

Arizona



EYE ON HISTORY: The players have a sense they are on the verge of something special. No second-year club has earned a playoff spot—in fact, only one second-year club (the 1962 Angels) has had a winning season. **Jerry Colangelo** has backed up his talk by signing veteran players with track records. Most of the players are 32 or older, meaning the time to win is sooner rather than later. ... **Hanley Frias** beat out **Dale Sveum** for the final infield spot. Frias' slick fielding gave him the final edge. With **Tony Batista** and **Jay Bell** up the middle, there was a need for a defensive replacement for late in games.

BULLPEN ADDITIONS: With **Gregg Olson** ailing a bit with a sore forearm and wrist, the club was concerned about a bullpen already short in depth. So it acquired **Darren Holmes** (from the Yankees for reliever **Ben Ford** and **C Izzy Molina**) and **John Frascatore** (from the Cardinals for reliever **Clint Sodowsky**). Holmes was a former closer with Colorado and is the only pitcher on the roster besides Olson with much closing experience. ... His job isn't on the line, but **Buck Showalter** will be under the microscope. He has real big-league players in '99 and his moves must pay off with consistency. Fans and Colangelo are expecting a lot. —*Pedro Gomez*

Chicago



SHORT ON ARMS: The team opened spring training with a solid pitching staff that appeared to be set. But as it left Arizona, the front office scrambled to find 11 serviceable arms. The team signed onetime sensation **Hideo Nomo** to a minor league deal. If the club sees that Nomo, 30, shows some good velocity and gets his split-finger pitch working again, it's likely to call him up in late April. The Cubs also picked up LHP **Brad Woodall** off waivers from the Brewers and LHP **Dan Serafini** in a cash deal with the Twins. Woodall could be a starter, and Serafini will provide some lefthanded insurance in the bullpen. ... G.M. **Ed Lynch** is still looking to acquire Twins closer **Rick Aguilera**—his former Mets teammate—but Aguilera is reluctant to be a setup man if traded.

PERSONNEL MATTERS: Manager **Jim Riggleman** doesn't get enough credit for using his entire 25-man roster and keeping the bench players sharp. He's able to plug versatile utilitymen (such as **Manny Alexander** and **Jose Hernandez**) into the infield and outfield, giving the team depth at several positions. Now that SS **Jeff Blauser** has shown he can play second base, Riggleman can easily give 2B **Mickey Morandini** days off when fatigue or injury affects his game. —*Bruce Miles*

Florida



CURBING PITCHES: Manager **John Boles** says his starting pitchers won't run up high pitch counts like **Livan Hernandez** and **Jesus Sanchez** did in '98. One reason **Jim Leyland** allowed it was because of a lack of faith in his bullpen. Boles thinks the bullpen is better now, which will help him impose stricter restrictions on the starters. ... The up-the-middle defense, with SS **Alex Gonzalez** and 2B **Luis Castillo**, should be strong, and 1B **Derrek Lee** is strong defensively, but can that trio—plus 3B **Kevin Orle**—hit? Lee will bat cleanup, and the Marlins will count on him for home run production, and Castillo and Gonzalez will bat first and second and try to get on base for Lee. If Orle doesn't produce early, he could be gone because **Mike Lowell** is recovering faster than expected from testicular cancer.

HIDE AND SEEK: Hernandez has changed his delivery to conceal the ball better. From the windup, he brings his left leg back farther and his knee higher, and keeps his glove lower. He pauses briefly before starting the front leg toward the plate, which he says will help slow his delivery. The change, back to the style he used in Cuba, was brought on by watching his half-brother, the Yankees' **Orlando Hernandez**, pitch. —*Dan Graziano*



HAVE ARM, CAN'T CLOSE: Dipoto was roughed up this spring, leaving Colorado uncertain of its closer.

Cincinnati



READY IF NEEDED: CF **Mike Cameron** must remain productive to fend off **Jeffrey Hammonds**. Cameron was one of the most impressive players in camp, winning the starting job and the leadoff spot. Hammonds closed with a rush, hitting the ball well, but Cameron's defensive skills and speed give him the edge. Hammonds should get some playing time in the corners when LF **Greg Vaughn** or RF **Dmitri Young** needs a rest or late-inning break. ... LHP **Denny Neagle** has continued to strengthen the muscles in his injured shoulder, pitching every fifth day. He is eligible to come off the D.L. Saturday but likely will need at least another week. ... **Stan Belinda** suffers pain in his shoulder almost every spring, and the team doesn't want to rush him. He's also eligible to join the team Saturday but likely will take more time.

