

ERIC HOSMER —#30— 1B



Eric Hosmer was made for this moment with Padres

- Kevin Acee, SDUT / March 23, 2018

Off the couch, through the back door and out to the cement batter's box with his handprint in the corner, the stocky boy would go.

"Tell me when the game's back on, dad," he'd say as he dashed away.

In the backyard, the boy would take 10, 15, 20 swings at a ball attached to strings and suspended between a metal frame. Then he'd head back inside to watch the Florida Marlins on TV, studying closely to see how he could imitate the swings of Gary Sheffield and Moises Alou during the next commercial break.

Because he loved to do it more than anything else, the boy would hit and hit and hit on the contraption.

After school. Before breakfast and dinner.

"He never stopped," his older brother remembers now.

By middle school, the boy was spending summers hitting baseballs all over the country in the top travel ball tournaments.

Around then, he started working with a hitting coach renowned in South Florida for his success with high school kids. The coach had first turned down a request by the boy's father to teach the boy because he was too young, but then the coach saw the boy swing and said he'd be happy to take him on as pupil.

Still, the boy would head to the back yard to hit the ball between the strings almost every chance he got.

Not until high school and only because Hurricane Wilma sent a tree crashing down on the metal and strings and the baseball and the batter's boxes did Eric Hosmer stop refining his swing on the Tony Gwynn SoloHitter.

Always next level

When Hosmer made his major league debut in May 2011, a month shy of three years after he was the No. 3 overall pick in the draft, his longtime friend and personal trainer was there along with Hosmer's parents and brother.

Amid the euphoria of a dream come true for a family he loved, and knowing all they had done to get to that moment — "We made it," Eric Hosmer had said to his parents earlier that day — Scott Foresman felt bad that the day felt to him as something anticlimactic.

"Other kids I've had, I got goosebumps when they got called up and made the majors," Foresman said. "Him, it was like, 'When is it going to happen?'"

That's how set apart the Padres' new star has been for so long.

It seemed like Hosmer became the Padres' leader in an instant. But such a thing doesn't just happen.

A man doesn't just appear somewhere and take over unless he was born for that role, bred for it.

A leader can't just arrive and have followers. He can't tell everyone what it's like to win unless he's won. He can't steal hearts with his smile unless he's been smiling all along. He can't talk about what hard work will get a person unless his own hard work has gotten him something worth getting.

Hosmer, who has a World Series ring and a \$144 million contract, has been working and smiling for some time.

He came to his new home having been molded in a home that valued doing things the right way — by a Cuban immigrant mother who, by his recollection, never stopped smiling, and a firefighter father who worked hours on end so he could have time off to be with his baseball-playing sons.

“You hear a lot of stories about how these guys came from a tough spot,” Hosmer said. “For me, I was really fortunate to have parents and a brother looking out for me. It’s like I realized at a young age what my parents were doing for me, the sacrifices they made. I felt I was dishonoring them not putting in the work. ... I was fortunate to realize at a young age what they were doing for me, and I just tried to return the favor.”

When Scott Foresman first started training Hosmer, he told his father that Eric needed to eat better. The next day, the Hosmers bought a freezer and filled it with chicken, fish and steaks.

To Mike Hosmer, that was just what a dad does when a son shows something is important to him.

Mike Hosmer, who worked in one of the nation’s busiest fire stations in one of its most treacherous communities in Miami through the 1980s and ‘90s, knew only he had to “get my kids away from that.”

Of those 72-hour shifts he would work so he could get successive days off to coach his sons in baseball, he simply explains, “As a parent you want to support your kids in whatever they do.”

The elder Mike Hosmer jokes “I made all my mistakes with Mike.” That would be Mike Hosmer Jr., five years older than Eric and a heck of a ballplayer, too.

“When it got to Eric, with Mike’s help, I kind of backed off,” Mike Sr. said.

Which meant only that he followed Eric’s lead.

“He was so motivated,” Mike Sr. said.

They made a good team, the dad who never stopped and the kid who wouldn’t be stopped.

