Run Production

Joe Espada is set to direct traffic at third base  By Ken Derry

For six seasons, Rob Thomson was the man waving runners around third, hoping to push them safely across home. But Thomson himself was waved around when he was offered the position of bench coach, formerly held by Tony Peña, who took the first base coaching job. Thomson accepted. The new man in the third-base coaching box is Joe Espada.

Though a young man by coaching standards, Espada is not new to the game — or the third-base foul line. He is in his fifth season as a big-league coach, having previously served as the third base coach for the Miami Marlins.

Espada, who will turn 40 on Aug. 30, was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico. He went to the University of Mobile, in Alabama, and was drafted in 1996 by the Oakland A’s in the second round. He spent nine years in the minors, playing for seven organizations — never making it to The Show. He toiled in independent leagues and in the Puerto Rican Winter League, but by 2005, the writing was on the wall.

“I was tired of the travel,” he said. “I had some injuries, and when I got off the plane or a long bus ride, my body was not responding the way it used to. Even though I was still young, in my opinion, I was just like, ‘I cannot take it anymore.’”

Espada reached out to some contacts in the Marlins organization and was able to land a job as the hitting coach for Single-A Greensboro.

He worked his way up the ranks, and in 2010, Espada became the Marlins third base coach.

The benefit, Espada said, of playing for so many organizations — A’s, Marlins, Rockies, Royals, Cardinals, Rangers and Rays — is the volume of coaching advice he received. He had always been interested in coaching, so early in his career, he began keeping a notebook of drills, tips and philosophies he picked up along the way.

“You use your experience,” he said. “But there was stuff that I heard from coaches that helped me, and I could make it a part of my own teachings. There were things that didn’t work for me, but I could see how it might work for someone else, so I use that, too.”

Although Espada grew up in Puerto Rico, English was the primary language spoken in his house. His parents were born in Puerto Rico, met in New York City, and returned to Puerto Rico to raise a family.

When his first spring training with the Yankees opened in February, Espada did not anticipate a learning curve. The game is the game, he said, and his coaching philosophy will not change. That philosophy: Listen, study, stay humble, turn the page.

“But the stage has never been bigger than it is in the Bronx.

“The expectations are much higher,” he said. “But as a coach, these are the expectations you want to be in. You prepare all your life to be on this stage. When it gets here, you better not waste your time because it will never come again.”