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Rangers optimistic about 1989 season

By Steven Merritt

ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

The 1989 Texas Rangers Winter Caravan made a stop in College Station yesterday, on the third leg of a four city tour for the team.

Caravan participants included pitching coach Dick Egan, pitchers Craig McMurtry and Jeff Russell, catcher Geno Petralli and play-by-play announcer Mark Holtz.

Egan, who is completing his 29th year in professional baseball and his fourth with the Rangers, said the addition of strikeout king Nolan Ryan to the pitching staff can only add to the credibility of the organization.

"Everything about Ryan emulates success, dedication and hard work and that's one of the things that the Rangers haven't had before, a separate leader," Egan said. "Charlie Hough is a veteran slow-moving, soft tossing and unique type of pitcher. He is a specialist and will still remain our opening day pitcher.

Ryan throws the ball just as hard today as he did when he was 19 years old."

You can only do that through exceptional dedication and hard work and that's the one ingredient he will bring to the Rangers. He will establish leadership within the clubhouse and on the bench."

Other pitching acquisitions made by Texas during the offseason included left-handers Jamie Moyer and Drew Hall from the Chicago Cubs.

"We gave up Paul Kilgus to get Moyer, so the worst the situation can be is half and half," Egan said.

Egan said he felt along with the Ranger organization that Moyer is more poised and smoother, thus making him a more consistent performer in his starting role with the club.

"Drew Hall, who will give us help in the bullpen this year, has the capability of being as good or better than Mitch Williams, who we also gave up in the trade," Egan said. "Williams had a little more publicity and major league success, but tended to be a problem child."

Ranger pitching wasn't helped by the team's offensive slump in run production in 1988, but the 654 walks allowed by Ranger pitchers didn't help either.

"Reducing the number of walks is going to be a major goal for our staff this season," he said. "Our pitchers don't give up a lot of hits, so cutting down on the number of walks will really help."

Egan also said that the early games of the season should determine who the bullpen stopper will be, but no decision has been made as yet.

"The pitching personnel won't be the problem this year," he said.

Pitcher Craig McMurtry, who compiled the lowest earned run average of any pitcher on the Rangers' staff at 2.25, echoed Egan's thoughts.

"I think our starting pitching will be very strong this year, maybe even comparable to the staff in Oakland," McMurtry said. "The rotation looks good on paper, but it's going to take a successful spring training to find out how good we are."

McMurtry said that the new additions can only help the revitalized staff.

"Jamie Moyer is a strong pitcher. Some say he has the best change-up in the National League," McMurtry said. "All I know about Hall is that he looks like a string bean and throws extremely hard. And what else can you say about Nolan Ryan? His presence could change the work ethic of many on this team."

McMurtry said one of his main goals for the season will be to get in 50 games as a reliever and to work on his change-up.

"Toward the end of last year I began to use the change-up more," he said. "This year I hope to use it more often and more consistently."

Right-hander Jeff Russell isn't setting his goals so far into the future. "Right now I'm just looking for a contract," Russell said. "I would love to continue playing for Texas. I like the Ranger organization."

Rangers' play-by-play announcer Mark Holtz said that he has seen improved interest in Ranger baseball in this area, one that is primarily Houston Astro territory.

"The acquisition of Nolan Ryan as well as two .300 hitters in Rafael Palmeiro and Julio Franco has really peaked interest around the state," Holtz said. "Ryan is a future Hall of Famer and the Rangers haven't seen hitters like this since Al Oliver and Mickey Rivers."

Holtz said that interest in the Dallas/Fort Worth area has recently shifted from manager Bobby Valentine to general manager Tom Grieve because of his attraction of top-rated players through trade and free-agent signings.

"Both Valentine and Grieve realized that they had to make some decisions or they wouldn't be around much longer," Holtz said. "Last year's team definitely needed to be looked at."

Hershiser named 1988 AP Athlete of the Year

NEW YORK (AP) — Orel Hershiser, a picture of perfection on and off the field, was named The Associated Press Male Athlete of the Year on Tuesday, finishing far ahead of his Olympic competition.

The Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher became the first non-Olympian to win the honor in an Olympic year since Denny McLain in 1968. Hershiser, who set a record with 59 consecutive shutout innings, is the 22nd baseball player to win the award in its 58-year history and the first since Dwight Gooden in 1985.

Hershiser got nearly twice as many votes as his World Series rival, Jose Canseco: 67 first-place ballots and 465 points, with Canseco — the first player to hit 40 home runs and steal 40 bases in a season — getting 30 first-place votes and 233 points.

Heisman Trophy winner Barry Sanders, who set all-time college records for rushing yards and touch-

downs, was third with 207, followed by Olympic swimmer Matt Biondi with 152, NBA star Michael Jordan with 91 and Olympic diver Greg Louganis at 59.

Voting was done by sports writers and broadcasters on a 5-3-1 basis. The AP's Female Athlete of the Year will be announced Thursday.

"This caps a year of fantastic awards," Hershiser said. "It is a tremendous honor to be recognized with an award which covers all sports."

Hershiser spent the 1988 season setting records and collecting trophies. His wholesomeness and his hymn-singing earned him adulation among children and adults.

Hershiser's record streak, 23-8 record and 2.26 earned run average made him the unanimous National League Cy Young winner. He also was named the most valuable player in both the NL playoffs and the World Series.

Schottenheimer named new Chiefs head coach

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Marty Schottenheimer, the winningest coach in the American Football Conference the past three seasons, was named head coach of the Kansas City Chiefs Tuesday.

"Our goal for 1989 is to become the champions of the National Football League," said Schottenheimer, who resigned as coach of the Cleveland Browns at the end of the season in a dispute with owner Art Modell.

Schottenheimer, 45, took the Browns to the playoffs in each of his four full seasons as coach. His 32-15 regular season record the past three years is unmatched in the AFC and trails only the Chicago Bears and San Francisco 49ers among all NFL teams.

His resignation from the Browns was triggered by his refusal to hire an offensive coordinator, a role he was filling.

Asked if he would hire an offensive coordinator with the Chiefs, Schottenheimer broke into a grin.

"We will have an individual to fill that role," he said. "Rest easy, Marty Schottenheimer is not going to call the plays. Someone will have that role, if not the title."

Asked why he would change from the approach that led to his departure from Cleveland, Schottenheimer said he thought remaining offensive coordinator for the Browns "was the best thing to do."

The naming of Schottenheimer completes a house cleaning that owner Lamar Hunt began in December with the resignation of team president Jack Steadman and the firing of General Manager Jim Schaaf.

Eleven days later, Hunt hired Carl Peterson as president and general manager.

The Chiefs, a power in the old AFL and winners of the fourth Super Bowl, have made only one playoff appearance since 1971 and have consistently been at or near the bottom of the AFC West.

"I see a gathering of talent here that can make us competitive. I mean in 1989," Schottenheimer said. "My primary reason for selecting this opportunity is I believe we can win here and win quickly."

Peterson, who enjoyed great success in the USFL with the Philadelphia-Baltimore Stars, retains ultimate authority on draft day decisions but Schottenheimer will be able to select his own staff.

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