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An Interview With:

JOE MADDON

Q. Could you kind of just contrast how you look going into this offseason versus last year when you were dealing with a total makeover?

JOE MADDON: We're just sitting upstairs doing the meetings right now and it's incredible the amount of tightness on the wish list right now. A lot more comfortable with the team coming back, got a lot of young guys with experience based on last year at the same time. Primarily like I said, our wish list is a lot smaller. The meeting sets up a lot different, but we also believe we have a pretty good chance of repeating and going back to the playoffs next year, and with that if we make the right choices in this offseason and I have a lot of faith in our guys upstairs that we will, then we have a pretty good chance of going back to the playoffs again.

Q. How much will the Rays have to work with?

JOE MADDON: Honestly, I don't even get involved. I know our payroll is in the \$40 million area. I don't worry about stuff like that. I've said that in the past and I really mean that. Regardless of our payroll number, it's up to us to put a good fundamental team on the team. When you have a team that can pitch and play defense every night, we have a pretty good chance of winning. I felt like a couple years ago when all this stuff started to break, no more enhancement drugs as an example, leveling the playing field in that matter, I thought the team that plays better baseball has a better chance of winning and not because you can go out and buy something that you don't have. With us we have a lot of good young hungry players, and I know we play the game properly. And if you were around us on a daily basis, we

don't worry about how much money the front office spends regarding the talent that's coming in. It's about playing baseball properly. I think over the last couple years we've grown into that. You can ask the guys that are sitting here, I don't talk about that. I don't worry about that. We have a couple holes to fill, and if we do fill with the right guys regardless of how much we pay, we'll win again.

Q. How are you going to work the young pitchers into your rotation?

JOE MADDON: That's a good question. Our young pitchers, we have a lot of them, and of course the guys that have been there, the incumbents, will be back. We just have to figure out Matt and Alex Cobb. Everybody talks about Matt, not as many people talk about Alex Cobb. He's potentially a very good Major League starter. I don't have an answer for you yet. It's obviously a wonderful problem to have. We'll continue to filter through it as the season conditions.

Q. How do you work the new wild card system?

JOE MADDON: I'm glad there's a new wild card team. It's kind of cruel, but I guess if you get there and you get that opportunity, that'll be great. Any time you have a chance to enhance the opportunities to get to the playoffs, when you enhance the number of cities and fan bases that are involved in the playoff run, I think that's always good for baseball.

Q. Are you going to try to bring Damon back?

JOE MADDON: Again, those are questions we're going through right now. Johnny Damon, I've talked about it before, as advertised, wonderful clubhouse guy, true professional, somebody that does fit in with our culture well, but we're not there yet to decide whether John is coming back or not, but he's definitely in the process.

Q. Of the guys that are coming back,

specifically like at shortstop, how do you see that playing out?

JOE MADDON: That's good, the shortstop situation with Sean and Reid. I've talked to both of them this offseason actually. What we wanted to do was have some conversations at the end of last season, but fortunately we made the playoffs at the last moment. So I've called them both and given them both an idea of what we're thinking about going into this offseason. So it's an open competition is what it is. I thought Sean did really well at the end of last year. Sean probably exceeded our expectations what he's going to be able to do defensively. Even as offense I think there's a lot of room for improvement there, too. But Sean is a wonderful baseball player and that's why we love to have him on the field. Reid one of the better young defenders, I think, at shortstop in the game. Obviously did not have the offensive year that we were looking for, so he needs to really pick up there. Again, talking to both of them, they're both aware that they'll be battling it out for that job in Spring Training.

Q. What are your thoughts on Bobby Valentine joining the division, sort of turned into a division of high profile managers.

