

December 7, 2010



An interview with:

JOE MADDON

JOE MADDON: Happy holidays, everybody. Just happy to be here. We've got a lot of stuff going on. Lot of interesting conversations upstairs. I've had a great several weeks back in Long Beach. Great Thanksgiving. Taking things kind of easily right now.

Looking forward to putting together our next year's team.

Q. The big question everyone has, a lot of guys are leaving. What are your expectations at this point?

JOE MADDON: With all the guys that are leaving, it's easy to think that it's going to be very difficult for us next year, and it probably will be. I also believe that a strong core of players remains on the field, and obviously a strong core in the starting pitching staff. Our starting pitching is still among the best in the American League.

So you take that and combine that with a really strong defense. We apparently are going to have some holes with the void of Carlos, et cetera. But I believe if somehow we're doing a lot of diligent work regarding our bullpen, if we can get some kind of a bullpen back together, that would make all the difference in the world. That would put us back in the 90-win area, I believe. It certainly comes down to the bullpen.

I was just talking to somebody else outside. Last year, coming out of spring training, we were just talking about our bullpen at that time which led the American League in ERA last year. We were really concerned. We had Soriano which we thought was going to be very good, though he only pitched seven times last spring.

Benny we had to send back to Triple-A. Grant Balfour was throwing 89 miles an hour at that time, and showed as a left-handed specialist.

And you had Danny and you had Lance, et cetera, and you had an injured JP Howell. So there were a lot of ifs about our bullpen last year going out of spring training. Bullpens are volatile and unpredictable.

So we'll do our best putting together something going into this season. If we kind of hit on some things, that will make a big difference for us.

Q. How tough is it to put together a bullpen with bringing in that many arms?

JOE MADDON: I don't want to say it's nearly impossible, but it's quite challenging. It's not going to be easy. I'm not here to tell you that. But we're going to give it our best go to do something like that.

In regards to winning and losing baseball games, our team's doing well. The most devastating part of a team is when a team loses late on a consistent basis. When you have games won in the 7th and 8th, and you're losing a lot of 8th and 9th inning games, the tone in the clubhouse at that time is where it can really go south. That is why the bullpen -- and I'm not saying anything you guys don't already know, but having that bullpen in place is going to permit us to be solvent again.

I don't know how this is going to happen. I really don't know how. I'm not going to sit here and tell you we have any great ideas yet. We've been talking about a lot of different things. A lot of it is hit and miss with bullpens, I understand that. But I tend to be on the optimistic side. I know our starting pitching is firm. I know our defense is going to be firm again. So that speaks to good pitching. We're just going to have to get somewhat lucky and be diligent and do our work regarding putting this bullpen back together.

But that, to me, is the key to our success next year: Yes or no, if we have a good bullpen.

Q. How did you react to the news that the Red Sox had picked up Gonzalez?

JOE MADDON: I heard it from one of the

Boston writers in a phone conversation that was actually at the hotel where he was going to. I was very disappointed (laughing). This guy is one of the best hitters that I've seen in recent time. He definitely fits that ballpark's abilities or his abilities match that ballpark well. There is nothing we can do about that.

Oftentimes in the past, I'm confronted with this in the off-season, and all these other teams, the Yankees and Red Sox in particular are going to make some really good moves. At the end of the day, I've got to tell you the same thing, I'm only worried about what the Rays do. There is nothing I can do. When it comes to the incontrollable components, which is what the other teams do, God bless them. It's up to us to react to it, plan well against them, pitch well against them, play well against them.

But for me it's about the what the Rays do in this meeting room upstairs and how we choose to put things together going into next season.

I don't like it. I think he's really good. He's going to wear out that left field wall. He's a great first baseman, it's good for the Red Sox.

Q. Is it a little bit of a different feel this winter instead of building like you had in the early years, you're kind of rebuilding for the first time?

JOE MADDON: It is different. I have permitted myself the moment to think about how nice it would be to have this whole team back next year and what that would be like, just having the same group back would have been kind of neat, but that's not how things are.

