

THE TROP REPORT

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

RECORD: 33-50 (.398)

5TH, AL EAST · 19.5 GB

PRICE: ONE THIN DIME

Two Rookies of the Month Can't Hide a 33-50 Record, But the Draft Is Four Days Away

Club goes 6-7 since the mid-June skid, falls to 19.5 back as Boston seizes the division — but Jason Johnson's June honors and a buried April award for Bubba Trammell give the front office something to smile about heading into July 5th

BY RAY DELGADO · TROP REPORT STAFF WRITER

June closed the way most of this season has gone in St. Petersburg: with more losses than wins. The Devil Rays went 6-7 over the season's final two-week stretch to fall to 33-50 through 83 games, now 19.5 games behind a Boston club that has passed Toronto outright for the AL East lead (52-30 to 50-34). It isn't the six-game freefall the club endured earlier in June, but it's not progress either — just a last-place team playing out a lost season.

The transaction wire, by contrast, was mercifully quiet. Only two moves separate this checkpoint from the last: Paul Sorrento's disabled list clock finally ran out, and the veteran left fielder is back in the everyday lineup (.279, 5 HR, 18 RBI on the year through 31 games). Almost in the same breath, Carson Miller — who had cooled to .145 over his last stretch of at-bats — landed on the 15-day disabled list with a fresh injury, not a day-to-day knock. Net effect: one left fielder swapped for another, no real gain in roster flexibility, and Miller's early-season audition put on pause at the worst possible time.

Dennis Springer's threatened designation for assignment, a fixture of this column since May, still hasn't happened — and paradoxically, his case against it has only gotten stronger. The 33-year-old right-hander is 5-6 with a 4.32 ERA, his best mark of the season, which leaves the Ryan Rupe/Danny Quinones call-up question that's been simmering at AAA Durham and AA Orlando theoretical rather than urgent. Both arms remain ready if the front office changes its mind; neither has been summoned yet.

Roberto Hernandez continues to be the bullpen's steadiest hand and its most obvious trade chip. Two more saves this stretch push him to 16 on the year, even as his ERA ticked back up to 3.96 — still comfortably the best year any Devil Rays reliever has turned in, and the name most likely to move if the front office decides to sell veteran innings once the July 31st deadline gets closer.

who won't be part of the next good Devil Rays team."

The genuine good news arrived off the field. Rookie right-hander Jason Johnson was named the American League's Rookie of the Month for June — a well-earned honor for a arm that's quietly built an 8-4 record and a 4.16 ERA across 101.2 innings while anchoring the rotation's back end. And a look back through the season's full award log, prompted by Johnson's win, turned up a second story that had gone unnoticed at the time: outfielder Bubba Trammell was named the AL's Rookie of the Month for April, back before this paper existed to report it. Two legitimate feel-good stories, both buried inside a record that reads 33-50.

The front office's Farm System Review, refreshed again this week directly from the organization's real prospect shortlist, carries the full picture on the 122 players Tampa Bay is tracking org-wide. Mihnea Piersic's monster season at High-A St. Petersburg (.327/.412/.583, 10 HR) is the headline, with Michelangelo Giacomini and Angel del Castillo both still running loud lines a full season in. Cameron Ingram has emerged as the top closer prospect at AAA Durham, and Eric Wicklund — still tied for the system's single highest ceiling at 80 Potential — has finally thrown his first innings for Rookie-level Princeton. One name came off the list entirely: Harry Judd, who has graduated past shortlist eligibility as he's now fully established in the show, and is tracked exclusively on the Command Center going forward.

All of which sets up the most consequential date on the Devil Rays' 1998 calendar that has nothing to do with a game: the real amateur draft, July 5th, just four days from this printing. Tampa Bay held no selections in the first three rounds, but the front office's cross-reference of the actual 1998 draft results against the current farm system has already turned up something worth watching — both Aubrey Huff (round 5, 162nd overall) and Ryan Rupe (round 6, 192nd overall) are already on the org's real prospect shortlist, tracked and performing, months before their draft classes officially arrive. A full Historic Draft Result Checklist, tracking every

BY THE NUMBERS

6-7

Record since the mid-June checkpoint

19.5

Games back of first-place Boston

2

Rookie of the Month awards this season:
Jason Johnson (June), Bubba Trammell (April)

16

Roberto Hernandez saves, 3.96 ERA, the pen's clear trade chip

Jul 5

Real 1998 amateur draft — four days out

AL EAST STANDINGS

Club	W	L	GB
Boston	52	30	—
Toronto	50	34	3.0
Baltimore	47	36	5.5
NY Yankees	46	37	6.5
Tampa Bay	33	50	19.5

STATE OF THE CLUB

Rotation: Springer (5-6, 4.32 ERA, his best mark yet) makes the DFA case harder, not easier; Rupe and Quinones still waiting in the wings.

Bullpen: Hernandez up to 16 SV (3.96 ERA) — the clearest trade chip on the roster heading toward July 31st.

Lineup: Sorrento activated in LF; Miller lands on the 15-day DL the same stretch, a wash for playing time.

Awards: Jason Johnson (June) and Bubba Trammell (April) both named AL Rookie

"We'd rather find out what's actually in this system before the draft gets here than spend the summer protecting guys

pick against who actually shows up in this save, debuts alongside this issue.

of the Month.

Farm: 122 players tracked org-wide; Piersic, Giacomini, and del Castillo the names trending hottest this issue.

Draft: The real July 5th amateur draft is four days out — a new Historic Draft Result Checklist debuts alongside this issue.