JOE MADDON: Bobby Valentine, I'm really happy for him. Gotten to be friends with him over the last couple of years as he's been a broadcaster, and we've been fortunate to be in the playoffs, have had some really good conversations with Bobby so I don't know him that well outside of that. I think it's very interesting, I think it makes our division even more interesting as you suggested. I'm not going to say better because I'm not going to denigrate Tito. I thought Tito did a great job while he was there, and I was a lot of respect for him, a ton of respect for him. It's just a different scenario there now. It's a different form of competition. But Bobby definitely is going to add to the interest level in our division. And in baseball in general, I he's a wonderful man. I love his enthusiasm for the day, not just baseball.

Q. What do you think about Manny Ramirez trying to make a comeback?

JOE MADDON: It's up to Manny. I can understand why. I got to know him a little bit last year, not a lot, and he really does have a passion for the game. I think that gets overlooked sometimes, and there's all the Manny being Manny items, but he and I, we did well together. Like I said, conversationally it does not surprise me that

he would like to come back and do this. I'm okay with this, as long as it's within the parameters and the rules and everything that's been set forth, and as long as he's done -- kind of like served his time, that's cool. I would wish him well. I don't know how it's all going to shake out, but again, I think he's misinterpreted sometimes. This guy really is a baseball player and loves to play baseball.

Q. With the way the two rookies last year, McGee and Gomes came on, how do you look at your bullpen at this point?

JOE MADDON: Yeah, you've got Kyle and Joe and then those two guys, I don't know exactly where J.P. sits right with everything that's going on, but I thought Gomer and Jake really came on strong. The thing you talk about almost all the time when you're discussing, they both have good arms. You're going to talk about everybody, everybody's organization, you're going to talk about two, three, four, five young pitchers that have great arms but what separates them is makeup, whether they can pitch well in the Big Leagues and pitch well in the playoffs. Jake and Brandon have very good makeup, they have very good makeup, and that's what permitted them to participate and play as well as they did towards the end of last season. So I see them as being in the definitely in the middle of this whole thing, in the mix, going into next season. I like them both individually as people and as players, but beyond that, you saw them good, but they're going to get better. Gomer played in Double-A the year before that. It's kind of incredible what he did last year. Jake a little bit more hoopla and hype coming into the thing. Nevertheless, he had a setback and came back and probably pitched his last baseball at the end of last season, so it's nice to have that kind of young makeup with good stuff in your bullpen.

Q. Is there any way to figure out if guys have that makeup before you throw them into the fire?

JOE MADDON: I'll tell you what, if you ever sat in on a meeting, on a Minor League meeting, that phrase or that description, that's what you're looking for in each guy, and that's almost discussed with each player. But it's always -- there's probably some guys you could bet on strongly that they're going to demonstrate the same makeup when they get to the Big Leagues.

There's some guys that you just miss on. It doesn't translate once it gets there, they're body shows up but maybe their mind does not, maybe the thought process does not. Sometimes you've just got to wait and see how it all shakes out on the big league level. But believe me, it's not only us. Everybody wants it in the American League East and I'll be pretentious for a moment, I've really talked about this, I think we've gotten better and quicker because we play in this division. I think it's the most fascinating place to be if you're in Major League Baseball. And if you want to get more specific, when you're talking about young pitchers trying to make the jump to the Big Leagues and then here, because a big part of pitching in our division is hitters aren't going to chase, they're not going to chase stuff. You've got to be able to get hitters out within the strike zone. You've got to swing and miss and have the ball do something, put it in play in play and then you've got to play defense. When you've got young pitchers like that being successful under those circumstances in our division, I think that speaks a little bit more loudly.

Q. Have you had a chance yet to really try and digest what happened at the end of the year and put it in perspective?

A. Honestly I get that. I've done some gigs out West and even back East since the end of the season. While you're actually participating in that moment, you don't get it. You don't feel it. You're just playing. And then since then you get a chance to talk to everybody, almost everybody to a person that wants to talk about it talks about the best hour in the history of Major League Baseball, at least within their lifetime. That causes you to reflect and pause and say, wow, that was that powerful. You knew it when it was all said and done, but to really visit with people that were caught up in the moment, that's really fascinating. And then furthermore, to know that you're a part of it somehow is kind of neat, because again, as a kid growing up you watched Bobby Thompson's home run, I don't know how many times, in black and white going over the wall of left field. And more recently, I don't know how many times, you've seen Joe Carter jumping up, going around first base, all those dramatic, historical moments in baseball, if you are a baseball historian stick with you. But then to actually be in the dugout to witness one of those actual moments is cool.

