

Package Producer: Keagan Smith

SLUG: Rays_Ballpark_Contender

TRT: 180 seconds

Visual	Format	Time
Sportscenter intro clip	TRANS	0:10
Live shot of anchors at desk	LIVE	0:20
Hurricane Milton radar shot followed by storm surge footage in Florida	VO	0:10
Drone footage of Tropicana Field during/after Hurricane Milton showing torn roof, other damage	VO	0:20
Indoor shot walking through Tropicana Field during renovations	LOOKLIVE	0:15
Wide shot walking across George M. Steinbrenner Field showing background and empty bleachers	LOOKLIVE	0:15
Dugout interview clip with Josh Lowe interspersed with home-run clip and diving catch in field	INT	0:30

Shot of Scott Van Pelt wading through crowds
in the concourse on a game day LOOKLIVE 0:15

Interview clip with Rays fan at a game INT 0:10

Interview clip with Yandy Diaz INT 0:30

Drone shot flying over George M. Steinbrenner
Field during a Rays game with sellout crowd VO 0:05

Script

"This is SportsCenter" intro VO

Good evening and welcome back to Sportscenter. We're already over a week into July, meaning the the MLB's All-Star break looms just a few days away. As we cross the season's midway point, we're taking a look at one of the most intriguing stories in pro baseball this year. We go to Scott Van Pelt for more.

In October 2024, the Tampa Bay area along the Florida Gulf Coast underwent a horrible tragedy as Hurricane Milton struck. With severe flood and wind damage, much of the region was left devastated due to the storm.

Like most of the buildings in St. Petersburg and surrounding locales, Tropicana Field was no exception.

The home of the Tampa Bay Rays was intended to be used as a shelter for displaced residents and first responders during and after the storm, but that plan never came to fruition as intense winds shredded and ripped off much of the ballpark's thick fabric roof.

As renovations requiring significant investments of time and money take place, the Rays were forced to find a new home before the start of the 2025 MLB season. Until Tropicana Field is ready again in 2026, the AL East lineup instead brings big heart to a little park.

Enter George M. Steinbrenner Field. Usually the home of Spring Training's Grapefruit League, the minor-league ballpark now hosts MLB-caliber action 81 days out of the year. While it seats just over 11 thousand fans, the mission remains the same for the pro team playing there.

"When they initially told us we were going to play at a minor-league park, I think a lot of the guys probably had some questions about how the season would play out. The environment is so different from an MLB stadium with fewer people, the lights aren't as bright, you know that sort of thing. We settled in quick once we got here though.. we're all professionals after all. I think we've kinda come to enjoy the circumstances and the level of play speaks for itself."

As of today, the Rays sit 49-43 and look like a real dark horse contender to compete for an American League Pennant. Despite the more intimate environment, the fans remain as dedicated as ever and tickets are arguably even more desirable since spectators are closer to the action.

"I've been a season-ticket holder for years but honestly, I've never been happier to go to a Rays game than now. I just love the vibes at the smaller park, plus it looks like a packed house every time we play."

"I'm in my seventh year with the club and I've just never seen anything like it. I mean, I've played here since before the pandemic and have been on some good teams, but we're playing some of our best baseball right now and the fans seem really engaged. The park looks full every night and I think everyone just feels the energy here a little more since there's a smaller crowd than at big stadiums. Of course we're excited to get back to an MLB park, but the grass is green and we're winning, so I can't ask for much more."

This has been Scott Van Pelt reporting for SportsCenter.
(crowd roar SFX)