

HOW IT FEELS TO ... Play Left Field in Major League Baseball



Field of Dreams

During the middle of the 2004 baseball season, the Kansas City Royals said good-bye to center fielder Carlos Beltran by trading him to the Houston Astros and said hello to David DeJesus, giving him a five-year, \$13.8 million contract two years later. It was a long time coming. DeJesus, a fourth-round draft pick of the Royals four years earlier, suffered a hairline fracture of his forearm sliding into second base in the last game of his three-year career as a Scarlet Knight in 2000. During spring training the following year, more trouble: he tore ligaments in his elbow, underwent “Tommy John surgery,” and was shelved again. Finally, three weeks into the 2004 season, he finally got his first bona fide shot at “the Show” but tanked at the plate. Back in the minors once again, he got his groove back, returned to the Royals that summer, and performed so well that he ended the season as the Royals’ Player of the Year. DeJesus, 29, a career .287 lead-off hitter, is regarded for his overall smarts at the plate, on the base paths, and, most notably, in the outfield.

— Bill Glavin

- “I prefer playing on grass. I don’t have to worry about the ball bouncing over my head, and I have time to get around the ball and come up throwing.”
- “You’re taught that when a ball is hit and heading behind you, you run and then turn back toward the infield to pick up the flight of the ball again. But in a bad sun, or at the Metrodome in Minnesota where the roof is the color of a ball, you need to keep your eye on the ball at all times.”
- “Before a game, I’ll trace my steps to gauge the distance between where I’ll be standing and the wall. If I run into the wall, so be it: you do what you have to do to help your pitcher and your team.”
- “My favorite place to play on the road is Angels Stadium in Anaheim. I always hit well there, and the scenery and weather are good.”
- “In certain parks, like Chicago and Detroit, you can hear a lot of what the fans are saying. I have fun with it but never let them get in my head.”
- “I want my glove to close a little flat, so the pinkie and the thumb will hit each other. I keep all my fingers in: two fingers in the pinkie hole, my middle finger in the ring-finger hole, and my index finger in the middle-finger hole. I leave the index-finger hole empty. I get more pocket that way.”
- “Johan Santana is the toughest pitcher I have faced. Manny Ramirez is the hitter I fear the most. Matt Holliday and Ichiro Suzuki hit the best to all fields.”
- “My biggest moment was a walk-off home run against the Mariners last season. We were down one run going into the bottom of the ninth, with a man on first. I still get the chills just thinking about it.”
- “Tampa Bay has this loud guy who sits behind home plate and always rags on the same guys. He’s funny, but you can’t laugh: it’s your teammates who he’s making fun of.”
- “Every hitter relives a bad at-bat. You’ll see a lot of players, including myself, take a phantom swing in the outfield during a lull in the play. But you have to forget about it and move on.”

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