



Padres Press Clips

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Kevin Towers' 'orbit' an irresistible force in baseball, life

Jeff Sanders, SDUT, 2/25/18

In more than 30 years in baseball, Kevin Towers pulled countless players, scouts and executives — and everyone in between — into his universe.

None, as confirmed by more than 20 speakers at Sunday's two-and-a-half-hour celebration of Towers' life at Petco Park, ever had an unkind word to say about the longtime front-office executive.

Not even the players whom Towers released.

One particular yarn spun by longtime friend and agent Barry Axelrod — flanked on stage by “KT” jerseys representing Towers' tenures in San Diego, New York, Arizona and Cincinnati — involved a police officer pulling over Towers in downtown San Diego.

Towers apparently had hit the road without his headlights on. The officer, as he was about to ask for Towers' license and registration, recognized the Padres' general manager.

Of course he did: Tower had released the officer sometime earlier.

Towers looked over the officer, asked his name, and a light bulb switched on. He knew where the officer had gone to school, what round he'd been drafted in, where he'd played in the system.

“You were pretty good,” Towers told the officer. “You were a good little middle infielder on both sides of the bag — short and second.

“You couldn't hit much, though.”

At that point, Axelrod — in tow with Towers — figured a ticket was surely headed their way. Then the officer nodded in agreement and said, as relayed by Axelrod: “That's what you told me when you released me. You were right. You also told me what I needed to do to get better. I tried, and I realized that you were honest with me. I didn't quite have it.

“So here I am now.”

The officer sent Towers on his way without the ticket.

Towers was 56 when he died on the morning of Jan. 30 after a 14-month battle with a rare cancer of the thyroid.

He had constructed the Padres’ second-ever World Series team after his unlikely climb from a minor league mound into a big league front office. His teams won four division titles and more than 1,000 games in his 14 years as San Diego’s general manager. He won another NL West title as Arizona’s chief baseball operations executive.

Yet, who Towers *was* cast a large shadow over all that as more than 100 friends from across the game descended upon Petco Park for Sunday’s gathering, the first opportunity for many to revel in the stories accumulated in Towers’ “orbit,” as Theo Epstein described it.

Epstein won two world championships in Boston and another in Chicago. The Cubs’ 44-year-old president of baseball operations, however, got his start in the Padres’ PR department as a 21-year-old just out of college.

“I was just a peon,” Epstein said. “A nobody. A faceless kid trying to be invisible and not get in the way. But there was never such a thing as ‘a nobody’ to Kevin Towers. That’s just not how he was wired. He didn’t care if you were the president of a team or an intern, if you were a star player or a clubbie, if you were a national writer or the backup guy at some local paper, he would treat you like an equal.

“That was KT.”

Epstein continued: “If he liked you, he would drag you into his orbit, his gravitational force, and then you were in for the ride of your life.”

The two talked baseball often. Towers, newly married to Kelley, dragged every morsel of information out of Epstein’s single life in Pacific Beach. Soon enough, Epstein was working for Towers in baseball operations, charting pitches at Qualcomm Stadium and on his way to his own decorated career in the game.

“KT was an incredible boss,” Epstein said. “He was empowering. He was a great listener. He was a generous teacher. He had this way of making you think you mattered, that you were a contributor, even when you were mostly learning.”

The protégé was still learning, Epstein admitted with a chuckle, when Towers later pried Cla Meredith, Josh Bard and cash from the Red Sox in May 2006 for catcher Doug Mirabelli. That transaction started with a call to Towers’ “Stalking Horse,” Yankees General Manager Brian Cashman.

Towers usually referred to Cashman as his “sugar daddy.” This time around, he wanted to use Cashman to drive up the price on Epstein.

No problem, Cashman said.

“In the end, he called me up all happy and satisfied,” Cashman recalled. “I got Cla Meredith out of those guys.”

Epstein didn’t know that before Sunday afternoon. He should have known better.

“Nobody,” Epstein said, “was better at building a bullpen than KT.”

A lot of stories were told Sunday. Tears were shed. Laughs, more than anything, were shared.

There was the time that dinner and drinks — always drinks — with rival general managers and their wives turned into a late-night bowling excursion in Manhattan. There was the time when longtime Cardinals GM Walt Jocketty had the darnedest time returning Towers’ briefcase because he wasn’t aware that Towers checked into his hotel under an alias — “Otis Campbell,” the town drunk from “The Andy Griffith Show.” There were so many long nights that became mornings in the Padres’ suite, the place for writers, agents, executives and players to be at the winter meetings

“We’d literally have to kick people out in the morning to start business,” Padres Assistant GM Fred Uhlman Jr. recalled.