It was Eric Hosmer’s persistence that persuaded Foresman to train him in high school. Foresman, who had been selected late in the 2001 draft, returned to South Florida after college and started a business that was thriving while also helping coach at American Heritage High in Plantation, just west of Fort Lauderdale.

This kid who was playing at his alma mater kept bugging him to train him.

“The only reason I took him is he wouldn’t stop asking me,” said Foresman, who still trains Hosmer and other pro ballplayers. “This kid just really wanted it at 14 years old. So I started working with him, and everything I would do he would take it to the next level.”

Of course he would.

Eric grew up tagging along with his brother, going to practices and games, sometimes getting to play with the older kids.

“I’d be out there playing, and I never got to the level that I was better than those guys,” Eric said. “I was always striving for something.”

Often, too, his dad would put him on teams with kids a year or two older.

“He never wanted me being the best player on the worst team,” Eric said. “... I’d be on teams where guys around me were just as good. He noticed the competitiveness and how I wanted to take my game to the next level.”

The right way

The kids on the Cooper City Diamond Kings could hit a ton. And yet their coach would have them work on baserunning for an hour before they got to hit for 20 minutes.

“We wondered why,” said Eric Hosmer, who would be one of three players on that team, with Deven Marrero and Adrian Nieto, to get to the major leagues. “He was teaching us discipline and doing things the right way. ... I think that message got to us and stuck with us when we were older.”

The coach was Mike Hosmer Sr.

“He was really big on fundamentals — base running, backing up bases,” said Mike Jr., who was also coached by his dad and would in turn help him coach Eric’s teams. “Mental mistakes, that’s what really got him upset. If you made an error or struck out, he never got mad. As long as we knew how to play the game the right way.”

So Eric Hosmer can hit. For sure.

But he also has four Gold Glove awards. And he is perhaps most famous for a play in which he took off from third base on a ground ball and dived across home plate with the tying run in the ninth inning of Game 5 of the 2015 World Series, a game the Royals would win in 12 innings to clinch their first championship in 30 years.

He played 162 games — starting all but one — for the Royals last season.

“You almost think you should be playing (all) the games,” Hosmer said. “I’m not like (Manuel) Margot or Freddy (Galvis) out there playing a main position, moving all over. And I just think that comes with the role. You’ve got to be durable. You’ve got to be available for your team.

“Even if it’s not an at-bat where I physically hit a ball, it could be I’m on deck and they don’t want to walk Wil (Myers) and maybe they give him a pitch, or vice versa. There are many ways you can change the game. It’s kind of the way I was brought up and the mentality I’ve always had.”

Now, the 225 pounds seem pretty perfectly distributed around Hosmer’s 6 feet, 4 inches, like the way an elite athlete was designed to wear his flesh.

So much so that Padres pitcher Robert Stock was blown away.

“You’re 6-4?” Stock said when he saw Hosmer. (It was more like “You’re 6-4?!!!”)

The last time they had seen each other was a travel ball tournament in Cooperstown, N.Y., when they were 12. Stock’s team from Southern California, in fact, beat Hosmer and the Diamond Kings in the championship of that 2002 tournament.

“I was about 5-7, 5-8,” Hosmer said. “I was always a little heavier. Kind of a shorter, stumpy guy.”

Somewhere between that and the growth spurt of his sophomore year — when he went from wondering if he’d ever grow to suddenly being an uncoordinated 6-2 — he figured that, regardless, “hard work is what would take me to the next level.”

Another icon?

The younger Mike Hosmer had his own baseball career, which would take him to play at Florida State before becoming a stock broker. But he would help his dad coach Eric’s teams and see his brother’s games when he could.

It was about the time he was a junior in high school and Eric’s travel team was going around the country beating almost every team it faced that Mike Jr. had his epiphany.

“Seeing him against the best kids from Texas and California, and seeing he’s just as good as they are,” Mike said. “You see all these kids, and there are ones that stand out, five or six guys that are comparable. My thought was, ‘If this is the future of baseball, he has to have a good shot of being part of it.’”

