

ROBERT SEALE / TSN

# Past tense

Second baseman **JEFF KENT** proved he could thrive amid confrontation with the Giants; the Astros are eager to see what he can do in a relaxed atmosphere **BY RICHARD JUSTICE**

**J**eff Kent had just finished a news conference announcing his signing with the Astros when someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned to find Astros outfielder Lance Berkman smiling. "Hey, it's great to have you here," Berkman said. "We've got a really good bunch of guys. You're going to love it."

The two new teammates exchanged small talk for a bit, then Berkman scribbled his telephone number on a piece of paper, handed it to Kent and departed.

"If there's anything I can do to help you get settled here, don't hesitate to call," Berkman said.

Welcome to Jeff Kent's new world.

Kent says the Astros appealed to him because he makes his offseason home near San Antonio, because he believes the team has a chance to get to the playoffs and because he believes he'd fit nicely in a clubhouse alongside veterans such as Jeff Bagwell and Shane Reynolds.

He's going to find it's even better than he imagined. The Giants succeeded with Barry Bonds and Kent in the middle of their lineup, in part because the two men—and others—fed off the tension and occasional confrontations that became a staple of their relationship.

Bonds established himself as one of the best offensive players in history with Kent at his side. Kent flourished as well, averaging 29 home runs and 115 RBIs a season during his six years with Bonds. The Giants rode the duo to three playoff appearances, including the 2002 World Series.

"I think we motivated each other," Kent says. "We

elevated each other's game. We elevated our team's game. That'll be a time in my life that I'll never forget. Barry made me a better player."

If it worked in San Francisco for Kent, it may work just as well without the tension in Houston. He moves to a clubhouse where the best players—Bagwell, Berkman and Craig Biggio—are also the best teammates.

"You're going to sit in the same chair as everyone else when you're in this clubhouse," Bagwell says. "We don't have fistfights and things like that. I think we have a special way that we feel like we should play the game of baseball, and when guys get here they feel the same way."

To the Astros, Kent represents the offensive firepower they never really replaced when Moises Alou signed with the Cubs after the 2001 season. That's one reason Biggio agreed to shift from second base to center field to allow Kent to play his best defensive position.

"Why?" Biggio asks. "Because he makes us better."

To Kent, the Astros will be as close to a perfect environment as there is in baseball. If it all works out as hoped, Bagwell, Berkman and Kent will be the best 3-4-5 combination in the game, and the Astros will be back in the playoffs for the fifth time in seven years.

"There's a veteran character and personality, if you will, to this clubhouse," Kent says. "You just kind of assume your role and play hard and, if you do, then you won't get anybody biting on your butt."

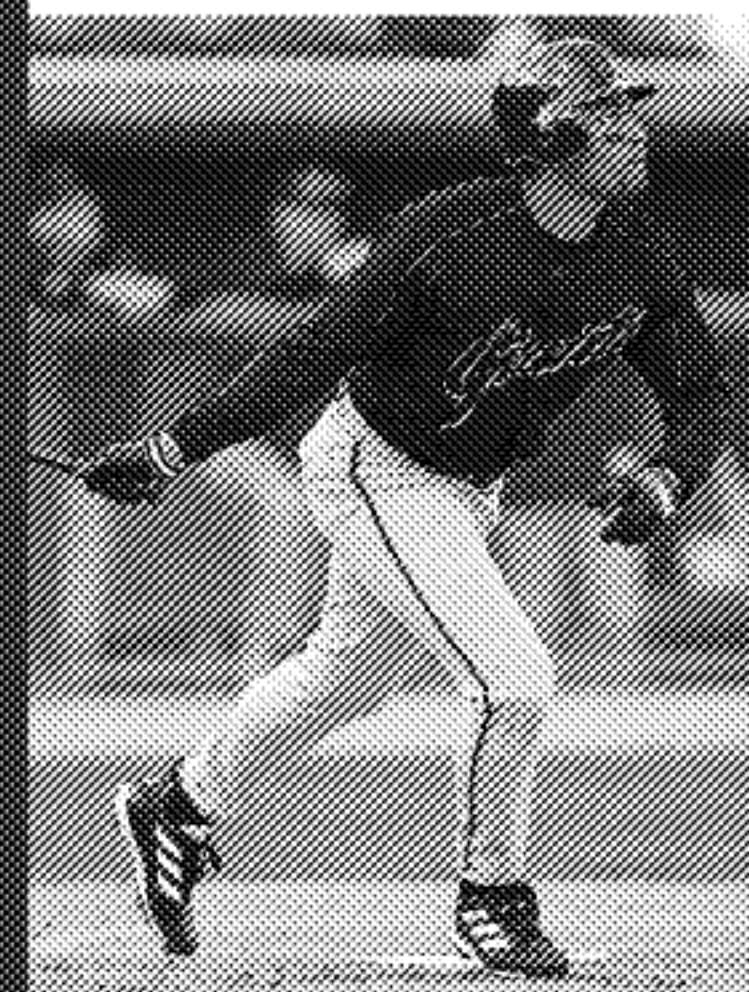
*Richard Justice covers baseball for the Houston Chronicle.*

