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# Notes: Diaz focused on breakthrough

## Corrective contact lens has made big difference for outfielder

By Mark Bowman / MLB.com

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LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Things have never looked so good for Matt Diaz, and it's not simply because he's expected to be included on an Opening Day Major League roster for the first time in his life.

While being examined by vision specialist Dr. Bill Harrison in late February, Diaz learned that he basically had no depth perception. He's since been given a corrective contact lens that he wears in his right eye. Diaz, who is expected to begin the season in Atlanta as a backup outfielder, is entering his eighth season of professional baseball. But while with his two previous organizations, the Devil Rays and Royals, he was never informed of his lack of depth perception.

"Maybe it's the sugar pill or placebo," Diaz said. "But whatever it is, mentally it's helped."

While it may provide some assistance offensively, the lens is expected to have its greatest effect defensively, which is certainly the weaker aspect of Diaz's game.

During this year's first Grapefruit League game, Diaz misplayed a ball in left field. The next day, he began wearing the lens and hasn't had trouble tracking balls since. As for his offense, the .358 batting average he's produced simply continues the trend he followed throughout his Minor League career.

"Offensively, I've worked real hard," Diaz said. "Defensively, everybody is saying I'm taking good



Outfielder Matt Diaz (right) hit .281 in 34 game Royals last season. (John Raoux/AP)

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jumps. I've always felt OK, just sometimes I've lost the ball. I lost the ball just once all spring and that was on the first day. I got the contact on the second day. I don't know if it's a coincidence or not."

Diaz, who turned 28 on March 3, has hit .309 and produced a .475 slugging percentage during his Minor League career. But with all of his success, he's still played in just 14 Major League games.

That will change this year with the Braves, who will use him as pinch-hitter and give him some time at the corner outfield positions.

"You can't have a much better spring than he's having," Braves manager Bobby Cox said.

Diaz's greatest opportunity should come against left-handed pitchers. In 54 at-bats with Kansas City last year, he hit .370 against them. In his 72 at-bats against southpaws with Triple-A Omaha last year,

**Trade winds still a blowin':** As the regular season quickly approaches, there's a growing belief Thomson will be traded in the next few days. The Braves have talked to a number of teams, including the Rangers, about Thomson, expressing their desire to be compensated bullpen help.

The Rangers may be willing to part ways with Joaquin Benoit, a strong-armed right-hander.

The Braves know John Foster won't be available for the start of the regular season, and it appears Macay McBride could also miss at least the first few weeks of April. McBride has a left forearm muscle strain that is causing bruising just above his left wrist. Cox said it's an injury that the team's medical staff hasn't seen before. McBride hasn't pitched since March 6 and it's unknown when he'll be able to pitch again.

As the Braves' roster currently stands, Chuck James and Mike Remlinger would likely begin the season as the left-handed relievers. Remlinger was once thought to be a long shot to earn a roster spot. But with four consecutive impressive performances, the 40-year-old southpaw has certainly earned a chance to prove himself again.

Remlinger allowed one hit in one scoreless inning during a 4-2 loss to the Nationals at Disney's Sports complex on Friday night. He's allowed two runs (one earned) in his past four appearances.

"Rem has so much knowledge, I think he's going to help this team in a lot of ways," said closer Reitsma, who tossed a scoreless eighth on Friday and has allowed just two hits in the five scoreless innings he's worked during the Grapefruit League season.

**Hudson ready for Opening Day:** Completing six innings in his second to last Grapefruit League Opening Day starter Tim Hudson allowed the Nationals four earned runs and five hits. He also issued just two walks.

Hudson's only mistake came when he didn't get a fastball in far enough against Alfonso Soriano making his third consecutive start in left field. Soriano turned on the pitch and belted it for a home run in the fifth inning.

During his final start of the spring on Wednesday against the Mets, Hudson hopes to put more his curveball and cut fastball. "I feel like I'm where I need to be," Hudson said. "I feel like my arm to where I can throw [the curve and cutter] a lot more."

**Braves bits:** Jeff Francoeur had three singles on Friday to raise his batting average to .692. Since from the World Baseball Classic, the 22-year-old right fielder has nine hits, including three home runs. ... Blaine Boyer said he will pitch against the Dodgers in Vero Beach on Sunday. The right reliever, who has battled shoulder inflammation since the end of last season, could be available for the regular season's second week.

**Coming up:** The Braves will send John Smoltz to the mound to face the Indians at Disney on Saturday at 1:05 p.m. ET. James, Brian O'Connor and Ken Ray are also scheduled to pitch.

*Mark Bowman is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball clubs.*

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