For Mike Sr., it was later that he knew for sure.

The South Florida Bombers, a team made up almost exclusively of graduated high school seniors heading to play in college and those already playing in college, invited Hosmer to try out when he was 16. He ended up hitting in the middle of the lineup.

“He was holding his own,” Mike Sr. said. “We realized he was something special.”

It says something that it took that long for a dad so immersed in his son’s life and baseball career.

It helps explain why his son loves the game so much and smiles so much when he’s playing it, his new manager marveling several times this spring about the way he approaches the monotony of spring workouts with enthusiasm.

When Hosmer hit his first home run of the spring, Andy Green was more impressed with the way he high-fived his teammates after crossing home plate. It just struck the manager how Hosmer was practically bouncing off the field, how his energy seemed to transfer to other people.

“It was never forced on me,” Hosmer said. “I just had a love for the game. I still do. It’s fun. To me, there is nothing funner than showing up in the locker room, changing, putting on your clothes and figuring out a way to beat the other team.”

That’s why he’s here, why the Padres had him targeted since last summer as the guy to lead them to, well, the next level.

Royals General Manager Dayton Moore said this to ESPN about Eric Hosmer in 2017:

"He personifies what it means to be a Kansas City Royal — his professionalism, commitment, attitude, work habits — better than any Royal since George Brett."

To be sure, that is like comparing a current Padres player to Tony Gwynn.

It is not done lightly. Such a comparison means something to a franchise, to a city. It’s saying that player is special in a way that so few others — maybe only one other — can be special.

And while there almost certainly will never be another player who means to San Diego what Gwynn does, it can be seen all the way back to that cement batter’s box in the middle of the grass in the backyard of that home in South Florida that maybe the Padres’ next icon was made for this moment.

After Reviving the Royals, Hosmer and Cain Try to Spark Other Teams

- Tyler Kepner, New York Times / March 5, 2018

SURPRISE, Ariz. — Early in Eric Hosmer’s career, when it was clear he would be a star first baseman, a fan at a Rotary Club asked a pointed question to Dayton Moore, the general manager of the Kansas City Royals. For decades, the fans had yearned for a player like Hosmer with the talent and charisma to stir a dormant franchise. But this fan was worried. He wanted to know if the Royals could possibly sign Hosmer to a long-term contract.

“Just enjoy him,” Moore replied, recalling the conversation in a spring training interview last week. “Enjoy watching him play. And, no, we probably won’t be able to keep him here long-term. But that’s O.K. Just enjoy watching him play. Let’s not wish away today.”

The Royals made the most of their todays with Hosmer and Lorenzo Cain. After 28 seasons without a playoff appearance, they rumbled into two World Series in a row, losing in 2014 and winning in 2015. Every small-market franchise tries to build through homegrown talent, and most fall short of a title. The Royals actually broke through.

Now Hosmer is a San Diego Padre, after signing for eight years and \$144 million last month. Cain signed a five-year, \$80 million contract to rejoin the Milwaukee Brewers, who traded him to the Royals in 2010.

Other stalwarts from the World Series teams are also gone: Wade Davis, Ben Zobrist, Johnny Cueto, Ryan Madson, James Shields, Jarrod Dyson, and the unsigned Greg Holland and Mike Moustakas. A starter, Yordano Ventura, was killed in a car crash in the Dominican Republic before last season. Hosmer wears Ventura's No. 30 with the Padres, a lasting bond to a team and a town he helped change.

"They kept hearing over and over again that guys that would come in and get back to being a playoff threat again," Hosmer said. "It took 30 years for that to happen. We had a special relationship, and the fans appreciated the way we played. We would show emotion, and they would show emotion back."

That was not always true in Kansas City, where hopelessness had sometimes reigned. In 1999, thousands of fans walked out of Kauffman Stadium in the middle of a game against the Yankees, protesting baseball's tilted salary structure. Some littered the field with fake \$100 bills.

