

# DAILY NEWS

Saturday, September 9, 2006

## Sheff cooking on tee in Jersey

BALTIMORE — While the Yankees began a four-game series against the Orioles yesterday, Gary Sheffield was at an indoor batting cage in New Jersey taking swings at a baseball on a tee.

This was a significant step for Sheffield, who is recovering from surgery on his left wrist in May and hopes to return to the Yanks shortly. His physical therapist, Gary Flink, said yesterday that Sheffield will continue to hit off a tee this weekend, then do one more day of hard therapy on Monday before taking live batting practice with the Yanks when they return home on Tuesday.

Speaking shortly after he finished working with Sheffield last night, Flink

said by phone, "it couldn't have gone better. . . . He didn't feel any twinges or discomfort and was very smooth during the whole thing."

Flink, who has worked with numerous professional athletes, including Richard Jefferson and Patrick Ewing, said he has been seeing Sheffield five times a week since the last week of July, when the Yankee right fielder had his cast removed. Each session is between 90 minutes and two hours, and Sheffield has been working so hard, according to Flink, that his left forearm has actually gotten bigger than his right (healthy) one.

Sheffield has done grip tests that measure his arm and wrist strength and

Flink said "all his strength measurements have made progress each week we've tested them. His progress has been right on. Everything points in the direction of him playing again this year and soon."

That is good news for the Yankees, though if and when Sheffield returns it will create some interesting playing-time situations. Hideki Matsui, who has been rehabbing his own left wrist with Double-A Trenton, also hopes to be back in the next week or two, and Joe Torre has already said Matsui will be solely a DH and not play the outfield.

With Jason Giambi and Bernie Williams also looking for time at DH, there

may not be many at-bats available for Sheffield there, and the Yanks traded for Bobby Abreu in July, so Sheffield's old spot in right field isn't available either.

Sheffield has started working at first base, and Torre has said he would not hesitate to use him there. Sheffield has never played first in the majors but played shortstop and third base early in his career before moving to the outfield.

Regardless, the Yankees just want to have his bat back available to them. Even if it's just as a pinch-hitter, he would immediately become a valuable weapon off the bench and could prove important if he is put on the postseason roster.

— Borden