

# Rays fan upset about team’s Cuba visit

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

A fan upset about the Tampa Bay Rays’ participation in an exhibition game last week in Cuba was arrested Saturday night after hurling bottles into the team’s dugout during a spring training game against Pittsburgh Pirates in Bradenton, Fla.

### MLB NOTEBOOK

Bradenton police arrested the unidentified man of Cuban heritage in the top of the seventh inning and said he had been charged with trespassing, assault and causing an affray.

The fan shouted obscenities in Spanish about the Castro regime in reaction to the Rays’ trip to Cuba, the first visit by a major league team to the communist country since 1999. He tossed a beer bottle and a Pepsi bottle into the dugout, with one exploding on the back wall. Earlier, he was spotted shouting obscenities at the team bus.

The Tampa Bay Times reported that Rays third-base coach Charlie Montoyo detained the man, who jumped over a wall near the end of the dugout, and held him until police arrived.

“I just saw him throwing stuff to the dugout and then I realized his age so I was just holding him and I was telling him, I realized he speaks Spanish, telling him to relax,” Montoyo told the Times. “I didn’t hear what he was yelling, I just saw the two things and then I was holding him. He smelled like beer or rum or something. To me, it was an old person drunk, so I felt bad for him.”

The Rays defeated the Pirates 3-1 on Saturday night.

The Rays played the Cuban national team on Tuesday in Havana.

“It was a Cuba thing,” Rays right-hander Jake Odorizzi told the newspaper. “I don’t speak Spanish too well. ... I think it was a Cuban person, frustrated about the politics of it, I guess. He threw two beer cans. Nobody got hit. Nobody did anything. Maybe some guys got wet.”

### Cardinals coach taking medical leave

St. Louis Cardinals third base coach Jose Oquendo, who recently underwent right knee surgery, is taking a medical leave of absence, the team announced Sunday.

Oquendo, 52, is the longest tenured coach on the Cardinals’

staff. He has been part of the team’s major league coaching staff since 1999, including the past 16 seasons as third base and infield coach.

Oquendo has been limited by his knee — also operated on over the winter — for much of spring training. He has been on crutches since returning from the second surgery.

In Oquendo’s absence, the Cardinals said Chris Maloney will handle the third base coaching duties and Bill Mueller will now coach first base and provide infield instruction.

Minor league hitting coordinator Derrick May will take over Mueller’s duties as assistant hitting coach and minor league offensive strategist George Greer will now oversee hitting instruction for all of the minor leagues.

Also, the Cardinals trimmed six players off the spring-training roster after Sunday’s game.

The Cardinals optioned pitchers Tim Cooney, Dean Kiekhefer, Miguel Socolovich and Sam Tuivailala and catcher Mike Ohlman to Triple-A Memphis. The club also reassigned first baseman-outfielder David Washington to minor league camp.

St. Louis has 34 players remaining in the major league camp, including 16 pitchers.

### Braves acquire pitcher from Pirates

The Atlanta Braves acquired left-handed reliever Eric O’Flaherty from the Pittsburgh Pirates for cash considerations on Sunday.

O’Flaherty, 31, was fighting for a spot in the Pirates’ bullpen this spring training after signing a minor league deal last month. He allowed eight runs (three earned) on 15 hits over 9⅓ innings in 10 appearances this spring.

O’Flaherty, a 10-year veteran, pitched for the Braves from 2009 to 2013.

O’Flaherty, who had Tommy John surgery in 2013, has a career 22-11 record with a 3.24 ERA over 369⅓ innings in 435 appearances with the Seattle Mariners, Braves, Oakland Athletics and New York Mets.

“We’ve been trying to find a left-hander all spring,” Braves general

manager John Coppolella said Sunday. “He’s somebody we know. When our scouts saw him and when our field staff saw him, we felt like he was somebody who could help us out. Obviously, we know this guy’s great off the field. He was great on it with us. We’re hoping he can fill a need a help us get better.”