The Royals lost 97 games that season, just another in a sad string of gloom. Moore arrived in 2006 and finally hit on the winning formula for a team with a modest payroll and a spacious park: contact hitters, slick defenders, dominant relievers and short-term No. 1 starters acquired for prospects.

It was always supposed to be temporary. That is how it works in modern baseball, and why teams scramble to align their top prospects' peak seasons. If a bunch of young players mature at the same time, the team will probably get a few years of prime performance at affordable rates. When the players then get too expensive, most of them disperse.

The Royals have kept some of their core players; left fielder Alex Gordon is signed through 2019, and starter Danny Duffy and catcher Salvador Perez through 2021. Duffy, who earns \$14 million this season, wanted more players to join them.

"I was hoping if one guy comes back, or two guys come back, maybe it'll spark another guy to take that and run with it, too," he said. "But the majority of guys I came up with are in other jerseys or unsigned. It's tough to see those guys go, but that's the nature of the beast. You definitely wish them well."

Cain spends his off-seasons in Norman, Okla., and attended the Oklahoma City Thunder game last winter when Kevin Durant returned as a member of the Golden State Warriors. Cain remembers the vitriol from the fans, who jeered Durant whenever he touched the ball.

"It was not fun for him," Cain said. "There were a lot of boos. Kind of tough to see, but that's just how it is."

Yet when Cain returns to Kansas City with the Brewers next month, he does not expect the same treatment. Some Royals fans in Arizona have already wished Cain and Hosmer well. Cain called Royals fans "the best fans in the world, for sure," and no one around the team believes the players tarnished their legacy by leaving.

"They did so much for the game of baseball in Kansas City," said Gordon, who grew up in Nebraska and went to Royals games every summer. "They were a part of changing the culture. Guys are going to come and go, and it's not always their decision; it's just how it is. But for what they did in Kansas City, the Royals fans are always going to be grateful."

Winning a championship does not guarantee a player a lifelong glow; Boston fans never forgave Johnny Damon for signing with the hated Yankees. But Hosmer and Cain left the American League and joined teams not known for spending.

Neither the Padres nor the Brewers had ever given such a lucrative contract in free agency. Neither team has won a championship, either — and, incredibly, Hosmer and Cain are the only players on either team's 40-man roster who have ever played in the World Series. For both, setting an example is part of their job description.

Cain said that when Shields came to Kansas City from Tampa Bay, a regular playoff contender, "he showed us how to lead — and once he left, we all became leaders."

“You need all 25 guys to come together and help push each other,” Cain said. “That’s what I’m trying to show these guys.”

The Brewers, at 86-76, had the best record of any team that missed the playoffs last season. In doing so, they sped up their competitive timetable. They agreed on Cain’s contract within hours of another bold move: a trade with Miami for Christian Yelich, a 26-year-old outfielder under contract for five more seasons.

The deals created a bit of a logjam for the Brewers, who also have Domingo Santana, who hit 30 homers last season, and the franchise pillar Ryan Braun in the outfield. The Brewers hope to find time for all the outfielders by sometimes using Braun at first base, where he could spell the slugging Eric Thames against some left-handers.

“You don’t really have any say over where you get traded, but I’m excited to be here,” Yelich said. “To be a part of an outfield with those guys, it’s going to be special. It’s exciting to go into the season expecting to win, hopefully for the foreseeable future.”

The Padres also added multiple veterans to their lineup, trading with Philadelphia for shortstop Freddy Galvis and with the Yankees for third baseman Chase Headley. San Diego has endured nine losing seasons in the last 10 years, but has hope in a slogan on Hosmer’s clubhouse T-shirt.

On the front, beneath a Padres logo, it says “#HotTalentLava,” with “= Major League Rock” on the back. Scott Boras, Hosmer’s agent, used those terms to describe the Padres’ percolating farm system, which MLB.com ranks as the best in baseball. For Hosmer, it is a familiar feeling.

“There’s so many similarities to what I was a part of in Kansas City, as far as a group of prospects coming up,” he said. “It’s been fun. It’s one thing to hear about all the guys, but now to finally get out on the field and see what these guys are about, it gets you fired up.”

