

Give the Rays this much: They managed not to match the longest scoreless innings streak in postseason history.

No, that would be 34 innings, set by the Dodgers of the late 1960s and early '70s, and these Rays stopped at a mere 33. As for anything else to give them credit for? There isn't much. After getting shut out by the Rangers in a sloppy [Game 1 of the American League wild-card series](#), they only narrowly avoided being shut out in a similarly sloppy Game 2, ultimately falling 7-1.

That sends the Rangers to the ALDS to face the Orioles. It sends the Rays home for the winter.

"I'm glad we scored a run," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash told reporters afterward. "Because if not, we'd have been talking about that a lot."

It's a stunning finish by the Rays, who had the best offense in the American League during the regular season with a 114 OPS+. Much of the concern around this team entering the playoffs had centered on their pitching staff, which had been hit hard with injuries, especially in the rotation. Yet it was the Rays' bats and defense that tanked them in the playoffs.

They appeared utterly vexed on Wednesday by Rangers starter Nathan Eovaldi. The veteran missed nearly six weeks this summer with a forearm strain and had something of a rocky return in September. His final two starts of the regular season were especially rough—at least five runs allowed in each without pitching more than five innings. But he looked as sharp as ever in Game 2. In 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings of work, he struck out eight and walked none, allowing just the one run off a two-on, two-out single in the seventh inning. Eovaldi's greatest strength is the depth of his arsenal. And Tampa Bay could not work with any part of his pitch mix on Wednesday.

That includes curveballs—which the Rays hit this year better than any team in the AL. (They posted a .304 wOBA on the pitch.) But Eovaldi threw his curve 21 times in Game 2, and Tampa Bay did not manage to put a single one in play.

"What a job he did. He's really worked hard to get back to this point, going on the IL, and goes out there and pitched just an enormous game for us, and he's done that many times," Rangers manager Bruce Bochy said. "It all starts with that starting pitcher and sets the tone, and that's what he did for us today, off a very, very good-hitting ballclub."

That makes seven consecutive playoff losses for the Rays, who were swept in the wild-card round by the Guardians last year and lost the final three games of the ALDS to the Red Sox in 2021.

"I don't know if it's a fluke or not," Cash said. "I think the guys that we had out there today were able to do better than what we did today. We'd like to continue playing, but I can't put my finger on one specific thing why we've been eliminated pretty quickly."

That gives the Rays the longest playoff victory drought in the league. That title has been occupied for the last decade and a half, of course, by the Twins. But [they finally shed that ignominious honor](#) this week—just in time for it to be picked up by the Rays.