### Yankees release outfielder

The New York Yankees released outfielder Chris Denorfia after he opted out of his minor league contract on Sunday.

The 35-year-old Denorfia would have earned \$1 million if he had made the major league roster. He hit just .200 in 25 at-bats, with one home run and five RBIs this spring training.

The Yankees signed Denorfia on March 2, adding a right-handed-hitting option to the outfield. The Yankees assigned Denorfia to minor league camp on Saturday.

Denorfia has spent 10 years in the major leagues with the Cincinnati Reds, Oakland Athletics, San Diego Padres, Seattle Mariners and Chicago Cubs.

Denorfia has a .272 career average, with 41 home runs and 196 RBIs.



O’Flaherty

## Lovullo

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“He’s an extremely talented guy and we’re going to miss having him here. He’ll be a tough guy to replace.”

Players on the team echoed the sentiment.

But for various reasons, it never worked out for Lovullo. There was some thought that his interviews weren’t going well because he was too selfless and wasn’t doing a good job talking himself up. Rangers general manager Jon Daniels and Astros GM Jeff Luhnow both later said they liked Lovullo a lot, yet he was only a finalist for the Minnesota job, finishing second to Paul Molitor.

So here was Lovullo, entering the 2015 offseason like the prettiest girl at the ball, ready to jump into his dream job as manager of his own



KIM KLEMENT | USA TODAY

Boston Red Sox center fielder Mookie Betts (left) is congratulated by Boston Red Sox manager John Farrell (center) and bench coach Torey Lovullo after scoring against the New York Yankees at George M. Steinbrenner Field in Tampa, Florida, during a March 5 game.

team. Suddenly, he couldn’t pull the trigger.

Instead, he re-upped on a two-year contract with the Red Sox, receiving a pay raise in the process but under strict

guidelines that he could not interview for other managerial openings. Not only were baseball people surprised, Lovullo’s family members began chiming in, too.

He had to spend much of his offseason explaining it to them, and recounted his decision-making process with the Herald this week.

“I had long conversations with my family and there were a couple dinners early in the offseason when they wanted to know what was happening, some of my thoughts and the process I went through,” he said. “And I covered it with all of them. I didn’t want them to be in the dark, as I did with my in-laws family. We sat down and talked about it. Sometimes people would give me their advice. And whether they did or didn’t agree with me, they supported me. And that’s true family.”

But doesn’t it feel like a lost opportunity to get your dream job?

“Not really, no,” he said. “My commitment was to the Boston Red Sox and John Farrell and the players. And I wasn’t sure what was going to

happen to John, so I just didn’t feel right about jumping off the ship right in the middle of the journey. I thought if it does happen, it will happen and continue to be an opportunity for me. It just didn’t seem right at the time. My gut was telling me it wasn’t right. My loyalty to John and the Red Sox was telling me it certainly was not the case.

“When I was talking about ‘me’ and ‘I,’ every time I was thinking about maybe moving on and going to another organization, ‘I-I-I’ kept coming up. I had to stop and say this is still a ‘we’ moment. This is John and myself, with a friendship that was deeper than the baseball field. It was the Boston Red Sox and myself, about my commitment here and staying here because (president Dave Dombrowski) said, ‘Until John is healthy, we want to make sure you’re here.’ As soon as I eliminated the ‘I’ and replaced it with the

‘we,’ it became crystal clear.”

So instead of managing his own team this spring, Lovullo has returned to his old role.

“For me,” he said, “everybody wants to know, ‘Was there an adjustment? Was there any discomfort? Any awkwardness?’ And I think John and I, through our friendship, have worked through any of that and it’s passed. So that wasn’t an issue. The challenge for me was in spring training, getting to know the new players and how we can all fit together.”

And then Lovullo returned to business as usual, providing extra bunting lessons to three players on an empty field at 9 in the morning.

“I feel like I’m young enough in this game where I can still have some managerial opportunities down the road,” said the 50-year Lovullo. “And if it’s supposed to happen it will happen. Life is timing.”

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