Moore could have left Kansas City, too, if he had pushed the Royals’ owner, David Glass, to allow him to interview for the Atlanta Braves’ general manager job last fall. Before joining the Royals, Moore had spent 12 years with the Braves, who now have a thriving farm system and seem much closer to contending.

Yet Moore was content to leave the decision to Glass, who did not want to lose his team’s architect. Moore’s passion for the job has never waned, he said, even as he starts over.

“Every team is special, regardless of the win-loss record,” he said. “And if you are leading in a relentless and focused way, it becomes exhausting, it becomes tiring, but that’s the privilege of leadership.”

The Royals had hoped to retain Hosmer as their leader in the clubhouse. But the Padres made a richer offer, and even if Hosmer had returned, the Royals still probably would have struggled. Their rotation was woeful last season, and Moore has been forced to chisel talent from the bullpen.

To entice teams to take expensive veterans off his payroll, Moore had to trade Scott Alexander and Ryan Buchter, relievers who are young, effective and cheap. Alexander went to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a three-way deal that sent reliever Joakim Soria to the Chicago White Sox, and Oakland took outfielder Brandon Moss — who has since been cut — as a way to get Buchter.

Those deals saved the Royals \$14 million, and they replaced Hosmer by giving a one-year, \$3.5 million contract to Lucas Duda, the former Mets first baseman whose errant throw in Game 5 of the 2015 World Series allowed Hosmer to score the tying run in the ninth inning.

That sequence is etched in Royals lore. After Cain took a full-count slider to draw a leadoff walk against Matt Harvey, he stole second and scored on a double by Hosmer. Moustakas moved Hosmer to third with a groundout, and Perez bounced a ball to third baseman David Wright, who threw to Duda for the out at first. Hosmer charged home, knowing that both Wright and Duda had erratic throwing arms.

With a good throw by Duda, the Mets would have won the game. But Hosmer's gamble paid off, embodying the will and urgency of a team that never cared about the odds. The Royals finished the night as champions, and their flag — planted by Hosmer, Cain and so many others in a proud alumni club — will always fly.

"They're forever a part of Royals history," Moore said. "We want all of our players, if they leave, to leave on a white horse."

Hosmer brings new feel to rising Padres

'He's elevated the level of expectation here really quickly,' Green says of new first baseman

- Joe Posnanski, MLB.com / March 4, 2018

PEORIA, Ariz. -- When Eric Hosmer and Wil Myers were drafted by the Kansas City Royals a decade or so ago they were given more or less the same speech by Royals general manager Dayton Moore. They were told that they were the future of the organization, that they were the players who would take Kansas City baseball from the bottom to the top. Moore wanted them to embrace the challenge. The Royals had been terrible for 15 years. There were people saying that they would never be good again.

"You," Moore told them, "are the players who will make the Kansas City Royals winners again."

They had different destinies. Hosmer stayed with the Royals and he played a pivotal role in the Royals' resurgence, not just as a team -- they obviously won a World Series -- but as an organization and a centerpiece of Kansas City. Myers was traded away to Tampa Bay for starter James Shields, who seemed the key to the deal, and reliever Wade Davis, who ended up being the key to the deal.

Moore and assistant general manager J.J. Picollo both have said that trading away Myers was the hardest baseball thing they ever had to do.

And so, yes, it is a bit strange that Hosmer and Myers are together again, quite a bit older, much more established, but basically on the same mission -- this time the team they are looking to turn is the San Diego Padres.

"Yes, I look around at all the young players here," Hosmer says, "and it definitely makes me think back to when we started in Kansas City. I see the same energy, the same talent, the same excitement. The big difference now is I'm not one of those kids. I'm the veteran, it's my job to take some of them under my wings a little bit. That's really the only difference."

It's a big difference ... and a fascinating part of the gamble that the San Diego Padres have taken. General manager A.J. Preller began in San Diego three seasons ago, and he began with an astonishing flurry of trades -- "Preller-palooza" people called it -- and in a few months he completely reshaped the roster. He turned over his outfield, reworked the left side of the infield, changed catchers and completely blew up the bullpen, in part by bringing in star closer Craig Kimbrel.

