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## Notes: Fly balls an adventure Roof at Tropicana Field can be tough on outfielders

By Bill Chastain / MLB.com

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ST. PETERSBURG -- Tropicana Field is home for the Devil Rays, but there are aspects of the building that are difficult for a player to acquaint with, particularly outfielders.

The Trop's Teflon roof as well as the lights can make routine fly balls an adventure for any outfielder, particularly young outfielders or new outfielders to the building.

Davey Martinez helped coach the outfielders in the spring and has been with the team while first-base coach George Hendrick recovers from knee surgery. A former Rays outfielder himself, Martinez said the roof is the hardest thing about learning to play outfield in Tropicana Field.

"You can't take your eyes off the ball," Martinez said.

Taking your eyes off the ball sounds like something that would be taboo while playing any outfield. Martinez said that is not the case.

"If the ball is hit to a gap, you take your first few steps, then you look for the ball," he said. "In here and the Metrodome [in Minneapolis], you can't do that. You lose the ball and you'll never pick it back up, especially balls in the gap here. Some of them you lose in the lights here. When they go up, once you take your eye off it, you don't see them."

Elijah Dukes has listened to Martinez and his fellow outfielders in figuring out how to best play the outfield at the Trop.

"Some balls are still difficult, but I try to follow the ball and just go to the spot," Dukes said. "I'm real good at going to the spot of the ball. You'll lose it if you take your eyes off it. That's goes for anybody. You take your eye off it, you might lose it, because it is white up there."

"It's not necessarily a home-field advantage, because anybody who takes their eye off the ball too long -- home or visiting team -- they have a chance of losing it."

Delmon Young has played approximately two months in the Major Leagues, and he said the Trop's roof is not his major concern.

"About the only thing that's tough at our place, compared to Toronto, is the lights get in the way of some of the fly balls and line drives," Young said. "The lights are so low that the mid-range line drives stay in it."

**Pacing Aki:** Akinori Iwamura was given the day off Monday, save for a pinch-hitting appearance that saw him strike out to end the game. With a left-hander on the mound for the O's on Monday and Wednesday nights, Rays manager Joe Maddon figured one of the two games would be a good time for a day off.

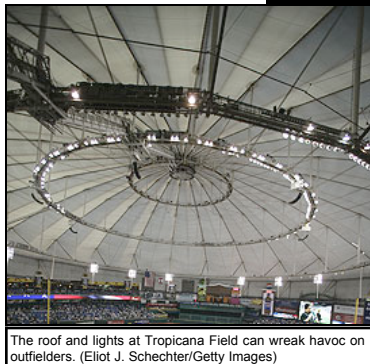
"I think [Iwamura's] going to play well all year," Maddon said. "And part of him playing well all year, I think, is the Japanese season isn't as, I don't think as, grinding maybe as this one is in regard to numbers or the travel. So I want us to be in tune with giving him a day off now and then, to permit him to play at the highest level possible."

Iwamura said if he had the option, he'd want to play "every single game.

"But the manager decides who is going to play, so I respect his decision," he said. "If the manager decides to give me a day off to make sure that I'm going to be ready for the next game, I'm more than happy to do so."

Iwamura said the shorter season he played in Japan was "no problem.

"But during the course of the season, sometimes I had up and downs, sometimes I would have a minor problem, some body part aches or nags, things like that," Iwamura added. "But I overcome those to play the whole season -- no problem."



The roof and lights at Tropicana Field can wreak havoc on outfielders. (Eliot J. Schechter/Getty Images)

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**Ryu relief:** Jae Kuk Ryu relieved James Shields in Monday night's loss to the O's and promptly surrendered consecutive doubles to Miguel Tejada, Aubrey Huff and Jay Gibbons en route to taking his first loss as a Ray.

"I wanted to get him out there," Maddon said. "You've got the base hit by Tejada right inside the line. Huff off-the-end-of-the-bat base hit. Then the ball was struck well up the middle. I wanted to give him a shot at that particular moment. We have to define our bullpen, and I felt that he's been very consistent and calm in situations. So I wanted to run him out there last night to see how it would go."

Ryu's ERA ballooned from 1.69 to 6.75. Still, Maddon said the right-hander will get another shot.

"Again, a well-placed ball down the third-base line, then a softie to center," Maddon said. "Now the third ball was well struck, and that's just how that stuff happens. But he threw strikes. He's not going to come in there and walk anybody. He's going to come in and make them swing the bat. And that's what he did. We'll just have to keep trying and see how that goes. But I have not lost any confidence in him."

**Strong team promotions:** University of Detroit-Mercy professor Mike Bernacchi grades Major League Baseball team promotions based on quantity, quality and creativity. The Rays were one of only five teams to receive a grade of A. The Marlins and Pirates each received a grade of A-plus, while the Rays, Astros and Mariners received A's.

**Up next:** The Rays and O's will wrap up their three-game series Wednesday afternoon in a 3:10 p.m. ET contest at Tropicana Field. Left-hander Scott Kazmir (1-1, 4.95 ERA) will start for the Rays against southpaw Erik Bedard (2-1, 5.09 ERA).

*Bill Chastain is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.*



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