That’s not to say there weren’t times when Towers upset the people he came to call friends.

Towers, for instance, had more than a handful of dust-ups with Phil Nevin. One involved Towers trying to trade his power-hitting third baseman to Cincinnati for Ken Griffey Jr. despite a no-trade

clause. There were arguments about cavernous Petco Park. After one particularly heated postgame tiff, Towers arrived at the ballpark the next day, marched down the hall to remove Nevin's photo from a wall, and hung it over a toilet in the Padres' offices.

The photo is still hanging there today, 14 years later.

"You never knew what kind of day you were going to have," Uhlman said, "when you worked with Kevin."

Indeed.

There was the time when first-year manager Bruce Bochy called on Towers, his pitching coach at short-season Spokane in 1989, to finish a game for a depleted pitching staff, only to see Towers immediately plunk the opposing team's No. 1 draft pick in the head.

There was the time he wore out Bud Black, on his first day as the Padres manager, on a two-and-half-hour "power walk" through the back fields in Peoria as he ran through every player in the organization.

There was the time he had a tipsy Kirk Gibson, his manager in Arizona, head-butt Jon Daniels during a long back-and-forth as the Rangers general manager and then-Ray executive Andrew Friedman tried to "gang up" on Towers on a three-way deal for Arizona outfielder Justin Upton.

Daniels, a fraction of Gibson's 6-foot-3, 215-pound frame, dropped immediately. Towers and Friedman then hit the floor, too, in laughter. That trade never materialized.

"He never gave in," Gibson said with a laugh. "Kevin loved to wear the horns. That's what his whole life was all about."

Mitchell, Wingenter shine; Hedges homers, Padres go young again

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 2/25/18

Score: Angels 2, Padres 1

Batters box: Austin Hedges, making his first start of the spring and sporting subtle alterations in his swing, blasted a home run the opposite way to right field in his first at-bat. Hedges, who is also focusing on improved plate discipline heading into his second full big-league season, walked in his other time up. ... Fernando Tatis Jr. struck out and grounded out twice. The youngest player in any major league camp and the Padres' top prospect, Tatis is hitless in six at-bats since homering on Friday. ... Josh Naylor, a first baseman who spent time in Single-A and Double-A in 2017, was 1-for-2 Sunday and is 2-for-5 in three games.

Balls and strikes: Bryan Mitchell, acquired in trade from the Yankees and handed a rotation spot, allowed a hit in two scoreless innings. He struck out one, got a popup and three groundball outs. ... Trey Wingenter struck out three of the four batters he faced in the eighth inning. The 23-year-old righty sits high-90s on his fastball and on Sunday showed the slider that he used effectively as a closer in Double-A last year and could have him in the Padres bullpen sooner than later.

Extra bases: Tatis started at third base, but manager Andy Green reiterated that Tatis is a shortstop and the move was to get him innings. Fellow prospect Javier Guerra started at shortstop. ... When Mitchell faced Jabari Blash in the second inning, it was an unexpected convergence of two players who were traded for each other. Mitchell and Chase Headley were sent from the Yankees to San Diego in exchange for Blash in December. Earlier this week, the Angels got Blash from the Yankees for a player to be named later (or cash). Blash flied out to center. ... The Padres played four teenage minor leaguers at some point in the game, plus 20-year-old Naylor.

On Deck: Los Angeles Angels, 12:10 PT at Peoria Sports Complex. Jordan Lyles, who made five starts for the Padres last season, will begin on the mound and is scheduled to be followed by eight others. ... Wil Myers will make his first start of the spring, in his new position of right field

New Padres pitcher Bryan Mitchell's only drive is to start now

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 2/25/18

Bryan Mitchell made the drive from the Peoria Sports Complex, down the 101 to the 10, a brief detour on the 17 and then back on the 10 to the exit for Tempe Diablo Stadium.

Navigating the loop of freeways surrounding Phoenix can be something of an adventure.

It was a pleasure for Mitchell. He was on his way to the first of what he knows will be many starts this season. And it will be the longest drive he makes to pitch in a game for his new team.

That will be quite the welcome change.

The 26-year-old Padres right-hander rode “the Scranton Shuttle” the last three seasons, sometimes flying, often driving the two-plus hours between Scranton-Wilkes Barre and New York.