It is a different feeling in a sense, but I tell you, and again, I'm just being honest, I'm very excited about it. I'm very excited about this next season. I know there are going to be a lot of different names, situations, and roles; there are going to be so many things that are changing. But when you take this job and you manage the Rays, you know going into it we have to work within certain parameters. I know that. And I really enjoy that. I really do. So there is a lot of challenge putting this thing back together.

Winning the AL East two out of three years I take most pride in. Of course we wanted to get deeper in the playoffs last year. But beyond that, you could lose a five-game series to two really good left-handed pitchers easily. But to win the American League East over the course of an entire season, to me, is very significant, and that really speaks to the entire organization, not just the team

on the field, the players, et cetera. Talking front office management, ownership, scouting and development. That's why we've been good.

That's where our challenge lies is to stay within our strengths. Those are our strengths. We've got to stay there. That's who we are. You know where I come from, I find it exciting to have this more grass roots approach to putting a team together, something rooted in scouting and development. I enjoy that.

Again, it's not going to be easy. I'm not delusional, I'm just telling you I'm enjoying the thoughts of trying to make this good again.

Q. When John Farrell was in here yesterday, he was saying while some people might think managing in your division is a negative to him taking that job. He said he doesn't feel that way at all. That was actually one of the things that appealed to him. Can you understand where he's coming from with that?

JOE MADDON: Yes. We're a little bit haute in the sense that we always talk about the American League East as the best division in all of baseball, I believe that.

Then when I took the job with the Rays, everybody thinks you're nuts, with the Devil Rays at that time, competing against the Yankees and the Red Sox. How are you going to compete? Don't you want to move to another division? I said no, I don't want to move to another division. You've got to beat the best to be the best. With that, there is motivation to be included within this group.

I can understand John wanting to compete within this division. When you're playing in the AL East, and now with the ascension of the Orioles and Toronto, and the steadiness of the Yankees and Red Sox and hopefully that we're able to maintain, you're playing almost 80 games against these guys. The atmosphere surrounding that on a nightly basis when you're playing these divisional games is pretty intense.

If you're going to manage and want to be involved, why not be there? And I'm not denigrating any other division or group. I'm not saying that. I just know what it's like here. So from his perspective, to cut his teeth in his division like I am right now or I've done, I think it's fascinating, it's interesting, it's the only place to be.

Q. There are so many positions that aren't set. The couple that you do know, how do you see second base being split up?

JOE MADDON: Well, we have some guys that we have platooned the past that may have to play more consistently against righties and lefties, i.e., Sean Rodriguez, possibly Matty Joyce. I don't know to what extent Mikey, Jaso. But we may have guys that we have platooned in the past; now may be their time to be considered regular players that play against both righties and lefties. So that's something we've talked about and considered.

Not being able to really bring in the one or two guys that permits the platoon situation, although that's still being considered, I'm not saying it's not. But the guys that I'm talking about, like Matt and Sean, as an example, Jaso, those kind of guys right there, to give them an opportunity to play on a regular basis, would be kind of interesting to see what they can do.

These are high-end guys, great athletes, they're young. And if you do hit it right, and they can be those kind of guys, then obviously you're in pretty good shape. So those are all different. We've not decided on doing that yet, those are thoughts.

Q. Can Ried play every day on a day-to-day basis?

JOE MADDON: For me, Ried Brignac -- and we've talked about this. They guys that I'm around all the time know what I think about Ried as a shortstop. Ried is one of the better fielders of the ball in the American League. He fields the ball cleanly. He's not the fastest guy in the world, but he really has good range both sides. He's got a really accurate arm, and he's got Major League make-up. He's all that stuff.

Now as a hitter, he still has to make some adjustments at the plate, although he did a lot better last year. But there is room for him to grow in that regard. But, yes, I think Ried Brignac has all the mental, physical abilities to be a good Major League shortstop as a starter, I believe that.

Q. In 2011?

JOE MADDON: I think he's about there right now.

Q. It's always is sort of traumatic losing a franchise type player. Carl kind of came with the furniture. Have you wrapped your mind around the thought of what it's going to be like to walk into the clubhouse in spring training

and not only not see him in the clubhouse or on the field, what kind of void that's going to be?

