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Petco Park gives Padres' players quality facilities

By: JOHN MAFFEI - Staff Writer

Tony Gwynn refused to hit in them.

"Too dark, too small, too minor-league, too many distractions for a big-league club," the eight-time National League batting champion said of the Padres' batting cages in Qualcomm Stadium.

Located a short walk through the fans and an elevator ride away from the team's locker room, the cages were as antiquated as the club's training room. This season, with a move to Petco Park, all that changes.

With the help of Padres batting coach Dave Magadan, the batting cages are state of the art. And they're attached to the home clubhouse.

"We asked for and got a lot of things," Magadan said. "But perhaps the best thing is that we don't have to share with the visiting team. In Qualcomm, we only had one cage, so we had to block time for the visitors.

"Now we both have cages, so we don't have to share."

Trainer Todd Hutcheson shared his ideas with club officials when asked about a training room in the new ballpark. He stopped short of saying he and assistant Jim Daniel were hamstrung at Qualcomm, and he said the pair didn't get everything they asked for at Petco Park.

"But what we have is outstanding," Hutcheson said. "Just by the sheer size, it's going to be better. Before the ballpark was built, they talked to us, asked us what we needed, what we wanted. We had a lot of input. We have all the major stuff, and we got a lot of little things we asked for.

"It's far and above what we had."

In Petco Park, the trainers actually have an office, as do the team doctors. And there is storage room.

There is a hot-and-cold spa, a Hydro Pro 100 underwater treadmill, a sauna, a therapy pool and a weight room that rivals the best on college campuses.

Will the new digs will help cut down injuries and shorten the time players are out?

"Recovery time always depends on the type of injuries we get. If there is a broken bone involved, it's going to take time to heal," Hutcheson said.



A portion of the Padres weight room at Petco Park, as pictured here on Monday, March 8, 2004.

JT Lovette for The North County Times

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"We really have the works now, though. The spa and therapy pool are great, and the sauna is a luxury. I won't tell you we'll get players on the field faster, but this certainly won't hurt us.

"The best thing, though, is that the weight room is right next to the clubhouse. The players don't have to walk 200 yards down the hall, past the visiting clubhouse, to get to the weight room (as was the case at Qualcomm). They're close, so we can better monitor their work, especially the guys who are rehabbing from an injury."

The worst part about the new training room, Hutcheson said, is that it's directly across from manager Bruce Bochy's office. Nosy reporters will get a bird's-eye view of who's getting treatment.

"That's something that needs to be addressed," Hutcheson said.

Magadan said his concerns about the batting cages were all addressed.

He wanted thick netting on the cages. He wanted the room painted dark green. He wanted televisions so pinch-hitters can track the game in the late innings. And he wanted mirrors so hitters can check their stances and swings.

Certain season-ticket holders will have a view of the batting cages through a one-way tinted window.

"And we have two cages instead of one," Magadan said. "What we have now is a night-and-day difference from Qualcomm Stadium. What we have now is much more conducive to guys coming off the bench and getting us a pinch hit late in the game.

"I think this will be a big advantage for us."

Slugger Phil Nevin sees the advantages of playing in the new ballpark. He was at the sold-out University of Houston-San Diego State game that opened Petco Park, and he liked what he saw.

"I had chills when the college team took the field," Nevin said. "I'm sure it will be electric for us. It's going to be cold there at night, especially in the spring, but I really liked what I saw of the ballpark.

"Finally, we have a place we can call our own. We don't have to share it with the Chargers or San Diego State. And I hope they don't tear it up with Motocross and that kind of (stuff).

"What I especially like is that the players will now have a gathering place in the winter. We'll have our own weight room, a place we can work out. We'll have cages to hit and a training room where Hutch and J.D. can help us with any little things we have wrong.

"No one can guarantee success. And it has been frustrating as hell losing over the last few years. But we've given ourselves a chance now, both on the field and off."

Contact staff writer John Maffei at (760) 740-3547 or jmaffei@nctimes.com.