TOP TUTOR: The team's best spring performance was rewarded with a promotion. **Dave Collins** tutored players in baserunning and conducted seminars in outfield play, stressing fundamentals. The team made Collins its first base coach, moving him up from a minor league instructor. Positioned at first, Collins will be able to work with **Pokey Reese** and Cameron, the team's primary basestealing threats. —*Chris Haft*

Houston



CONVINCING ARGUMENT: So much for **Ken Caminiti** starting the season on the disabled list. One week after being released from the hospital because of an acute sinus infection, Caminiti was expected to be the in opening day lineup. He convinced the team not to put him on the D.L. by building up his stamina while playing in minor league games. Manager **Larry Dierker** plans to ease Caminiti back into action, using **Bill Spiers** to fill in at third base on occasion. ... The decision on Caminiti means prospect **Russ Johnson** is headed back to Class AAA New Orleans for a third season. Johnson is becoming very bitter about being in the minors, and he has made it clear he would welcome a trade. But don't expect G.M. **Gerry Hunsicker** to give in to Johnson's frustrations. Hunsicker views Johnson as depth and would trade him only if he could get fair value.

BELL CHIMES IN: The batting order will be slightly different when Caminiti is not in the lineup. Spiers will hit second, and **Derek Bell** will move from second to Caminiti's cleanup spot. Bell has resisted hitting in the middle of the lineup in the past, but Dierker says Bell volunteered to hit fourth when it appeared Caminiti would start the season on the D.L. —*Carlton Thompson*

Atlanta



WELCOME, MR. JORDAN: From Bobby Cox's seat in the dugout, **Brian Jordan** always looked like a player who would fit perfectly in Atlanta. A hard-nosed, no-nonsense type who plays the game the way it's supposed to be played. "Solid," Cox says. "He's not going to hit 50 homers, but he'll hit 25 to 30 and he'll drive in right around 100 runs." In other words, Jordan is no **Andres Galarraga**, but until mid-February, no one expected him to be a cleanup hitter, either. Galarraga's cancer has forced a series of changes in the lineup, from **Ryan Klesko's** move to first base to Jordan batting fourth. While Galarraga's bat (44 homers and 121 RBIs) will be sorely missed, in Jordan the Braves have one of the N.L.'s best clutch hitters. With the Cardinals last season he had 44 two-out RBIs and 15 game-winning RBIs.

ANDRUW'S POTENTIAL: Judging by Giants LF **Barry Bonds'** comments, **Andruw Jones** might be baseball's next superstar. "Andruw Jones plays center field like no one I've ever seen," Bonds says. "He runs down balls like it's a joke." Better than **Ken Griffey Jr.**? "He's faster than Junior." Bonds was asked if Jones has established himself. "No, but if you look at his potential, he has a chance to be the best center fielder ever." —*Bill Zack*

Colorado



NO CLOSING STATEMENT: **Jerry Dipoto** came to camp as a candidate to be the closer, along with **Curtis Leskanic**, **Dave Veres** and **Mike DeJean**. But he pitched his way out of the job. He led the team with 16 saves in 1997 and a career-high 19 last season. However, this spring he was scored upon in his final four outings and allowed at least one earned run in six of 11 spring games. In addition to two blown saves, Dipoto's spring ERA was 7.30, and he allowed 27 baserunners in 12 1/3 innings. He was having trouble throwing first-pitch strikes. Dipoto's only spring salvation was that his arm was fine. Early-season performance will indicate who will emerge as closer.

READY OR NOT: **Larry Walker** had a bad week, starting when he strained a muscle in his right rib cage while hitting a home run in batting practice. The following night, he developed food poisoning after he ate dinner in a Tucson restaurant. Walker had been having a superb spring. He came to camp 12 pounds lighter, weighing 227 after putting in time with a personal trainer in the offseason for the first time. In 19 spring games, he hit .340 with two doubles, four triples, one home run and 15 RBIs before being hurt. —*Jack Etkin*

Los Angeles



WHOA, ADRIAN: The Dodgers are pleased by how much starting 3B **Adrian Beltre** has improved. Through winter ball and spring training, **Beltre** has put up impressive offensive numbers and played solid defense. He's hitting for a high average and some power and striking out less. After being pressed into the majors before he was ready last year, **Beltre**, 21, struggled with the bat and with maintaining a work ethic. Club vice president **Ralph Avila** pushed **Beltre** into making an attitude adjustment—and **Beltre** has responded. ... RHP **Antonio Osuna** is making good progress recovering from offseason elbow surgery, but he has been put on the disabled list as a precautionary measure.

MAKING AMENDS: With OF **Todd Hollandsworth** on the 15-day disabled list with a right hamstring pull, the team was forced to shuffle the 25-man roster. The team now will carry only four outfielders and keep a third catcher. OF **Jacob Brumfield**, who worked himself into contention for the fifth outfield spot, likely will move up to become the top reserve. C **Rick Wilkins** will give the Dodgers insurance behind **Todd Hundley**, (who's coming off an arm injury) and hard-working rookie **Paul LoDuca**. —*Jason Reid*