JOE MADDON: You know what really stands out when people ask me about him is -- our dugout is on the first base side at home. So many times I'll see a ball hit to left field that your immediate thought is oh, no. But then you know it's Carl. Then all of a sudden you see the gap close and you see the ball caught.

Then you watch the other teams that have different left fielders, the same ball is hit, and the ball is always dropping. Then you think about the momentum that's been shifted just based on that play being made or not being made.

So, yes, Carl stands out to me. Everybody's talking about his offense, but that really stands out to me what he does out there. In the clubhouse, he's really well liked. Actually very funny, very straight up, great work ethic.

I don't know that I'll really wrap my mind around that until spring training when he actually slaps you in the face or slaps you in the face with another team.

Listen, he's a good guy. He's a good player. He's earned this moment, and we all wish him well. But he's all of that. He's really good. He's really good.

Q. With the five starters who gave you a real good season last year, how do you plan to work Ellison in this year is he more minor leagues?

JOE MADDON: That's in discussion. We don't know that yet. We don't. We do have the luxury of having six nice starters right now. There is always that potential discussion of moving somebody to the bullpen. Honestly, and I'm just giving you all the different looks. Nothing's been decided. But there is that possibility.

We're sending Helli back, although I really think Helli's ready to pitch in the big leagues. So these are continuing discussions we have going on right now. We have not answered those. We're still discussing those. We're trying to include everybody in it, I'm talking to scouts, people that have seen different guys, our staff, et cetera. So I don't have a solid answer for you. It's a nice problem.

Q. Put it this way, to have those six guys, you have other goals obviously. You



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mentioned defense and the bullpen, but to be able to start off with depth at starting pitching, does that make at least some confidence going into it?

JOE MADDON: I'll tell you about depth and starting pitching, I don't think you can ever think you have too much really good starting pitching. Because when that stuff goes away and you have to start filling those spots in with guys, like the six-year free agent guys or the guys you don't really dig, that is when your whole thing falls apart. So any time you can stockpile and have enough Major League pitchers that you like, not guys you just want to pitch, but guys that you truly like, I don't think you can have enough depth in that regard. So if you want to get greedy a little bit, that is the area you want to do it with.

For me, listen, we have to be that team. We have to be that team that pitches really well. We have to be that team that catches the ball. We have to be in the right spots. We have to run the bases really well. I think we have to be athletic and fast. We're not going to sit there and pound you with homers. We're not going to buy the 30 or 40 home runs. We're probably not going to buy that.

So we have to get these guys that fit in and are able to manufacture runs, create runs, take advantage of moments, and more than anything to be able to pitch to keep the games close so that we don't need 7, 8 or whatever runs on a nightly basis. So for me we're always going to be about pitching.

I talked about the old Dodger days, whatever. We have to be that way and we kind of are. We have to keep our mind's eye in that direction.

Q. You've talked about not obsessing over what everybody else does, but that is sort of your philosophy leading the team. But when you see the Yankees mention Cliff Lee, and the Red Sox getting Gonzalez, how do you convey that to everybody else and the players so they don't read this stuff and say why don't we do stuff?

JOE MADDON: I get kind of animated about it in spring training. I really -- again, the old adage you can only control that which you can. For me, I really want our guys to focus on the tangible stuff that's ours, not somebody else's. Of course you're envious of Cliff Lee pitching there with Sabathia, whatever. That's ridiculous. That's

as good as it gets, obviously, or Gonzalez going. Of course, that's awesome for them.

But I want that to fuel us too. And, again, we have a bunch of young gamers on our team that believe they can beat these guys and convincing them this is the way to do it. That is the game planning and the way we try to play. That is the key of spring training. That is the element as a manager and coaching staff that we have to get through to these guys. We can't worry about the name on the back of the Jersey, we just can't. If we did, if we'd focus on that, we'd get our butts kicked on a consistent basis.

