

Arizona



MOVING OVER: Torrey Womack may not become the right fielder after all. Instead, the club plans to put him in left, where the staff believes the transition from infielder to outfielder will come easier for the speedy Womack. **Luis Gonzalez** will become the club's right fielder. Womack is resisting the switch to the outfield, mostly because he is less than two years removed from being an All-Star second baseman with Pittsburgh. Nonetheless, the team strongly believes Womack will be able to make the move to the outfield with little difficulty, using **Tony Phillips** and **Lance Harris** as examples of players who successfully made the switch to utility player.

NEW HOME: The indoctrination of **Jay Bell** at second base is going smoothly. The most difficult aspect for Bell is learning the footwork on double plays. **SS Tony Batista** doesn't appear to have any difficulty working with Bell. The two flip-flopped positions from last year. ... **RHP Todd Stottlemyre** has a new wrinkle with his split-finger fastball. He is tinkering with throwing it from the same angle he delivers his changeup. "I would like to leave camp with another weapon, and this pitch has a chance," says Stottlemyre, who thinks the pitch would be effective against lefthanders. —*Pedro Gomez*

Cincinnati



FINDING THE ROUTINE: The team knows **Pokey Reese** can make outstanding plays at second base, where he has moved after playing shortstop most of his career. But the Reds need him to make the routine plays more often. Reese showed excellent range to his right and left during early exhibitions. But his penchant for bobbling balls on less-challenging plays is troubling and will reach up and bite the Reds if he doesn't improve. ... **RF Dmitri Young**, branded a butcher on defense for past efforts, has worked tirelessly to improve in the spring and already looks smoother in pursuit of fly balls and base hits. Young works on defense every morning with minor league coach **Dave Collins**.

LOW ON LEFTHANDERS: With LHP **Gabe White** likely to close games, the team could enter the season with no lefthanders in middle or setup relief. The Reds aren't too concerned because they have **RHPs John Hudek** and **Stan Belinda**. Lefthies hit only .160 against Hudek and .220 against Belinda last year. Hudek's secret is a cut fastball that runs in on lefthies. Plus, he likes to pitch up in the strike zone, and most lefthies feast on deliveries down and in. Belinda has a sinking fastball that lefthies fail to drive with any consistency. —*Chris Haft*

Houston



HOLT BACK: RHP **Chris Holt**, who missed the entire 1998 season recovering from rotator cuff surgery, will contend for one of the last two spots in the rotation, behind **Shane Reynolds**, **Mike Hampton** and **Jose Lima**. Holt, who will battle with **Sean Bergman** and **Scott Elarton**, isn't suited for the bullpen as a consolation prize, but Bergman and Elarton have been relievers before. If Holt makes the team, it will be as a starter—or he'll be at AAA New Orleans. But with a good spring, he could force the team to move Bergman. ... The No. 2 lineup spot is up for grabs—**Derek Bell** would love to hit there but is needed in the middle with **Moises Alou's** injury. Of **Clayton Kershaw** and **Richard Hidalgo** and **SS Ricky Gutierrez** all are potential candidates.

FEN NAMES: With only his reliable 100-mph fastball, **Billy Wagner** posted 62 saves in just more than two seasons. In spring, he's working on perfecting his slider and a changeup to complement his fireball. The setup men for Wagner shouldn't be a problem—except for finding enough innings. In **Jay Powell**, **Doug Henry** and **Xavier Hernandez**, manager **Larry Dierker** has three pitchers who have closed before and could extend into the ninth inning. —*Carlton Thompson*

Atlanta



A NOT-SO-WILD-THING RETURNS: Judging by his pitching line, **Mark Wohlers'** spring debut was a ghastly sight. One inning, three hits, two walks, one wild pitch and four earned runs. Shades of the 1998 Wohlers? No, not by a long shot. While the numbers may not point to a solid outing, Wohlers and manager **Bobby Cox** were satisfied with his progress. Wohlers worked the third and by the end of the inning he had made 38 pitches, 22 strikes. His biggest problem was an uncooperative slider, which often hung over the plate begging to be hit. But he also displayed an excellent split-finger and his fastball was in the 94-97 mph range, not far below his normal velocity.

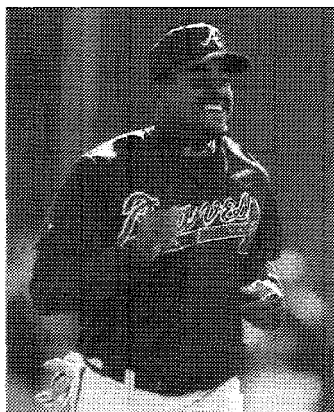
LINEUP JUGGLING TIME: Cox wasn't kidding when he said he plans to tinker with the lineup all spring. He has hit **Bret Boone** second and seventh, he has had **Ryan Klesko** batting fifth and sixth, and he has used two different leadoff men. It's more likely Boone will wind up hitting second and **Andrew Jones** will settle into the No. 6 or No. 7 hole. Cox probably will make **Brian Jordan** the cleanup hitter, and Boone, who strikes out less frequently than Jones, will hit behind leadoff man **Otis Nixon** with Klesko batting fifth. —*Bill Zack*