## Opportunity knocks

A new season brings a new chance for everyone, though some need it more than others.

**Ken Griffey Jr., CF, Reds.** He's not smiling much, at least not in public. Given a choice, though, the Reds would take a healthy Griffey over a happy one. Griffey says he got serious about his training in the offseason, and in spring training he has shown no signs of the leg problems that hindered him the past two seasons. He hit six home runs in his first 35 at-bats.

**Erubiel Durazo, DH, A's.** Last year, Carlos Pena was billed as the A's slugging first baseman of the future, but he was sent to the Tigers before the All-Star break. Now it's Durazo, whom A's general manager Billy Beane says he has coveted for years. Durazo, who played mostly first base with the Diamondbacks, is a big, strong hitter with the high on-base percentage the A's relish. He should stick around a lot longer than Pena—if he can avoid the trainer's room. That's no sure thing. Durazo, 29, has been on the disabled list six times in the past three seasons.



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

### Jose Cruz Jr., RF, Giants.

Hitting third in front of Barry Bonds should mean a lot of fastballs for a fastball hitter. Cruz struggled with the Blue Jays last year after hitting 34 homers and stealing 32 bases in 2001, but he struggled a lot less from the third spot than he did from the fifth spot. He had 18 more at-bats hitting third but drove in 15 more runs and hit 74 points higher.

—Stan McNeal





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San Francisco

Kent takes advantage of Bonds' return



2B Jeff Kent is the first to admit that the presence of LF Barry Bonds in the lineup makes everyone else—including Kent—better. Maybe that has something to do with a spike upward in Kent's performance since Bonds returned June 9.

GRADING OUT

OFFENSE B Maybe a 15-run outburst at Seattle will be the start of something big. PITCHING B Bullpen is coming up aces. Rotation, except for Mark Gardner, getting steady. DEFENSE A Giants of June have been much better than fumble-fingered team of April.

Bonds from stealing. Even when the pitcher retires Bonds, he has to work so hard mentally and physically, he may let up on Kent.

TIME OFF: Bonds' biggest problem since returning after a seven-week absence from elbow surgery is his timing at the plate, which is still off. Manager Dusty Baker thinks Bonds will get his timing back by walking more.

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME: By giving up switch-hitting, J.T. Snow has been able to dump the extra workload and concentrate on batting from the left, his dominant side.

GIANTS

Table with columns: Name, AVG, G, AB, R, H, H?, RBI, OBP, SLG, SB, K, BB, E. Lists players like Mayne, Javier, Kent, etc.

GRAND SLAMS: Mueller (1)

Table with columns: Name, ERA, W-L, G, IP, H, R, ER, HR, K, BB, SV, Avg. Lists pitchers like Johnstone, Embree, etc.

SHUTOUTS: None COMPLETE GAMES: Ortiz (1)

LEAGUE LEADERS

AVERAGE

Table with columns: Name, Average. Lists players like Casey, Gonzalez, Walker, etc.

RUNS

Table with columns: Name, Runs. Lists players like Bell, Bagwell, Williams, etc.

HITS

Table with columns: Name, Hits. Lists players like Williams, Gonzalez, Casey, etc.

DOUBLES

Table with columns: Name, Doubles. Lists players like Biggio, Casey, Young, etc.

TRIPLES

Table with columns: Name, Triples. Lists players like Womack, Johnson, Martin, etc.