We like the idea that we have to face these kind of challenges. I do. I love it personally. And I think if you polled all of our players, they would echo a lot of the same sentiments regarding how much we like to approach this and how much we do enjoy going to New York and playing in New York at the new Yankee Stadium or going to Fenway, a great venue.

Now all of a sudden, Canada's coming back alive, Toronto, this is a really fun place to play. Our guys love it. We don't focus on the back of the uniform, we kind of enjoy it.

Q. Do you think you've had enough of a run at the top in the past two out of three to have kind of gotten that culture changed to where it can go on now?

JOE MADDON: Yeah, absolutely. I think the proverbial knowing how to win phrase means something. You only know how to win it when you do. You can talk about it all you want. But I think that matters and it counts for something. And the pride within the organization. The expectations are to win. The expectations are to win 90 games or 90-plus games. And that matters. It matters in close games.

One of the things I talked about last year, one of the biggest parts of spring training was to understand the fine line or the razor thin line between winning and losing. I'm watching NFL games and all these games decided between three and four points on a weekly basis. It really comes down to execution and of course personnel. But you've really got to play the game a little bit better than the other side. So with us specifically in order to get back to that level, we have to understand the real fine line between winning and losing in this league and our division, and that speaks to putting in that extra time fundamentally. Not just worrying

about your hitting. Understanding what first and third is all about, understanding when we need you to move on defense, move.

Situational hitting is huge for us. We have to be really good at situational hitting. We have to be. There is no choice, we have to be. Those are the things that permit us to win, and that is what winning teams do, and how you know how to win, because you pay attention to those details, I believe.

Q. Your lineup last year was odd because you scored a lot of runs, but you didn't get many hits?

JOE MADDON: It was, wasn't it?

Q. It was strange. Can you duplicate that formula each year? Is it a sort of a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence?

JOE MADDON: No, I think that's something that you could strive for regarding scoring runs. Obviously we have a culture of a lot of walks and strikeouts. That's who we are. But you combine that also and we're a pretty good base running team. We have a lot of team speed. Now missing a very large corner.

Q. Yeah, not quite as fast.

JOE MADDON: Though the guy coming up, Desmond Jennings can do a lot of those, and I'm not making the comparisons yet. But we have to do all those different things in order to score.

Listen, at the end of the year, the number of runs we scored surprised me, I'm not lying. But we have a lot of games where we scored a lot of points early like clumpy. Then if you look at the average in the end it can be deceptive. Overall, we're about we're going to strikeout, punch this out, we're going to walk a lot. We're going to do a lot of things on the bases. We're going to try to be creative and we're going to score runs any way we possibly can. We got to be able to score runs with outs. If we do do that -- we probably won't be able to replicate the number of runs from last year. We can still score a good number of runs just based on doing all of these things right.

Listen, when you come to spring training, you can hang out with us. That's all I talk about. That's all I talk about.

Q. Can you talk about Desmond Jennings and what you learned about him in the month he was with you?

JOE MADDON: I picked up on him last spring training he got hurt. But D.J. really a good make-up guy. Good make-up guy. These guys, really good football players tend to be that way. He's a really good football player.

But the thing that surprised me most are his instincts with the game of baseball being a good football player. But he's a receiver, he runs good routes. Maybe that is the carryover because he runs good routes in the outfield. He gets to a spot, he breaks down. On the bases, his jumps and his leads. Watch that about him. Of course, he's going to make a mistake once in a while. He got picked up off at the latter part of the season. But he sees things well.

This guy's going to be fine, he's going to hit enough. He's going to hit for some power. His defense is going to be spectacular. He's going to throw a right. But he is a good athlete with a good head for this game. That tells me he's going to get a lot better. It's really fascinating, actually. Couple more years he's going to be a solid performer in this league.

Q. How much of your evaluation of him is going to take place in spring training and how much will already be done before you get to spring training?

JOE MADDON: We talk about that a lot too. I'm not a big spring training guy. You can blow my doors off because you had a good spring and you had a horrible previous season. That can be deceptive. You have to be very careful. As a minor league instructor, I got fooled with that several times years ago. As a Major League manager, you can't permit that to fool you.

