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Notes: Great news for Bell

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By Ken Mandel / MLB.com

LAKELAND, FLA. -- Considering how bad the news could have been, David Bell sounded ecstatic.

The MRI exam and X-rays on his lower back showed no herniated disk and no stress fracture. While the prognosis said that he could be ready to return to game action in three weeks, Bell thinks that he'll be back sooner and feels sure that he'll be in the Opening Day lineup against the Nationals on April 4.

"I was real encouraged by what the doctors told me," said Bell, who received an epidural injection from Los Angeles-based back specialist Dr. Robert Watkins on Wednesday. "I'm excited about doing all my exercises. The toughest part is to be patient. I'm confident that I'll be ready Opening Day."

Bell said he will resume throwing as soon as he can. Even a three-week absence leaves 11 Spring Training games, and he can get extra at-bats at the minor league complex.

He returned to Bright House Networks Field on Friday to begin lower back and abdominal therapy as he recovers from a sprained ligament in his lower back. He thinks the injury occurred while fielding ground balls on Feb. 21, the day before full-squad workouts began.

"I must have twisted the wrong way," he said.

The best news for Bell was when the bone scan revealed that the injury wasn't related to the lower back and hip strain that limited him to 85 games and a .195 batting average in 2003.

Phillies manager Charlie Manuel was a bit more guarded regarding his Opening Day third baseman.

"I don't know if it's possible or not," Manuel said of Bell's predicted return. "I trust him and believe in him because I've known him a long time. But I want him well and healthy when he comes back."

An abbreviated Spring Training limited Bell to 22 at-bats in 2004, and he responded with the highest batting average of his career, hitting .291 with 18 homers and 77 RBIs.

He'll be ready this year, too.

"I don't just want to be physically ready," Bell said, "but also baseball ready."


Leave it to Lieber: New ace Jon Lieber impressed in his Phillies debut, tossing three scoreless innings and allowing just two baserunners. He's lined up to start Opening Day on April 4.

"You always want to make a good first impression, regardless of the situation," said Lieber, who signed a three-year, \$21 million contract in the offseason.


Lieber said that he was able to throw all his pitches, but was unhappy with his location.

"Right now, it's more a rhythm thing to get out there against another team."


Adventures in popups: Tomas Perez had a routine out turn into an adventure on Friday, as he tripped over the mound



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while tracking a popup.

The play happened with one out and a runner on first. Perez got to his knees and reached for the ball with his bare hand -- a potentially dangerous move -- but the ball bounced a few feet to his right. He recovered to get a forceout at second.

"That was something," said Manuel, with a laugh. "He stayed with it."

Coming up: Gavin Floyd is the scheduled starter for Saturday's game against the Indians. He will be opposed by Jason Davis.

Philling in: The MRI on Vicente Padilla's right elbow confirmed the original diagnosis of right triceps tendinitis. He is currently throwing off flat ground, and could pitch off a mound in one or two weeks. He could still start the season on the disabled list. ... Left fielder Pat Burrell has a right thigh contusion after being hit by a pitch in Thursday's exhibition opener. He was scratched from Friday's lineup and is day-to-day. Burrell was hit by a pitch in Thursday's loss to Detroit and is also day-to-day.

This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

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