Five times last season he went down and five times he came back up to make mostly long relief appearances and one start for the Yankees. Once, he didn’t leave New York for his one-day demotion. Usually, there would be a couple weeks between the trips.

That meant that long between starts. Sometimes his starts in Triple-A would have a severe pitch limit so he could be ready to go for the Yankees if necessary.

“It’s tough to really work on stuff and feel good,” Mitchell said.

Not a problem anymore.

Mitchell is a starter now, handed a job in a rotation for the first time.

“I’ve never been told that,” Mitchell said. “Very few guys have the luxury of being told that before the season. It’s obviously new to me. I’m taking that. I know that the situation, just

working to get to that point versus trying to do too much in the spring, feeling like I have to fight for a job, which has been the case the past few years.”

Mitchell pitched in a game for the Padres for the first time Sunday, allowing a hit in two scoreless innings against the Angels.

“Obviously, I was antsy, the nerves were up,” Mitchell said afterward. “I thought it was good. My arm felt good, body felt good, the ball was coming out good, stuff was moving. So we’ll go from there.”

That means building up to a start at Petco Park the first week of the season. Three innings next start, four the next ... and clarity throughout.

“It’s awesome,” he said. “... To know that now, I can set all my focus on opening day and working toward that. I don’t have to put pressure on myself or worry about that.

“It’s just less stress, to be honest — to know that’s how they feel and I have that waiting on me. I can just set my goals on that first start and have everything ready versus have everything ready and not knowing. It eliminates the unknown factor.”

That’s important to a starting pitcher.

The Padres believe it will make a difference.

Mitchell is one of those pitchers almost every organization has that for whatever reason gets caught in the nebula between the rotation in Triple-A and the rotation in the major leagues, often pitching out of the bullpen in the majors and never doing any of it as well as he could.

“He was a guy that our scouts were on the last few years,” Padres general manager A.J. Preller said. “... He’s a guy we felt like ultimately needed an opportunity.”

That, essentially, is what Preller told Mitchell in their first phone conversation after the December trade that sent Jabari Blash to the Yankees while the Padres acquired Chase Headley and his \$13 million salary along with the pitcher they handed a starting job.

Mitchell’s repertoire of pitches has never been in doubt. His ability to spin that arsenal into being a consistent major league starter is the unknown.

He is 1-4 with a 3.76 ERA and 1.65 WHIP in nine career starts – one last year, five in 2016, two in '15 and one in '14 – in the majors.

Among the 185 Triple-A pitchers who started at least ten games last year, Mitchell ranked first in FIP (fielder independent pitching, 2.18) and fourth in ground-ball rate (55.4 percent). He threw 66.5 percent of his Triple-A pitches for strikes last season.

Count among the Padres' reasons for confidence that Mitchell can finally ascend to his potential is the history pitching coach Darren Balsley has in tutoring pitchers like Tyson Ross, Ian Kennedy, Drew Pomeranz and others, either resurrecting careers or pushing them to new levels.

Mitchell's various fastballs dip and dart and travel in the mid-90s. He developed a two-seamer this offseason. His change-up is adequate. The curve is his out pitch.

"He was awesome," catcher Austin Hedges said after Sunday's game. "That's a live fastball, that's a good four-pitch mix and really good curveball."

Green said this on Sunday morning: "It's as good a curveball as you'll see in Major League Baseball. It just is. He spins it anywhere from 80 to 87 mph. So he's got a slower one and a harder one when he wants to kill with it."

On the day he arrived in camp, Headley looked down the row of lockers on one side of the Padres clubhouse when asked about Mitchell. He nodded and, without prompting, concurred with his new Padres bosses.

"This is what he needs," Headley said. "... New York, especially for pitchers, is a very difficult place to come up. It always felt like if you didn't go out and throw seven scoreless, you were going to be on the shuttle back.

"For him to have a little comfort coming into the year, I think he's going to do well. Because the ability is real. Nasty. Nasty stuff."

Franchy Cordero has slugging chance; rotation battle heats up

Kevin Acee, SDUT, / 2/25/18

Franchy Cordero spent 30 games in the majors and slayed the Triple-A Pacific Coast League in 2017. Then, he was MVP of the Dominican Winter League.

But Padres manager Andy Green gave his young up-and-coming outfielder a break in the spring training opener Friday.

“He wants to play baseball,” Green said. “He was mad.”