My point is he had an okay season last year. He didn't have a typical season. He did have some issues, whatever. Though he had a good year the year before. So there is a track record of success with this guy. If he comes into spring training and did really well, obviously that would open some eyes. There is no doubt. But at the end of the day I really prefer evaluating based on the previous years as opposed to that small six weeks of spring training when pitchers are throwing fastballs. Who knows. It might be in the sixth, seventh, eighth inning against a lesser type pitcher. All these things matter with these guys who have spectacular spring trainings. The hype's built up, he goes out in the regular season when everybody stars playing and all that magic goes

away. So you have to be careful about that.

Q. So you're not going to say he's going to be the next Carl Crawford?

JOE MADDON: No, he'll be the first Desmond Jennings.

Q. You're not sure he'll on the roster opening day; is that correct?

JOE MADDON: That's correct. He has to earn his way to that spot. We talked about this a couple years ago. This was the entitlement program. This is the house of scholarship. We aren't that anymore. You have to earn your way to this team and I love it. Something that we've talked about, it was maddening the first couple of years all these guys signed a big league contract with the Devil Rays, they're supposed to be in the big leagues in two years and do whatever they wanted to do. That was the culture at that time.

It's changed, it's flipped, it's good. Now you have to earn that right to be there and it's a very healthy atmosphere.

Q. Is there any way to underestimate the departure of Carl and what it would mean to the franchise?

JOE MADDON: Obviously, this is our guy. This is the guy that's been at the forefront for several years, so we're going to miss him. There is no question we're going to miss him on the field and in the clubhouse, but you have to move on rather quickly in this game.

So I talked about it earlier, I probably will wrap my mind more around his impact when the actual season begins, maybe next spring training. But I've really been around, I guess, long enough that I don't hold on to that stuff too long. It's time to move forward, time to do different things. We're looking at 2011, and also this eye's on '12, '13, '14, et cetera. So that's the way it works. I talked about it.

We wish him well, and he's obviously going to be very good for many more years to come. But if he's no longer a Ray, we have to move forward and get somebody else out there. And I can't lament that fact.

Q. Right, wrong or indifferent, there seems to be a perception that the window of opportunity might be closing. How would you respond to that?

JOE MADDON: I always enjoy that. I find it challenging. It may be true. I don't know if it's

true or not. I don't view it that way. I look at it as a window of opportunity regarding building something even better. We are very excited about moving forward and doing different things in the next couple of years.

Having said that, I'm not saying we're looking forward to this year either. I really, I've talked to Andrew a couple times before I came out prior to Thanksgiving. I'm on the phone all jacked up talking about different things because it is a challenge, and it's an exciting challenge. Again, this is what I was trained to do way back in the day. So for me, yes, we're gone through transition. We're losing a lot of good players, but we still have a lot of good people there. When your core is a starting rotation like that, that's not bad. And you have defense on the field, that's pretty good too. So there is a lot to build around yet. If we just hit it right in this off-season, who knows.

Q. Are there any guys in your lineup that have just had a bad year, and historically they should improve this year and that will help maybe make up the slack for Carl?

JOE MADDON: Sure, start with BJ. Though you look at BJ, he had 60 extra base hits and 40 stolen bases which they're the only two guys that have ever done that, ever done that?

Q. This year.

JOE MADDON: When was the last time it was done before that. Do you have any idea? You're supposed to have that. Yeah, BJ, you look at him. First of all, BJ, God, there is so much there. There is so much there. And oftentimes when I think somebody has not been successful, more than anything there is something going on in your head. I like the way BJ thinks a lot. I think BJ is a big game player. He's never impacted by the moment. Look what he did in the playoffs.

His problems are rooted more mechanically. Just to get to bat there sooner. He does what he does. He's busy, he swings. When he learns what he's doing better, and he's able to eradicate these things and get more concise. Physically you're going to see a better production. He's been a better base runner, a better outfielder. Better decisions running the bases. His arm's fine. All this other part of his game has gone much better. The batting, the average and the home runs, et cetera. That's going to come.