So I think -- again, I do remember stuff well. I don't necessarily keep photos or hardware

or those kind of things, but over a period of time I think there's something that causes you to reflect mentally, to be able to reflect and know that you watched that thing over the corner of the outfield wall by Long was pretty significant.

Q. You talked about Matt and Alex. The fact that the six-man rotation worked well last year, will we possibly see that again this year?

JOE MADDON: What Roger is asking about is our six-man. We did that at the end of July, right after the All-Star break. We did a couple of things last year that I probably want to keep in the back of my mind, and that is that where we shifted into a six-man rotation to not overwhelm Price or Shields, but really building up some large innings, and it kind of worked. I thought David and Shields and the whole group were kind of frisky at the end of the year.

I don't know if we would or when we would, but I think if you're going to, that's a pretty optimal time to try it especially if you have some guys building up some big innings. That was one part.

When we got to August, we had a really good road record, real bad home record, and that's not who we are. I was talking to José Fernandez, one of our clubhouse guys, and I was racking my brain what's the difference between being on the road and being at home and why is this happening this year. He said to me, you don't show up as early on the road. I said, all right. I wanted guys coming to the ballpark later in August. See, I listen. I really believe a lot of the stuff that's done prior to the game is overblown. Batting practice is one of the most over-abused parts of pregame preparation, all the swings that hitters take in batting cages is ridiculous. I think they get to the point where they make themselves tired. So what we did is we backed off in light of our work. Had we done poorly, I'm sure somebody would have suggested that we did not work hard enough.

But nobody works harder than we do, and I know every team probably says the same thing. At some point you've got to pull back on some of the things you're doing, play every day, and it's not only about the physical fatigue, it's about the emotional and mental fatigue, but really, that's the part that kicks your butt. With our guys we backed off, and for a while I got them to come later in the clubhouse, then eventually they started coming a little bit earlier. But I think they learned a lesson.

It's something I've always believed in and something I will probably do next year again is to report later as the season gets later because, believe me, you don't have to do more work. There's a point of diminishing returns setting in anything that we do.

Q. Talking about the shortstop, would your preference be one of those guys win the job more or less outright than sharing it like you did last year?

JOE MADDON: That's a good question. I don't know that yet. Okay, specifically in my mind, somebody would win it outright, but as Spring Training plays out and then you see what your utility situation is going to look like and how you feel about that, that may impact that decision somehow. I don't know.

Q. What would be the determining factor of somebody winning it outright?

JOE MADDON: Well, I think they're both -- obviously I've always talked about Reid being the better defender at shortstop and Sean being the better defender at second base. I think it'll be an accumulation or watching everything to make that determination. It's not just going to be somebody goes like 8 for 11 over a stretch in Spring Training and they've won the job. It's got to go deeper than that. There's certain items within Reid's game I want to see get better, also, not just hitting, and that would be important to see those kind of improvements, too, and with Sean, he started to show some of those improvements, talking about his at-bats in particular, working better at-bats, not chasing pitches out of the zone, those kind of things.

Best way to describe it, though, it's going to be watching everything, so it's not just about hits. I never want to make it just about hits.

Q. Your offensive numbers at shortstop are the lowest in the majors?

JOE MADDON: I've heard that and I know that. And again, part of our meeting upstairs, and we're going to talk a lot about I am proving our offense. I'll tell you what, I don't want us to improve our offense at the sake of lessening or pitching to our defense. That's who we are. Our template indicates -- if we play great defense and pitch well, we're going to win around 90 some games and have a shot at the playoffs. Now, if we don't pitch well or play defense like that and hit, I don't know, 15 or 20 more home runs, I don't know

if we're going to be able to prevent enough runs to overcome that slight uptake in the offense. I would much rather that we be identified and continue to nurture being this defensive team with great pitching. That to me is the one that permits us to do what we did last year.

