

Olajuwon cleared to practice

HOUSTON (AP) — Rockets center Hakeem Olajuwon could return to action Thursday now that his short-windedness has been diagnosed as a treatable asthma-like condition.

"A lot of people have this. It is not major," Olajuwon said. "When they ran all these tests, thank God I found out that I am healthy."

Olajuwon intends to play Thursday in a home game against the Sacramento Kings.

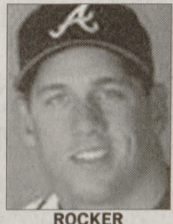
The condition is treatable with inhalers, team physician Walter Lowe said.

Olajuwon missed a game and flew back to Houston earlier this week against the Los Angeles Clippers after complaining of fatigue.

Olajuwon, who has played in only 34 of Houston's 57 games, had surgery on Dec. 1 to repair a hernia and returned to the Rockets' lineup on Jan. 13. He shot 3-for-7 from the field in each of his last three games and totaled 22 rebounds in 64 minutes.

Arbitrator cuts Rocker's suspension

NEW YORK (AP) — John Rocker's suspension was cut in half to the first 14 days of the regular season, and he can report to the Atlanta Braves' spring training camp Thursday.



ROCKER

The reliever, punished for disparaging foreigners, homosexuals and minorities in a magazine interview, is expected to address teammates Thursday in Kissimmee, Fla., then hold a news conference.

Shyam Das, making his first decision as baseball's independent arbitrator, also cut Rocker's \$20,000 fine to \$500.

"I think it's fair," Braves pitcher Tom Glavine said. "It allows him some of spring training to get ready for the season. ... If not, you run the risk of John ruining his career. No one wants that. That would be unfair."

Rocker originally was suspended for all 45 days of spring training and the first 28 days of the regular season by commissioner Bud Selig.

"I disagree with the decision," Selig said. "It does not reflect any understanding or sensitivity to the important social responsibility that baseball ... has to be the public. It completely ignores the sensibilities of those groups of people

maligned by Mr. Rocker and disregards the player's position as a role model for children."

Atlanta city councilman Derrick Boazman, leader of a coalition of minority groups that has called for the Braves to release Rocker, also was unhappy with the decision.

"Hate and bigotry and homophobia and racism have a place, evidently, and that place is in major league baseball," he said.

In his Jan. 31 decision, Selig said Rocker's comments in a December issue of Sports Illustrated "offended practically every element of society."

Rocker will wind up missing the first 13 days of spring training and, if no games are postponed by weather, the first 12 games of the regular season. Atlanta's first game after the suspension is against Philadelphia at Turner Field on April 18.

"I think this is good all the way around," Braves reliever Rudy Seanez said. "Everybody is ready to get past it and move on."

Rocker told the magazine he would never play for a New York team because he didn't want to ride a subway train "next to some queer with AIDS." He also mocked foreigners and called a Latin teammate a "fat monkey."

Randall Simon, who believes he was the target of Rocker's "fat mon-

key" comment, said today he is ready to forgive.

"If he comes to me and apologizes, everything will be all right," Simon said. "He's one of my teammates. Everybody makes mistakes."

Simon said he hopes Rocker will address the team as a whole, as well as offer him a personal apology.

"I think he should because of what happened and what he said about me," Simon said. "He should give me some respect. I think I deserve an apology so we can move on."

Brian Jordan, another of Rocker's harshest critics, said Rocker has to change his ways. Many Braves thought the reliever was out of line in seeking the limelight last October.

"He has to be more mature dealing with certain situations and dealing with his teammates," Jordan said. "He has to learn to control his anger. I think that's a big reason he said what he said."

The players' association filed a grievance against Selig, arguing the penalty was too great when compared with past discipline by the commissioner's office. The union repeatedly has succeeded in convincing arbitrators to overturn or reduce suspensions.

Selig's original penalty was believed to be the longest against a baseball player for an action not related to drug use

since Lenny Randle of Texas got 30 days in March 1977 for punching his manager, Frank Lucchesi.

The 25-year-old reliever was heavily criticized by Atlanta civic officials and even teammates. But since training camp opened, some Braves have said they would be willing to forgive Rocker if he showed remorse through his words and actions. Braves owner Ted Turner said he deserved a second chance.

"My feeling is I would rather deal with it now, when the outcome of the games doesn't matter, than have it drop on us right dab in the middle of the season," Glavine said. "We still have to exercise some patience. It's already getting old, and even if he gets here tomorrow or Friday, it's not going to go away for a while."

Rocker was repeatedly taunted by New York Mets' fans during the pennant race and NL championship series, and then by New York Yankees' fans during the World Series. Several fans threw objects at the pitcher and some spit at him.

In his most extensive comments since the furor began, Rocker told ESPN in December he had lost his cool in the magazine interview and said things he didn't mean about New York fans because he wanted "to inflict some emotional pain in retaliation to the pain that had been inflicted on me."

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