HOME RUNS

Table with columns: Name, Home Runs. Lists players like Sosa, Bagwell, Bell, etc.

RBIs

Table with columns: Name, RBIs. Lists players like Williams, Bagwell, Jordan, etc.



GLAVINE

ERA

Table with columns: Name, ERA. Lists players like Tapani, Smoltz, Lima, etc.

WINS

Table with columns: Name, Wins. Lists players like Lima, Byrd, Bottenfield, etc.

LOSSES

Table with columns: Name, Losses. Lists players like Perez, Trachsel, Springer, etc.

COMPLETE GAMES

Table with columns: Name, Complete Games. Lists players like Schilling, Johnson, Lima, etc.

INNINGS PITCHED

Table with columns: Name, Innings Pitched. Lists players like Johnson, Schilling, Lima, etc.

STRIKEOUTS

Table with columns: Name, Strikeouts. Lists players like Johnson, Hitchcock, Estes, etc.

SAVES

Table with columns: Name, Saves. Lists players like Nen, Wagner, J. Franco, etc.





**FANTASY STOCK CAR '98**

**Week 17 TOP TEN**

**Pontiac Excitement 400**

Rk.	Name	Location	Total Pts. YTD.
1	Dan Hagen	Wheaton, IL	15,424
2	Brian Damiani	Warrington, PA	14,988
3	Dale Champine	Com. Township, MI	14,893
4	Albert Rottini	Woodridge Rd, NJ	14,878
5	Jeff Wade	Moorestown, NC	14,819
6	Jeff Anderson	Pleasant Hope, MO	14,717
7	Sam Knox	Pine Bluff, AR	14,673
8	Matt Beddow	Conshohocken, PA	14,649
9	Dan Sutter	Wind Gap, PA	14,600
10	Todd Lipcsey	Stafford, VA	14,549

**FANTASY GOLF '98**

**Week 18 TOP TEN**

**Kemper Open - Nationwide Senior Classic**

Rk.	Name	Location	YTD. Earnings
1	James O'Neill	Colchester, CT	\$11,779,613
2	Hugh Stein Sr.	Ridgefield, CT	\$11,490,051
3	Jeff Wyatt	Jacksonville, FL	\$11,104,512
4	Dave Kiker	Raleigh, NC	\$11,030,245
5	Jay Darnell	Plainfield, IL	\$11,003,590
6	Ron Phillips	Orlando, FL	\$10,989,237
7	Bruce Johnson	Marietta, GA	\$10,833,463
8	Dave Kamman	Gurnee, IL	\$10,820,933
9	Bill Aharens	Milford, CT	\$10,729,082
10	Chris Clair	Aston, PA	\$10,692,826



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**San Francisco**

41-27: 2nd

**Without Kent, team looks for cohesiveness**



On the same day the team placed cleanup hitter **Jeff Kent** on the disabled list with a sprained knee, it figured it also would lose its most effective starting pitcher when **Orel Hershiser** was struck on his right (pitching) wrist with a line drive by the Mariners' **Alex Rodriguez**. It was Rodriguez, coincidentally, whose hard, rolling slide into **Kent** sprained the second baseman's knee. But Hershiser's wrist was bruised, not broken, and by week's end it appeared he would make his next scheduled start Tuesday

**GRADING OUT**

OFFENSE	C
Had six runs in three losses; had averaged more than six a game for 11 straight wins.	
PITCHING	B
Starters were 29-18 through 68 games, but rotation in trouble once win streak ended.	
DEFENSE	B
Errors starting to crop up more frequently—and in key situations.	

against Colorado. Hershiser tested the wrist by playing catch last Friday night in San Diego. ... Manager **Dusty Baker** urged the team to make up for the little things in Kent's absence. However, it took the field and blew a 3-0 lead, losing to San Diego 10-3, as the Padres capitalized on the first error of the season by shortstop **Rich Aurilia**, which tied the score 3-3, and a throwing error by pitcher **Steve Reed** that paved the way for a seven-run eighth inning.

**THINKING AHEAD:** General manager **Brian Sabean** said he is acting under the impression that **Kent** will not be ready to play when he is eligible to come off the disabled list on June 24. That way, if he comes back on time, it's a pleasant surprise.