Cordero, who can play all three outfield spots and is vying to be the Padres’ fourth man out there, came out swinging.

He hit the third pitch he saw Saturday against Oakland A’s starter Andrew Triggs down the right field line and beyond the fence.

“That’s impressive athletic ability,” Green said. “He flies around the field, and he’s got easy power.”

Cordero, who hit three home runs in his midseason call-up last year and went .326/.369/.603 in 93 games for Triple-A El Paso, could stick as a backup. There is certainly thought the 23-year-old from the Dominican Republic could use the playing time back in the minors, but it’s not impossible the Padres could have the roster flexibility to give him his turns in the majors. It might depend on whether they keep all their current outfielders.

“He could play out in left,” Green said. “He could play in center when we give Manny (Margot) a day down. If Hunter (Renfroe) was the other outfielder and makes the club, then he could be kind of a platoon bat in that situation too. So he’d get some opportunities to get on the field and play.

“There’s not a lot of guys that repeat after hitting 20 doubles, 20 triples and 20 homers (in Triple-A), but I wouldn’t call it a waste for him. There’s still stuff he can continue to work on. He’s still

very young, and he has a lot of talent. If he doesn't win a spot out of spring, I think he'll utilize that time in Triple-A to get better and better."

Rotation situation

The Padres use the "competition" word frequently, believing it is the bedrock of a team trying to achieve at a higher level. And it seems they could have a real one going at the back end of the rotation.

Veterans Tyson Ross and Chris Young served notice Saturday they are real contenders. And though Matt Strahm, acquired in trade last summer while recovering from knee surgery, has not pitched in a game yet, the lefty has thrown a couple sizzling live batting practice sessions. Still to make their spring debuts, as well, are Robbie Erlinand Colin Rea.

That means either five guys are fighting for one spot or seven guys are vying for three spots.

The Padres entered spring with incumbent Clayton Richardand newly acquired Bryan Mitchell locked in the top two spots. After them, young Dinelson Lamet and Luis Perdomowere penciled in, with Lamet perhaps in a little darker shade.

"Nothing (is) guaranteed to either one of them," Green said. "So they're fighting for their spots, but kind of understanding going in that they're probably a little bit ahead of some other guys. Last spot I'd say is absolutely wide open, and Lamet and Perdomo are going to have to show some things this spring."

Pace of play lessons

Second baseman Carlos Asuaje found out quickly that the new rules regarding mound visits are going to require some thinking.

"Yeah, I got like five visits," Asuaje said with a chuckle.

The first came when minor-leaguer Brett Kennedy was getting roughed up in the first inning in Friday's spring opener. Asuaje went to the mound, patted Kennedy on the back and offered a few words of encouragement. When he returned to his position, the umpire told him that would be a visit in the regular season.

In an effort to quicken the pace and shorten the length of games, MLB is limiting each team to six visits per nine-inning game (with one extra per extra inning). They have also redefined “visit.” Any player leaving his position to speak to the pitcher or the pitcher leaving the mound to speak to another player will count as a visit.

This might seem a subtle change, but it is significant change for players used to walking to the mound at any time to give a pitcher a breather, talk over strategy and signs or give support.

Said Asuaje: “I guess I have to stand at second and yell to a guy, ‘You’ll be fine.’ ”

There was also a play in the second inning where Asuaje handed the ball to pitcher Eric Yardley because Asuaje was close enough to the mound he thought it would be odd to throw the ball. Again, he was warned by the umpire that would constitute a mound visit.

“It’s different,” Asuaje said. “I don’t know. We’ll get used to it.”

Extra bases

- Wil Myers will make his spring debut Monday in right field.
- First baseman Eric Hosmer is likely to start Tuesday.
- Outfielder Alex Dickerson, coming off back surgery that robbed him of all of the 2017 season, is experiencing elbow soreness. He had been slated to play Sunday.

Wil Myers doing extra work in right field

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 2/25/18

Wil Myers finished batting practice Sunday morning and immediately began looking for Skip Schumaker, the Padres' first base and outfield coach.

Myers is scheduled to make his first spring training start Monday — his first time in right field since playing a total of 45 innings there in 2016.

What he specifically wanted to work on was going back on fly balls.

So he and Schumaker set up near the warning track as Myers tracked about 30 fly balls hit to the track, the wall and over the wall.

“That’s the one thing I really need to work on — the wall ball,” Myers said. “They don’t come into play (a lot). Fly balls, those are fine. But you have to be ready for those ones at the wall.”