Last year we're sitting in another table in another city talking about this moment, and the bullpen, what are you going to do. If we don't pitch and play defense, last year, I don't care, we don't win 91 games and play in the playoffs. We can't get away from that.

Any time we build or if we think we're going to make ourselves better offensively, we've got to do it and know that we're not harming our defense in any way.

Q. José Molina said he would catch as much as you wanted him to. What do you see with that relationship with him and the two young catchers?

JOE MADDON: Well, I like it. Me and Jay Mo go way back, so I know what he's all about. He knows me; I know him. He's going to be very easy. He's got really strong thoughts about catching. He's going to help our young guys in receiving in particular and game calling, those kind of things, so I think he's going to be a big aid. So I'm looking forward to that. Also his throwing, his release, he to me is one of the quicker releases in all of baseball for any catcher. All those kind of things, I hope we're off on the other guys. Number of games played, I need to talk to him. I've often talked about I have so much faith in our training staff and our strength and conditioning component of our organization, so I think whatever he's capable of doing physically they're going to get it out of him. They will. So I need to sit down with Jay Mo and talk about it in the offseason. I've already talked to him once on the phone. I'll get together with him later and in Spring Training, we'll try to decide what's the best way to go about this.

I think even if he's not starting a game, to maybe finish a game with him would also be a very nice thing to have in our back pocket, too. So number of games, I'm not sure, probably 80 plus hopefully. The impact he's going to have on the other catchers and the pitching staff I think will be significant.

Q. How do you view the Red Sox losing Papelbon and how does it change the dynamic

of the division?

JOE MADDON: Well, I mean, he's good. He was real good last year. I don't know what they're going to go with their bullpen without him. I don't know how they're going to set it up. But he's very forceful, and that's the kind of a force that's difficult to lose and rebuild from. It's not only about him, it's what he does to everybody around him. When you're able to nail down that ninth and even part of the eighth with him, it makes everybody stronger around him and makes Bard a better pitcher, et cetera. I've read where they might even be starting Bard. I don't know if that's true. It's something when you take somebody that good out of your bullpen, there's no question. But they've got tremendous resources and they're very creative, so I don't doubt that there's something that they're having in the mix right now that's going to be pretty darned good, too. But Papelbon is one of the better ones out there. I am not sorry to see him become a National Leaguer.

Q. What would you like to see from Lobaton and Chirinos during Spring Training?

JOE MADDON: Okay, Robby Chirinos, the biggest things with him would be his release, getting rid of the ball more quickly. He's a very good receiver and he blocks the ball well. His offense was a little bit sporadic, so we'd like to see a little bit more of shortening of his swing.

Lobaton, we just need to have him stay healthy. He was doing fine until he got hurt. He would have played a lot more had he not gotten hurt. By him getting hurt that puts Shoppach back in the picture and it was kind of strange how that all played out. But with Robby those things I talked about. Lobaton just continue to work on his offensive side and just stay healthy because defensively he was pretty good.

Q. Were you surprised Dave Martinez didn't get more of a look?

JOE MADDON: I guess I was. I was, based on his conversations, or conversations that I had with different people. I thought maybe that he would have been at least given more interviews. Whether or not you're going to accept him, I would have thought he would have. So yes, I was surprised.

Q. When the Astros move, there will be an Interleague game going on every day. Do you think the league lines have blurred enough

where it makes sense to have one set of rules with regard to the DH?

JOE MADDON: I haven't thought about that enough. I've been an advocate of a more balanced schedule. I've been an advocate of not -- this imbalance we have to play our guys in our division so often. But maybe I shouldn't cry so much because it's worked out pretty well the last couple years.

