

# Two Good

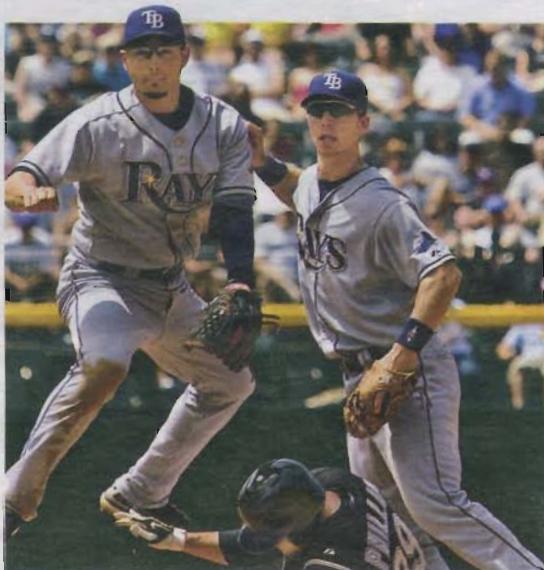
A PAIR OF UNLIKELY ALL-STARS ARE KEEPING THE RAYS IN THE RACE.

By Jorge Aranguré Jr.

**LAST YEAR, JASON BARTLETT AND** Ben Zobrist were complementary cogs in Tampa Bay's improbable World Series run. This season, they might be the team's two best players. Zobrist leads the club in OBP and OPS, and Bartlett ranks second in both categories.

Until now, the 29-year-old Bartlett was known as a slick-fielding shortstop. He hit only one homer last year and in the postseason batted .235. "The bat that felt light a month earlier felt like a log in the playoffs," he says. Bartlett, who was 165 pounds coming out of high school and has long had trouble keeping on weight, was worn out by the extended season. After his October swoon, he made a point of packing on some pounds, eating whatever and whenever he could: two protein shakes a day, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, barbecued chicken. "I try to eat well, but a calorie is a calorie," he says. Now up to 190 pounds, the six-foot Bartlett has eight homers and ranks among AL leaders in batting average.

Like Bartlett, the 28-year-old Zobrist wasn't known for his pop, never hitting more than seven homers in any season as a pro. Then two winters ago, at a baseball seminar in Nashville, his off-season home, Zobrist met Jaime Cevallos, a former college player who now markets hitting aids for amateurs. Cevallos told Zobrist that he could turn him into a power hitter. "I was in a good place to



be convinced," says Zobrist, a switch-hitter who had batted .155 in 97 at-bats in 2007. Cevallos taught Zobrist to use his legs and hips in unison. "To the naked eye, it's subtle," Zobrist says. "But it's a major overhaul."

The results have been remarkable. Zobrist hit 12 homers in 62 games last year, and in the first half this season he was second in the AL in slugging. The 6'3", 200-pound utility man has spent most of 2009 filling in at second base for Akinori Iwamura. Zobrist can also play the outfield, so the Rays will surely find ways to keep him in the lineup when Iwamura returns from left knee surgery.

In the meantime, Bartlett and Zobrist form baseball's only All-Star double-play combo—which could be even more surprising than the Rays making the Series last year.

**BARTLETT (FAR LEFT) AND ZOBRIST HAD HIT A TOTAL OF 26 HOMERS BEFORE THIS YEAR. THEY'VE ALREADY REACHED THAT MARK IN 2009.**



**W2W4**

FRIDAY

**08.07**

**RANGERS AT ANGELS**

After cruising to the AL West title by 21 games last year, the Angels suddenly have competition. They'll take on the upstart Rangers 10 more times this season, so somebody had better wake up the Rally Monkey.

THE NUMBER

**136**

through July 23, and the fewest in club history: 239 jacks. Maybe Colorado staff that can succeed