Myers played first base almost exclusively the past two seasons but was the Padres' center fielder in 2015, his first season with the team. He was the American League Rookie of the Year as a right fielder for the Tampa Bay Rays in 2013 and played 159 games (1,332 innings) in the outfield between '13 and '14.

It’s almost as if manager Andy Green has to stifle a yawn when he talks about Myers transitioning back to the grass.

“He's as athletic as anyone in major league baseball,” Green said. “You don't hit 30 home runs or steal 20 bases if you're not. He can fly. ... He's got plenty of speed to play literally anywhere on the baseball field. I don't think anything is going to be a real challenge for him.”

There remains a possibility Myers could play in left field, though he prefers right. He has played more than 1,300 innings in right versus 35 2/3 in left.

“We see him as a guy who can play the corners ably at both positions,” Green said. “I’d say the majority of his reps will be leaning toward right field. We want to give him exposure to both, watching, listen to him, see how he’s playing. Naturally, he’s probably a little more comfortable in right, but we’re going to have to see about the roster composition too.”

That means it could depend on whether Hunter Renfroe, who started 117 games in right last season, is on the roster come opening day.

Towers' life celebrated at Petco ceremony

Bill Center, Padres.com, 2/25/18

Compassionate. Loyal. Friendship. Moxie. Candid. Soulful. Fun-loving. Brilliant. Kind. Passionate. Integrity. Trustworthy. Devoted. Love. Class.

Those were just a sample of the words used by 22 speakers Sunday afternoon at Petco Park to describe Kevin Towers during the "Celebration of Life" held for the Padres' former general manager.

"My friend, my boss, my mentor ... a great evaluator, an eager listener, a better teacher and a loyal friend," Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein said to describe Towers.

"There was never such a thing as a 'nobody' to Kevin Towers. That was K.T.'s way. No matter who you were, he greeted you with respect and kindness. I was 21 and fresh out of college when K.T. invited me into his circle."

Stories of Towers' achievements and devotion were mixed with the humorous asides that made Towers a beloved figure throughout baseball.

Managers and executives flew in from Spring Training sites in Florida and Arizona to speak about Towers. They included Bruce Bochy and Bud Black, who were Padres managers during Towers' run as general manager, and Kirk Gibson, who managed Arizona when Towers was the GM of the D-backs.

"We come together to celebrate this man," said former Padres president Larry Lucchino, who promoted the then 33-year-old Towers from scouting director to general manager of the Padres in 1995. "We hope to tell you about the joy K.T. brought to baseball and anyone he met."

Lucchino remembered meeting Towers in 1995 after John Moores and Lucchino had purchased the Padres. One of Lucchino's first tasks was to find a general manager. One of the people he asked to help in the search was Towers.

"We had interviewed five or six men," said Lucchino. "We took a walk one day and the subject of the next general manager came up. I said 'I've chosen you.' He responded, 'No way.'"

Way.

Towers served as the general manager of the Padres for 15 seasons, the longest tenure of a general manager in Padres history. He spent a total of 28 seasons in the Padres organization as a player, a Minor League pitching coach, a scout, the scouting director and general manager. He later spent four seasons as the general manager of the D-backs and served with the Yankees and Reds as a special assistant.

As general manager of the Padres, Towers built teams that won four National League West titles and one of two NL championships in Padres history. He also won a NL West title as general manager of the D-backs.

Towers, who was known affectionately as K.T. throughout baseball, died Jan. 30 after a 15-month battle with anaplastic thyroid cancer.

"Even when he was fighting cancer, he loved talking about baseball," said Black.

"He told me many times he was going to beat cancer and he put up a great fight," said Walt Jocketty, who was general manager of the Cardinals when Towers was with the Padres and later became Towers' boss in Cincinnati.

In his opening remarks, Padres chief executive officer Ron Fowler detailed Towers' importance to the Padres, San Diego and the construction of Petco Park.

"I don't know if this place would have been built without 1998 and Kevin Towers," Fowler said of the Padres' NL championship season.

Lucchino also spoke to that subject.

"He helped change baseball and San Diego forever," said Lucchino. "After the season ended, Towers was on corners holding up the 'Vote Yes on C' signs." Passage of Proposition C in 1998 was the measure that approved the construction of Petco Park.

Lucchino talked about Kevin and wife Kelley Towers' love of English bulldogs.