Colorado



HELLO, LARRY: The team settled its biggest issue of the spring and took another step toward keeping what it believes is a contender intact when it signed **Larry Walker** to a six-year, \$75 million contract extension, starting in 2000. In addition to a \$1 million signing bonus, Walker, 32, will receive salaries of \$12 million in 2000 and 2001 and \$12.5 million in each of the final four years of the deal. ... Manager **Jim Leyland** toyed with the idea of batting Walker fourth and **Dante Bichette** third, but he decided against it. Walker's baserunning instincts—his ability to stretch singles into doubles and steal bases—led Leyland to pencil him into the No. 3 spot. Leyland also feels Bichette can drive Walker home often. Bichette led the majors with 219 hits in '98 and is good at adjusting with two strikes.

A HIGH STRIKE: At the suggestion of pitching coach **Mill May**, **Mike DeJean** is working on a four-seam fastball. He throws a sinker, forkball and slider, three pitches that are down in the strike zone. The four-seamer is up in the zone. There are times a reliever needs a strikeout. Rushing a four-seamer to a hitter could get that strikeout, or it could set up a slider, forkball or sinker that a hitter then might miss. —*Jack Etkin*



BRIAN JORDAN: While others on the Braves fight for their lineup spot, Jordan's a cinch to hit cleanup.

Chicago



WOOD SIGNED: The Cubs signed **RHP Kerry Wood** to a one-year contract worth \$690,000. Wood has bounced back nicely from illnesses that plagued him in the opening days of spring training, but the team will have to watch his elbow closely. ... **RHP Kirk Miller** came to camp wanting to win a job in the bullpen, but if LHP **Terry Mulholland** is needed out of the bullpen, Miller or **RHP Scott Sanders** could start some games. Miller, who relies on a slow curve to keep hitters off balance, went 14-3 last season at Class AAA Iowa before coming up to lead a hand in the bullpen. ... Middle relievers **Matt Karchner**, **Terry Adams** and **Felix Heredia** are back on track after poor performances last season.

LEADOFF MAN: OF **Lance Johnson** looks healthy and ready to play 150-plus games this season, which should give the Cubs a big boost in the leadoff spot. He possesses good speed, but this is hardly a running team. Johnson and **2B Mickey Morandini** in the 1-2 spots will serve as table-setters for OF **Sammy Sosa**, 1B **Mark Grace** and OF **Henry Rodriguez**. ... The club is not worried about the few extra pounds Sosa is carrying. He weighed in at 222 but doubled in his first spring at-bat and homered in the second game. —*Bruce Miles*

Florida



ON TARGET: Alex Fernandez pitched two innings in the spring opener against Tampa Bay and felt no effects of the rotator cuff injury that cost him the '98 season. The team clocked his fastball in the 88-89 mph range, and as high as 90, which is about as hard as he ever threw before the injury. All signs are encouraging at this point, which means Fernandez is on track to start the regular-season opener April 5 against the Mets.

STRENGTH UP THE MIDDLE: One area in which the team should be better is defense, especially up the middle. ... **C Jorge Fábregas** is in the majors because of his defense, and the Marlins are hoping his strong throwing arm will help them control opponents' running games. Even though he's no **Charles Johnson**, he'll be a vast improvement over **Graig Zaun**. If 2B **Luis Castillo** makes the team, he and **SS Alex Gonzalez** could form one of the most dazzling middle infield combinations in the N.L. And if **Craig Counsell** is the second baseman instead of Castillo, he's solid enough that the team wouldn't sacrifice any defense. CF **Todd Dunwoody** has impressive range and a surprising arm, and if **Mark Kotsay** or **Preston Wilson** have to fill in, they're excellent defenders as well. —*Dan Graziano*

Los Angeles



PLAYING HIM SOFTLY: If **C Todd Hundley** is going to return to form behind the plate after surgery on his right elbow and be the powerful lefthanded bat the Dodgers hope he'll be, he must proceed with caution. Manager **Dave Johnson** was wisely recognized that and will use Hundley, 29, carefully and keep him out of meaningless spring training games. ... The Dodgers weren't willing to wait and see if RHP **Ramon Martinez** could come back from surgery on his rotator cuff—Martinez is now set to join the Red Sox. The team questioned his shoulder and age (31) and realized its own pitching depth—and didn't want to take the risk.

FOR KEEPS: RHP **Dave Millick** and **SS Jose Vizcaino** are supposedly available for acquisition, but G.M. **Kevin Malone** should seriously consider keeping them. Johnson likes Vizcaino, even if he doesn't start, as a switch hitter who can also play at second and third. Veterans say Vizcaino would be a calming presence for young 3B **Adrian Beltre**. Millick gives the bullpen another quality arm. ... The Dodgers are once again trying to hit **Raul Mondesi** third. But he has to show more discipline and get on base more, or the move will be detrimental to the offense. —*Jason Reid*