The Padres won three fewer games in 2015 than they had the year before.

This is a pretty common theme. Every first-time general manager who comes in to turn around a long-struggling team tends to learn the hard way that there are no quick fixes. Preller and the Padres began to break things down, to trade off some pieces for prospects, to do the hard and often unnoticed scouting and development work that goes with turning a team around. The Padres only won 68 and 71 games the last two seasons. But MLB Pipeline just rated the Padres the No. 1 farm system in all of baseball.

"This is a fun time," Preller says. "I mean, Spring Training is always fun, there's a sense of optimism, everyone ready to go. But, sure, I think this Spring Training is definitely fun. We are excited about our development, excited about young players. We feel like we have a lot of depth in our system, a lot of quality depth. Plus, we are excited about some of the young players in the big leagues, seeing what guys like [Manuel] Margot and [Dinelson] Lamet and others can do after getting a full season."

This all leads to the signing of Hosmer and the move of Myers. Hosmer was perhaps the most talked about free agent of the offseason because opinions on him vary so wildly. Well, that's not exactly right -- everyone has roughly the same scouting report on Hosmer. He's a good hitter with some power who has been a bit too inconsistent over his career. He looks like an outstanding fielder (four Gold Glove Awards) even if the defensive metrics don't love him. And he has off-the-chart character; everyone loves the energy, the enthusiasm and the leadership that Hosmer brings to the game.

What varied, then, was how much teams valued these traits, particularly the leadership part of the equation. The Boston Red Sox, for instance, seemed like a perfect fit for Hosmer, but fairly early in the free-agent process they re-signed Mitch Moreland, indicating they were out of the Hosmer race. Other teams that usually get involved in big-name free agency simply never got into the race. The Padres had never offered a \$100 million contract before; they gave Hosmer an eight-year deal with a guaranteed \$144 million.

"We obviously love the talent of the player," Preller says. "He's a big left-handed hitter who is hard to punch out, he defends well, he's a good athlete. ... And, yes, definitely we love his character and think he will have a great influence on our young players. Not just him, of course. Clayton Richard is someone who has a great influence on our young pitchers. And Wil is another guy who shows our players how to be a professional."

Myers has already started that -- he eagerly agreed to change positions and go to the outfield in order to make room for Hosmer at first base.

"To have another guy here who's here for the long haul is exciting," Myers says. "The more we grow together and learn together, I think the better we'll become." . 2nd, 2018

The Padres say that Hosmer's zeal and fire has already made a huge difference. He has made an effort to hang around the young players.

"It's going to be huge," Padres manager Andy Green says about Hosmer's passionate approach to baseball. "That was a huge part of the draw -- the professionalism, the love of baseball, the curious mind, the want to get better still. ... I think he's elevated the atmosphere here real quickly with just his presence. He's elevated the level of expectation here really quickly."

Hosmer shrugs -- he feels like he's learning too. He felt strange being in a new organization.

"You know, you're looking around, you don't know them, they don't know you, it's a crazy feeling," he says. "But then you get on the field and it's the same. Baseball is baseball. That's the beauty of this game. I feel good now. I'm getting to know these guys. I'm seeing the talent here, it's great."

"Absolutely, I'd like to bring some of the things that we were able to do in Kansas City here. We were fearless, you know. We just knew that we were going to come through. I'd love to experience that feeling again here. I am confident we will."

By signing Hosmer, the Padres have let the league know that they are ready to make their push. It might not be this year. But it's coming.

"People keep asking me if I think we need to get to .500 this year," Preller says, "and I say that it's not so much about the win total. Are we taking the next step?"

I ask Hosmer about that.

"Well, it's really about simplifying the game," he says. "That's what I think about as a player. It's really cool to be around all these young players again, even if my role is different now. We're going to be exciting, just being around everyone for a couple of weeks I already know that."

