

## BLUE JAYS RED HOT AT THE RIGHT TIME

What in the name of Joe Carter is going on these days in Toronto?

The Blue Jays, sputtering along like an also-ran for most of the Major League Baseball season, caught fire in late August/early September and got themselves smack dab into the midst of the wildcard race in the American League.

Now, delirious Blue Jays fans across the country are hoping that manager Charlie Montoyo's team can run its recent hot play all the way to the World Series.

And why shouldn't they be able to? In the last 60 days of the season, Toronto has been the best team in the American League, running off 15 wins in 18 games at one point, and finding themselves neck and neck with the Yankees and Red Sox for the two wildcard berths. Proof of the Jays' contending legitimacy came in a mid-September series against East Division-leading Tampa Bay Rays, where Toronto won two of three.

How did all this happen? How did the Jays go from semi-contender to virtual powerhouse? Let us count the ways:

1. The pitching staff, shaky to start the season, has more than stabilized. Robbie Ray is a Cy Young contender, Jose Berrios was picked up in a trade deadline deal with Minnesota, and rookie Alex Manoah was called up to the big club in June and became the fastest pitcher in Blue Jays' history to reach 100 strikeouts as he won six of his first eight decisions. The fourth starter is Hyun-Jin Ryu, who has struggled down the stretch.

2. Vladimir Guerrero, Jr. is on fire. Only 22, he leads the majors in home runs, and is tops in the American League in every important offensive category. He has emerged into what the Blue Jays always said he could be. Dominant. And if it wasn't for the once-in-a-lifetime season put together by Shohei Ohtani, Vladdy, Jr., would be the runaway MVP.

3. The Guerrero offensive support is ubiquitous. Free agent George Springer is finally healthy after a dreadful start to the year. Teoscar Hernandez, free agent Marcus Semien and Lourdes Gurriel, Jr., Bo Bichette and Randal Grichuk are having banner seasons, giving the Jays a lineup that brings fear to opposing pitchers.

The Jays' braintrust may come to regret trading highly regarded shortstop Austin Martin in the Berrios trade, but with Springer, Semien, Hernandez, Ryu, Ray and Gurriel in or approaching their 30s, the 2021 season could be the team's best chance for another World Series' title before age starts taking a toll.

It's been 28 years since Carter's iconic homer won the '93 series over Philadelphia. It wouldn't be a shock if they ended that drought this year.

- Curler **Darren Moulding**, on the proposed rule change calling for a draw to the button instead of an extra end at the world championships: "I think the lack of extra ends is horrible. How do you do that? That's like the NHL, in the Stanley Cup final, saying we're gonna go to a shootout, without an overtime. Wow."
  - Columnist **Norman Chad**, on Twitter, picking the Steelers over Buffalo in the opening week of the NFL season: "With everyone jumping on the Bills' bandwagon, I feel comfortable (if lonely) riding in the Steelers' Mini Cooper wagon."
  - **Phil Mushnick** of the New York Post: "Florida has offered a full scholarship to an eighth grade QB, **Julian Lewis**. Seriously. Guess he already meets the academic requirements."
  - NY Post reader **Bill Hoyt**: "One day I'd like to attend the funeral of one of those obnoxious, starved-for-TV attention PGA gallery clowns so he can hear the mourners holler, 'Get in the hole!'"
  - Comedy writer **Brad Dickson** of Omaha: "There is now a shortage of cheap whiskey in America. So does that mean University of Missouri home football games are cancelled?"
  - From @NFL\_Memes, via Twitter: "**Mitch Trubisky** got married ... Doubt there was a reception"
  - **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times (and it's good to have him back after a major health incident): "**Prince Philip's** will will be sealed for at least 90 years to protect the 'dignity' of **Queen Elizabeth II** and the royal family, a London judge has ruled. 'Can we do that with our 2021 season?' asked the Baltimore Orioles."
  - **Jack Finarelli**, aka sports curmudgeon.com, on high-scoring college football games where teams "use what I call the Brothel Defence — where all the opponents score at will."
  - **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "According to a VirtualTourist.com item, Jacksonville has been one of the most dangerous U.S. cities to visit. Unless you are an NFL team."
  - **Steve Simmons** of SunMedia.com: "What a horrible time for sports in Detroit: The Red Wings are lousy. The Lions are worse. The Pistons were last in the NBA and the Tigers are 11th in the American League."
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