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Baseball: Rays

Willy Aybar hits walkoff homer as Tampa Bay Rays rally to beat Seattle Mariners

Tampa Bay Rays news and notes

Tampa Bay Rays cut ties with Pat Burrell, promote Hank Blalock

Tampa Bay Rays facing several more roster decisions in coming weeks

Rays tales: Matt Garza is Tampa Bay Rays' wing man

Tampa Bay Rays' Evan Longoria concerned about effect of Tropicana Field turf on hamstrings

By Marc Topkin, Times Staff Writer
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PORT CHARLOTTE — **Evan Longoria's** sole goal for this season is to play all 162 games, and he worked extensively this winter on strengthening his hamstrings to increase his chances.

But there's one factor he can't control: the wear and tear of the turf at Tropicana Field.

Longoria joined LF **Carl Crawford** in identifying the turf (which sits on a concrete base) as an issue in staying healthy.

"The turf on your lower back and hamstrings is really tough," Longoria said upon reporting to camp. "So that was my biggest focus this offseason. I did a lot of pushing and pulling stuff, training the hamstring. I did a lot of resisted running to kind of build that up.

"It's definitely different. We go on the road and play for 10 days and you feel good and then you come back on the turf for a couple days and you definitely feel it in your hamstrings. If that can be prevented, I tried to do as much as I could this offseason."

His hope is to be in the lineup for every game. "I worked as hard as I could this offseason to get my body ready for that," he said. "Hopefully if I play all those, down at the end of the season we'll be in a good spot and make a playoff run again."

He wanted to do so last season but missed two April games when his grandmother died, then six starts from May 31-June 7 due to hamstring tightness.

Overall, Longoria said liked the additions the Rays made and their chances. "I think they made the right moves," he said.

PAT THE BAT: Pat Burrell's chances of rebounding from his poor 2009 will be a major key to the Rays success. First impressions were good as Burrell showed up Sunday in what looked to be very good shape.

"He looks good, really good," said Longoria, who worked out with Burrell at Arizona's Athletes Performance Institute. "He works out like an animal, so it was good. We kind of pushed each other the whole offseason. He gets after it."

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FREE WILLY: Manager **Joe Maddon** said he'd like to get more at-bats for **Willy Aybar** (who had 324 in 2008, 296 last year) , but also that his overall defense needs to improve and he no longer will be used at second after making five errors and several other miscues in 28 games there.

"I love having him," Maddon said. "We like him at third, we like him at first, we like him at DH. We like him at the plate. He's just a professional hitter."

Aybar said the right wrist he sprained in winter ball is healed and won't limit him during camp.

MISCELLANY: LHP **Jake McGee** rejoined the team after spending much of Saturday at an area hospital with his wife, **Morgan**, who was treated and released. ... SS **Jason Bartlett** was also back after missing the FanFest to attend to his son and sick wife, who was at the same hospital. ... Only six position players haven't reported: **Carl Crawford**, **Elliot Johnson**, **Carlos Peña**, **Sean Rodriguez**, **Ben Zobrist** and non-roster **Angel Chavez**. ... Maddon and the coaches started their individual precamp meetings with each player. ... C **Dioner Navarro** and RHP **Rafael Soriano**, who missed previous workouts, were feeling better, Maddon said.

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