Padres' Hosmer gives Hoffman Rolex after receiving No. 30

- Jerry Crasnick, ESPN / February 27, 2018

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Eric Hosmer earned a reputation as a first-class teammate over seven seasons with the Kansas City Royals. It didn't take his new club in San Diego long to find out why.

Hosmer was grateful when Padres third base coach Glenn Hoffman gave up his No. 30 uniform jersey as a sign of goodwill at the start of spring training, so he recently surprised Hoffman with a Rolex watch at the Padres' complex in Peoria.

Hosmer wore No. 35 in Kansas City, but that jersey is retired in honor of Padres Hall of Famer Randy Jones. Hosmer wanted to wear No. 30 in San Diego as a tribute to his late Royals teammate Yordano Ventura, who died in a car crash in the Dominican Republic in January 2017. But he needed the go-ahead from Hoffman to make it happen.

"Like I said to Hoffs, it was extremely meaningful for me," Hosmer said Tuesday. "So I wanted to get a nice gesture for him. It's an unwritten rule throughout the league that if a veteran guy comes and asks for a number and somebody has it, you do something like that for him."

Hosmer declined to comment on the cost of the Rolex, but he said a "friend in Kansas City" helped pick out the gift. Hoffman has since switched to jersey No. 26.

"I bet there were a lot of coaches who were mad they didn't have '30' after that," Hosmer said, laughing.

After a long winter of waiting, Hosmer signed a franchise-record eight-year, \$144 million contract with the Padres a week ago. He is expected to bring veteran leadership, on-base ability and solid defense to a young San Diego team that exceeded expectations with 71 victories last season. He went 1-for-3 with an RBI single in his Cactus League debut against the Seattle Mariners on Tuesday.

Hosmer spent part of the day getting acquainted with Jones, who is roaming the back fields in uniform this week. Jones, known as the "Junk Man" for his soft-tossing repertoire, went 22-14 with a 2.74 ERA for the Padres and won the National League Cy Young Award in 1976.

"I was messing with him about his windup, and he told me he wants a baseball card of me doing it," Hosmer said.

As Hosmer acclimates to Padres camp, he is particularly encouraged by the surplus of young talent in the organization.

"The other day we had an infield that wasn't old enough to buy a drink yet," Hosmer said. "The wave of talent we've got coming up is pretty special to watch. It's one thing to hear about prospects and all that. To see the (young position players) and the arms as well, it gives you a lot to look forward to."

New Padre Hosmer eager for 'great moments' in San Diego

- Kevin Acee, SD Union Tribune / February 20, 2018

Now it's Padres season.

"Spring training starts today," Eric Hosmer said. "I'm just happy to go play baseball."

The Padres on Tuesday introduced the player they gave the largest contract in team history with the expectation he will be a cornerstone of their building process as both a star on the field and a mentor in the clubhouse.

At his first news conference, after putting on the "SD" cap and the new jersey with the new number (30), Hosmer made it clear right away he embraces the challenge.

"I've had a few good moments in my career in San Diego up to this point," Hosmer said. "I look forward to having a lot more great moments there. ... It was fun to get the vision and see where San Diego is trying to lead this young group of guys and for them to want me to be a part of this and help guide these guys and help bring this city a world championship, because San Diego is a great city, as everybody knows. But as far as sports is going, I think people are really excited about the Padres and where this organization is going, and I'm just happy to be a part of it."

“To see where the city is and where San Diego is and how they’re just begging for a sports team to go in there and bring some excitement and energy to it, I just saw the direction the organization was going, I saw the people at the top of the mountain that were leading the organization, and I bought in to what they’re trying to do here.”

It was important for the Padres to have Hosmer in camp when it began. It was important to Hosmer to be here.

He left the news conference to go straight to his first team meeting and then take the field with his new team for the first full-squad workout of spring training.

“There’s a lot of excitement to get in the locker room, open these guys’ eyes up and let them know how good they are,” Hosmer said. “... I’m looking forward to helping these guys become the players you guys all project them to be.”