I don't have a strong opinion. I have to see it actually work. You know, you think about it, and again, just alluded to it a moment or two ago, I really like playing in our division. I mean, I've really found that out. The fact that it's so competitive, and all the things that are going on right now, whether it's the Yankees or the Red Sox or Toronto is really on the rise right now, I think with Alex in the group they're doing a great job up there, and I know Baltimore is going to keep getting better.

So I have this thing that I really enjoy playing in our division. For all this time I've been crying about balancing the schedule, maybe I'm okay with it, only because it's so much fun playing these other teams.

Last year, this last season, if we don't have a chance to play New York and Boston as often as we did in September, we can't do what we did. Again, I don't know the answer to that. I'm curious to see how it's all going to play out. I just haven't sat down and really tried to analyze it in order to get you a good answer on it.

Q. I know you don't like to harp on payroll, but when you see the Marlins, a team that has been compared to yours in terms of untenable ballpark situation, getting a new one and what they've done with those new resources, is it hard to think about how life could be different for the Rays if a new ballpark were to --

JOE MADDON: That would be nice. That would be nice. I do. I do afford myself those thoughts on occasion. Of course it would make it better. Of course it would. And part of it is not just acquiring new talent but being able to retain that group that we've raised on our own, too. I want to believe it's going to happen. I don't know exactly when, but I want to believe it's going to happen.

But yeah, it's good for the Marlins. Good for the Marlins. I'm happy for them, and it's something, of course, I'd like to see happen for us.

But in the meantime, you can't cry about it. You don't make excuses about it. You don't say they have what we don't. I won't do that. But at some point it would be nice.

And again, not just so you can go out and buy a shortstop, but if you could re-sign a left fielder, it would be kind of cool.

Q. Same question about the end of the season and putting things into perspective. Can you put into perspective what you saw from Matt Moore at the end of the season?

JOE MADDON: Yeah, I was talking to boys about that, I was talking to Jim Leyland and Jerry Collins and a couple of the guys. We were playing in Baltimore, and I've never seen Matt throw, I've shaken his hand in the parking lot one time, and I didn't really even know what he looked like. I hate to say this. But he comes out of the bullpen in Baltimore, and I get back to the dugout quickly because I want to watch his warmups, hadn't seen him throw. I got back there and I got so see him warmup on the side, and I'm thinking to myself, my God, that is really significant, that's good stuff. His delivery, his arm stroke, the way the ball comes -- you hear this stuff all the time, the way the ball comes out of his hand is truly different. You don't see it very often.

So you've got all that delivery-wise, and then out of that comes 95 plus, comes a great curveball, comes a change-up, and then gets back to the makeup. The makeup is spectacular. Very exciting to be able to hopefully watch the development of this young man because it starts with the makeup to delivery to stuff, and he's got this great way about him.

Q. What do you like better, that or the \$100 million free agent?

JOE MADDON: Well, you know, where I come from, I really enjoy working with Matt Moore, I really do, and David Price and James Shields and Jerry Hellickson and Mr. Cobb and Davis and Niemann and those guys. And we have others. It's exciting, man, I'm telling you. That's why I don't caught up in this other stuff. We have some really significant, good young pitchers that I think are going to keep getting better, and they're all of good makeup and they're good people, and they're really fun to work with. I look forward to that.

Q. Knowing what you have with Matt Moore and Cobb, the reality would be trying to improve the offense, maybe you would trade

one of the current starters. Is that a reality that you have to kind of accept?

JOE MADDON: Exactly. If you would, you probably would go in that direction, one of the current starters, those that had been there, if we chose to go in that direction. Obviously I think our starters are very popular within this building right now, and that's pretty cool.

But again, you feel like you have some depth, and depth can go away very quickly if you're not careful. Again, we are built on pitching and our defense, so these are things we've got to be very concerned and careful with as we make those decisions.