Again, I don't think it's here as much as it



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is learning how to get the bat from here to here more consistently.

Q. Ben was one of those guys, too. What would you think about Ben, in your mind right now, where do you see Ben?

JOE MADDON: I don't know. I don't know. My first impulse is to say a lot of what you saw in the past. I don't know. I don't know. I've talked about the fact of giving guys the chance to be more on a daily basis. But there are still going to be those moments where you don't want Sean to face a certain righty or Matt to face a certain lefty. And the fact that it's open, it's very exciting. Left field would be an option, first base, all these things are options. I don't know yet.

But, obviously is going to play somewhere on a daily basis. Getting back to your point, he's another guy that offensively speaking was definitely an underachieving year for him last year. He really, and again, we, I don't want to say battle with him, he's a Tinkerer. We just want to get him to arrive at one thing more consistently. One approach more consistently. It works wonderful. You're going to see it bounce back. Maybe not to the level you saw it two years ago, but I think you're going to see some bounce.

Q. Could this be the year he settles in on one position?

JOE MADDON: I -- you know what, I really like him being who he is right now. I like it a lot. We have a bunch of guys like that, even Elliott Johnson potentially on board. The fact that the guys moved around, and not lose anything defensively. That is the key. We move guys around and that's the real anomaly about our group that we can move you. Zo could be a plus second baseman, a plus right fielder, a plus centerfielder. He can do all those things above average. That's unusual to have a utility guy who only has one or two, maybe one real good spot. The other ones are okay. They're all pluses.

You look at the potential with Elliott Johnson, same thing. His defensive prowess and different positions is above average. So it's a nice luxury to have.

Game in progress you want to do things. You have all their mobility in this group to move people around, it helps. It really helps in our situation. We're not just going to go out and buy seven or eight guys in the starting lineup, they're going to play every day in the same spot, we're just not that group.

So his versatility, and I think he's never complained to me about it. I don't think you could say last year happened offensively because his move, I don't think that's true.

Q. You mentioned one of the problems with the team is blowing late leads in the bullpen. If you're playing pretty well over the first two months of the season, but your bullpen's blown a couple leads, will you let your young starters go deeper into games in order to win?

JOE MADDON: I'm all for young starters going late into the game within certain parameters. Shieldsy right now, Shieldsy has kind of built up a nice catch a of pitches and innings and stamina. So I'm more comfortable with him. Garza done the same thing. I've let Garza go 120, let Niemann go 120 last year, Garza, Davis, David Price a couple times.

Our guys actually have gotten a little bit further along than a lot of people realize. But I really -- listen, they're the pulse of our team. If I mess up our starting pitching and these guys go down, my goodness, we have nothing. So I'm really cognizant of taking care of our starters. I'm not talking about babying them, I'm talking about taking care of these guys. I like it, absolutely, but not to the point where you're going to push a guy beyond what you think he's capable of handling physically. You've got to watch him, some guys, can get stronger between 110 and 120. He could do it. David Price could be just as good between 110, 120, 125. Some of these other guys get 105 to 115, it falls off the cliff. I don't know if they were trained that way, it's just who they are. You've got to pay attention to it. So we get talked a lot about pitch count, et cetera. But I think we do things well. I've been very pleased with the progress. One of the goals last year was 200 innings, we fell short with Davis and Niemann because they got hurt. A little shoulder problem. Otherwise, we'd have five starters with 200 last year which would have been really nice. That would be the goal going into this season. So our starters do pound out the innings.

Q. In your combination old school, new school mentality what do you think the potential is with playoffs?

JOE MADDON: Somebody broached that subject to me last year. I find it good to get more

people involved. I'm just curious about how that will work. I've heard the presentation of the one game sudden death, shooting somebody in the head. I don't really like that as much. I think that's more palatable. You talk about luck, who knows.

I like the idea of the extend the races or the further into the season that other cities can be involved in the hunt, which makes it interesting. I think it adds to it. I don't think there is anything negative about it. I kind of like it.

Q. In your situation it could help?

JOE MADDON: Absolutely it can.

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