**INSIDE PITCH:** A key to stopping the team in the first inning is stopping leadoff hitter **Darryl Hamilton**. Hamilton has reached base safely to lead off games in 14 of his last 23 starts through last Saturday. His on-base percentage stands at .393, making him fourth among National League leadoff hitters.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Beginning with Monday night's game against Colorado, the Giants were to play 12 of 14 games at home, with the two road games coming across the bay in Oakland. The home games include three with the Rockies, four against top division rival San Diego, two with Oakland and three with Texas. Expect the Giants to do well during the stretch even without **Kent**. —Henry Schulman

**GIANTS**

	AVG	G	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	OBP	SLG	SB	K	BB	E
Sanchez	.323	48	127	14	41	1	14	.362	.370	0	22	8	4
Aurilia	.308	50	169	29	52	5	26	.367	.479	3	24	16	1
Bonds+	.304	67	237	44	72	15	52	.440	.582	11	35	59	2
Hayes	.302	47	129	12	39	3	25	.364	.411	0	28	13	2
Mueller#	.299	66	244	46	73	5	25	.394	.422	1	38	40	7
Hamilton+	.293	57	215	38	63	1	15	.389	.358	7	36	34	0
Mayne+	.278	39	115	10	32	2	13	.371	.365	1	17	16	1
Johnson	.250	39	140	17	35	9	20	.307	.464	0	28	11	3
Javier#	.231	64	212	25	49	1	25	.322	.307	6	34	28	1
Benard+	.227	42	66	6	15	1	6	.320	.318	1	12	9	1
Jones	.222	40	81	12	18	2	8	.289	.321	2	24	8	0
Snow#	.202	58	188	24	38	3	28	.295	.298	0	35	26	0
Diaz#	.131	33	61	5	8	0	5	.131	.164	1	14	0	0
*Ball	.000	1	1	0	0	0	0	.000	.000	0	0	0	0

GRAND SLAMS: Bonds, Mayne (1)

	ERA	W-L	G	IP	H	R	ER	HR	K	BB	SV	Avg.
Nen	1.30	4-1	35	41.2	20	8	6	2	53	14	19	.139
Reed	1.45	2-1	33	37.1	23	7	6	2	32	15	1	1.80
Johnstone	1.66	2-2	28	38.0	23	7	7	3	42	17	0	.173
Hershiser	3.19	6-4	14	87.1	62	34	31	8	56	41	0	.199
Tavarez	3.45	2-3	29	44.1	55	19	17	3	30	18	1	.316
Rodriguez+	3.47	1-0	23	23.1	20	9	9	3	16	6	1	.230
Rueter+	3.73	7-3	14	82.0	83	36	34	11	48	29	0	.266
Poole+	3.90	1-2	21	27.2	28	13	12	2	15	7	0	.272
Darwin	4.54	6-3	14	71.1	82	40	36	10	46	23	0	.288
Estes+	4.73	5-5	14	85.2	85	49	45	8	72	47	0	.266
Gardner	5.80	5-3	14	80.2	94	53	52	15	52	34	0	.294

SHUTOUTS: Estes (1)

COMPLETE GAMES: Estes, Gardner (1)

**LEAGUE LEADERS**

**AVERAGE**

Olerud, NY	.359
Grace, Chi	.352
Gwynn, SD	.346
Jordan, StL	.343
Walker, Col	.338
Bichette, Col	.337
Kendall, Pit	.336
Morandini, Chi	.335
Sosa, Chi	.333
Alou, Hou	.333

**RUNS**

Biggio, Hou	60
Galarraga, Atl	58
Jones, C., Atl	57
McGwire, StL	54
Glanville, Phi	54
Sosa, Chi	51
Walker, Col	48
DeShields, StL	46
Vaughn, SD	46
Mueller, SF	46

**HITS**

Glanville, Phi	94
Bichette, Col	94
Grace, Chi	88
C. Jones, Atl	85
Sosa, Chi	83
Biggio, Hou	82
Castilla, Col	81
Galarraga, Atl	81
Bell, Hou	79
Rolen, Phi	79

**DOUBLES**

Fullmer, Mon	28
Walker, Col	28
Boone, B., Cin	22
Kent, SF	22
Bichette, Col	21
Bonds, SF	21
Biggio, Hou	21
Young, Cin	20
Finley, SD	19
Guillen, Pit	19
Floyd, Fla	19
Bell, Hou	19

