) tracks 115 players across the Rays' six affiliates, and the standouts are hitters. First baseman Mihnea Piersic, named the Florida State League's Batter of the Month for June, is now at Double-A Orlando with a .323/.410/.596 line and 16 home runs on the season. Aubrey Huff has hit .315/.422/.528 since moving up to High-A St. Petersburg, and 20-year-old right-hander Dan Wheeler is carrying a 2.88 ERA over 75 innings at Low-A Charleston.

Orlando's Danny Quinones, the Southern League's Pitcher of the Month for June, is now at Triple-A Durham with a 4.25 ERA in a 5.04-ERA league — the next real audition for a big-league rotation spot. Eddie Smith and Moises Vitela made the Florida State League All-Star Game on July 14, and Damaso Marte, Joe Hall and Eric Wicklund were named to the All-Star Prospects Game on July 5. Weekly honors went to Jordon Booth and Alex Camacho at Charleston, Brad Winters at Durham and Travis Clouse at St. Petersburg.

At the big-league level, no Devil Ray won a weekly award in July, and the club's June Rookie of the Month, Jason Johnson, was announced on July 1. The July Batter, Pitcher and Rookie of the Month awards post tomorrow, August 1; the Trop Report will tally the Rays' results in the next issue. As for the amateur draft, the in-game calendar has pushed it out of July: the pool publishes October 11, the combine is November 8 and the draft itself is November 10, so the real 1998 class will have to wait.