Q. Would you be surprised if you had all eight by February 20th realistically?

JOE MADDON: You know, a little surprised, not overwhelmingly surprised. It could happen. It could happen. It's like anything else. We're like everybody else. We come here to do something that's going to help us. At the end of the day, if it's not, then you keep these guys, that's not a bad thing, either. That's not a bad thing, either. We just have to pick these other couple spots up that we need to fill out the group, fill out the batting order again while we're maintaining our defense, and having those arms, every night when you walk out to the dugout and you look at your guy on the mound versus their guy on the mound, if you feel good about that, that's a pretty good feeling. Every night you walk out as the Rays' manager and you walk out on the mound you feel pretty good about the potential results that night. Not everybody can say that.

Q. How much of it is makeup with those young starters to succeed?

JOE MADDON: Big, it's very big. I'm smiling because think like a David Price, Jeremy Hellickson, baby face, great makeup, Alex Cobb put in a very difficult situation last year, Matt Moore, let's go pitch the first game of the playoffs, go ahead. These guys, that's the beauty of our guys and that's where you get some much confidence is because -- you don't get to sit down and converse with them like I do, but if you had opportunity, you'd have the same kind of confidence in these people. And it's about their coachability and their willingness to learn and they don't know everything. They have a nice combination of qualities.



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Q. Is there anything else that's a big key for a starting pitcher to succeed in the east just in general?

JOE MADDON: I think you have to be able to get a swing and miss within the strike zone and you have to -- I really believe you have to be able to command your fastball. The reason why Shields -- all of our guys, but Shields pitched so many innings, had so many complete games last year, because he threw his fastball and he throws it where he wants to. Those that are unwilling to do that who are normally going to be out of the game around the fifth, maybe the sixth inning, and that puts your bullpen in peril on a nightly basis. I think our guys throw their fastball where they want to, and I think that really is very, very helpful regarding our success. I think to pitch in our division, you have to be able to -- I think you should do that in every division, but I see too many times where young starters are too afraid of their fastball or their fastball strike, and then you're trying to trick hitters, whatever, and then all of a sudden you're at 100 pitches in the fifth winning, maybe giving up three or four runs, whatever, only because you're afraid of contact and that really gets a lot of good, young arms in trouble.

Q. How about your contract situation?

JOE MADDON: I've got another year going right now. I've got another year left, and we've been briefly talking a little bit, but I'm really not concerned about that. I'm sure it's all going to be worked out in due time.

Q. Would you be uncomfortable? How about going into this season without an extension?

JOE MADDON: I am not uncomfortable at all.

Q. Are you talking a little bit here about an extension?

JOE MADDON: We've been talking about, but it's just basic stuff. I'm a Ray and I have a lot of faith in being a Ray as I continue along. This is the best place to work in Major League Baseball. Of course everybody is looking for security. We all want security. But for me it's just about having an open conversation. We never would associate anything in public anything like that. It's just about an ongoing conversation right now. We'll see how it plays out. But I'm not worried about it.

Q. Are you confident it'll get worked out?

JOE MADDON: Yeah, I am, very confident.

Q. What kind of fit do you think a guy like Hideki Matsui would be on your club?

JOE MADDON: I haven't even thought about that. Good man, great professional. One of the things we're still researching designated hitter and Johnny Damon still in the running for that, too. Honestly we just started our conversations today about DHs in general, and I think he's a wonderful professional. Does he fit with us? I'm not exactly sure right yet, but he's definitely a name that would come up with us at some point. I've always had the utmost respect for that guy, been around him a little bit, great clutch hitter, man, great clutch hitter and I just love the way he plays.

Q. How about middle infield? Are you guys looking for help within the organization, or might you be looking outside at perhaps a player from Japan?

JOE MADDON: Primarily if you're looking for the stuff -- we're always looking for middle infield. I can't tell you that we've been specifically looking at Japan right now. I don't even know that to be honest with you. But we are looking for other middle infield help potentially, too, but it's not like we're just looking to Japan for that. That has not been a part of the conversation that I've been involved in yet.

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