**TRIPLES**

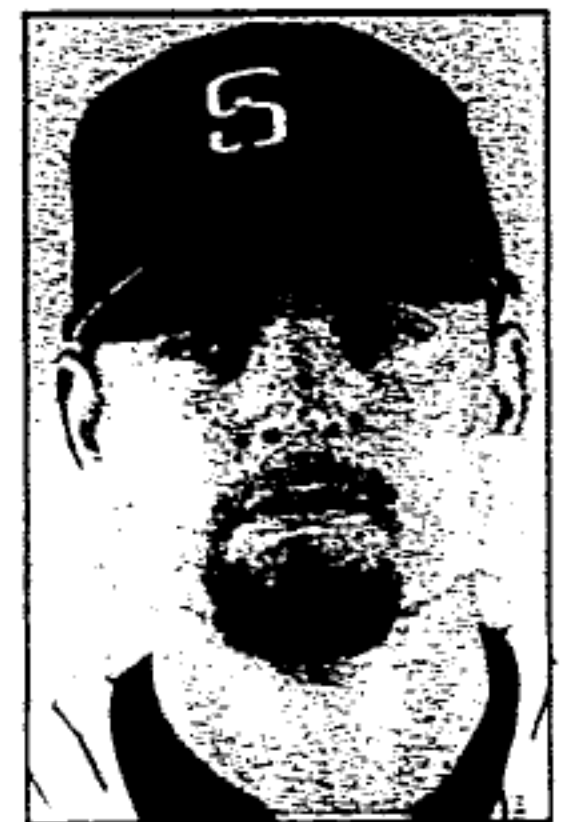
DeShields, StL	6
Glanville, Phi	5
Perez, Col	4
A. Jones, Atl	4
Collier, Pit	4
Alou, Hou	4
Finley, SD	4
Morandini, Chi	4
Hollandsworth, LA	4
Womack, Pit	4
Vina, Mil	4

**HOME RUNS**

McGwire, StL	31
Galarraga, Atl	25
Castilla, Col	22
Vaughn, SD	22
Sosa, Chi	21
C. Jones, Atl	17
Lopez, Atl	15
Mondesi, LA	15
Bonds, SF	15

**RBIs**

McGwire, StL	80
Galarraga, Atl	66
Castilla, Col	63
Sosa, Chi	60
Vaughn, SD	57
Alou, Hou	56
Brogna, Phi	54
Bichette, Col	53
C. Jones, Atl	53
Bonds, SF	52



**TREVOR HOFFMAN ERA**

Leiter, NY	1.70
Maddux, Atl	1.75
Ashby, SD	2.21
Reed, NY	2.31
Cordova, Pit	2.34
Schilling, Phi	2.59
Glavine, Atl	2.68
Brown, SD	2.74
Harnisch, Cin	2.80
Yoshii, NY	2.82

**WINS**

Glavine, Atl	9
Maddux, Atl	9
Hampton, Hou	8
Ashby, SD	8
Tapani, Chi	8
Millwood, Atl	8
Schmidt, Pit	8
Reed, NY	8

**LOSSES**

Kile, Col	9
Astacio, Col	8
Blair, Ari	8

**COMPLETE GAMES**

Schilling, Phi	6
Ashby, SD	4
Reynolds, Hou	3
Maddux, Atl	3
Neagle, Atl	3
Hernandez, Fla	3

**INNINGS PITCHED**

Schilling, Phi	114.2
Maddux, Atl	113.1
Stottlemire, StL	109.2
Ashby, SD	106.0
Brown, SD	105.0
Reynolds, Hou	104.1
Kile, Col	103.2
C. Perez, Mon	101.2
Benes, Ari	101.1

**STRIKEOUTS**

	Per 9 IP
Schilling, Phi	11.54
Nomo, NY	9.66
Leiter, NY	8.62
Sosa, Chi	8.38
Stottlemire, StL	8.12
Martinez, LA	7.89
Dreifort, LA	7.79
Astacio, Col	7.64
Estes, SF	7.56
Reynolds, Hou	7.42

**SAVES**

Hoffman, SD	19
Nen, SF	19
Shaw, Cin	18
Urbina, Mon	16
Wagner, Hou	16
Beck, Chi	16
J. Franco, NY	15
Dipoto, Col	13