Hosmer, a four-time Gold Glove winner and an All-Star in 2016, agreed Saturday night to an eight-year contract that pays him \$105 million over the first five seasons and could pay him \$144 million. He reportedly chose the Padres over the Kansas City Royals, the team with which he won a World Series ring in 2015.

“It basically came down to me really liking this organization and where it’s going,” Hosmer said of the Padres. “... It’s a championship gene that (the Royals) try to create over there throughout the minor league system. ... I really look forward to bringing that over here to San Diego.”

The Padres two years ago started blowing up a roster, trimming the major league payroll and throwing more than \$100 million at prospects from all over the Americas. Their focus is building from within, retaining top quality cheap labor. But they always said they were going to spend on a major league veteran when the time came.

“The next step,” General Manager A.J. Preller said Tuesday, “was being able to later bring in the right piece ... to get us where we alternately want to get to, which is a world championship for San Diego.

In SD, Hosmer sees similarities to Royals

- AJ Cassavell, MLB.com / February 20, 2018

PEORIA, Ariz. -- In May 2011, Eric Hosmer arrived in a championship-starved city with his focus set squarely on reversing those fortunes. It didn't happen instantly. But the process worked as well as anyone in Kansas City could have hoped. By '14 the Royals were American League champs. A year later, they won their first World Series in three decades.

Hosmer has once again arrived in a city desperately searching for a title. It's been 20 seasons since San Diego's last trip to the Fall Classic and nearly a decade since the Padres contended for a playoff spot.

Now, Hosmer gets to see things from a different angle. Seven years ago, Kansas City was primed to cash in on one of the game's top farm systems. Hosmer, the No. 3 overall Draft selection in 2008, was a pivotal part of that process, in which the Royals stockpiled young talent in hopes of a future payoff.

The same is true of San Diego -- except now Hosmer is the \$144 million man and not the bright-eyed youngster. The 28-year-old first baseman was unveiled in a news conference Tuesday morning, and he compared the two situations.

"A lot of similarities," said Hosmer, who dug deeply into the intricacies of the Padres' farm system before he signed. "It's something I went through as a young guy. I'm excited to go through it now, not being the young guy anymore and being the guy that can be there for the young guys."

Padres general manager A.J. Preller called Hosmer a "bridge" between the current team and the group that will arrive in the future. The Padres boast six of MLB Pipeline's Top 50 prospects and arguably the best farm system in the sport, and they believe Hosmer's presence will only help to nurture some of those youngsters.

Ideally, Fernando Tatis Jr. (ranked No. 8 overall), MacKenzie Gore (No. 19) and Luis Urias (No. 36) can comprise a prospect core that resembles what Hosmer, Mike Moustakas and Salvador Perez became in Kansas City.

"Each situation's different," said Preller. "But [Hosmer] had the experience of being a young player that's come to the big leagues, struggled as a group, then ended up being really successful at the Major League level. Those experiences played into our evaluation of him and are pretty valuable to our club and our clubhouse."

Hosmer was quick to note the mood among the Royals fanbase when those prospects landed in Kansas City, one after another. It's begun to happen in San Diego already, where Austin

Hedges, Manuel Margot and Hunter Renfroe made their full-season debuts last year. Urias and Cal Quantrill could arrive later this season. Tatis isn't too far away.

"In 2011, it seemed like every other week a different prospect was coming up," Hosmer said. "It's a fun process. It's an exciting time because everybody hears about all these guys, and once one guy comes up, it seems like the fanbase really latches on and appreciates that player. Before you know it, there's another guy rolling in and another guy rolling in."

Part of Hosmer's job is to nurture those youngsters -- a role he's eager to undertake. Of course, he's also been tasked with anchoring first base and the middle of the San Diego lineup for the foreseeable future. Hosmer is coming off a career year, in which he batted .318/.385/.498 with 25 homers, and the Padres are expecting more of the same.

"First and foremost, he's a good player," Preller said. "Then, on top of that, he's had experiences that are similar to what some of those guys are going to go through in the next few years. We saw that as a really good fit for us."