"Overall, the characters of the English bulldog could be found in Kevin Towers," said Lucchino.

"Kevin Towers was loved throughout baseball. More importantly, he was a good guy."

Yankees GM Brian Cashman added, "Kevin Towers taught us how to live life."

Towers revered as friend, mentor to many

Ryan Posner, Special to MLB.com, 2/25/18

SAN DIEGO -- A collection of the lives touched by Kevin Towers assembled on a cloudless Sunday afternoon to celebrate the life of the former player, scout and general manager.

And what a collection it was.

Hundreds of current and former players, scouts, managers and front-office executives who worked with Towers gathered on the Petco Park infield and listened as stories and memories were shared by a variety of speakers over a two-hour-plus ceremony.

Towers, who spent 15 seasons as the Padres' general manager and five seasons as the general manager of the D-backs, died at the age of 56 on Jan. 30 after battling a rare form of thyroid cancer for over a year.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy, Rockies manager Bud Black, Yankees general manager Brian Cashman, Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein, former Padres closer Trevor Hoffman and Reds president of baseball of operations Walt Jocketty made up a sampling of people who spoke at the ceremony.

All spoke in high regard of Towers' widow, Kelley, who helped put on the celebration of life.

"He didn't care if you were the president of the team or an intern, the star of the team or a 'clubbie,' if you were a national writer or some backup writer for the local paper, he would treat you like an equal," said Epstein, who worked under Towers -- known by K.T. in the baseball community -- in the Padres' front office before becoming general manager of the Red Sox.

Guest after guest took to the microphone to share countless stories of Towers' travels, from trade talks, to long nights at the Winter Meetings, to his ingratiating personality that made him one of the league's most-popular executives.

"This man did so much for me," said Bochy, who managed the Padres under Towers for 12 seasons. "He really did so much for my family."

Bochy was one of three managers to work under Towers while he was a general manager. The other two -- Black and Kirk Gibson -- addressed the crowd as well.

"I think the three of us can relate to the competitiveness Kevin had," Black said. "... The competitor is something I'll always remember."

Epstein wasn't the only executive who credited Towers for helping launch their career.

"He was like my college buddy, my sponsor," Cashman said. "He indoctrinated me to everybody that's here today."

Former Padres president Larry Lucchino hired Towers to become the Padres' general manager in 1995, and in '98 the team made its second-ever World Series appearance. That trip to the World Series has been credited as an instrumental facet in the eventual construction of Petco Park.

Towers helped guide his teams to five National League West titles -- four with the Padres and one with the D-backs.

"Hiring Kevin Towers at age 33 as general manager of the Padres proved to be on the best personnel decisions of my entire career," said Lucchino, also a former president and CEO of the Orioles and Red Sox.

Padres vice president and assistant general manager Fred Uhlman, Jr., along with player agent and one of Towers' closest friend, Barry Axelrod, also took the podium to speak. Padres chairman Ron Fowler and managing partner Peter Seidler provided welcoming remarks for the ceremony and Padres broadcasters and former players Mark Grant and Mark Sweeney emceed the event.

"I tried to think about his greatest baseball accomplishment: Maybe 1,000 Padres wins as a general manager, maybe crafting and putting together that 1998 team," Axelrod said. "But what I came up with is that I never, ever heard anybody say anything bad about Kevin Towers in 35 years of friendship."

Naturally, Hoffman closed out the event with his remarks. An assortment of people regarded as Towers' "Foxhole Guys" also spoke during the ceremony.

"He made people better around him," said former Padre and current Yankees third-base coach Phil Nevin, one of Towers' "Foxhole Guys". "... I'll miss everything about our relationship."

The plethora of guests filed into seats lined up between first and second base at Petco as songs from Towers' favorite musicians and groups, including The Beatles, Neil Young and the Grateful Dead, played over the stadium speakers.

The ceremony, which was open to the public, concluded with a choir performance from Eddie Baltrip and Fulfillment.

Mitchell ready to take advantage of fresh slate

AJ Cassavell, MLB.com, 2/25/18

TEMPE, Ariz. -- **Bryan Mitchell** arrived in Padres camp two weeks early this spring, sporting long hair and a well-trimmed beard. His new look told a story of opportunity.

Mitchell spent the first eight years of his professional career with the Yankees, an organization notorious for its strict grooming policies. More importantly, he toiled the last four seasons in a sort of limbo -- between the rotation and the bullpen, between Triple-A and the Majors.

View Full Game Coverage

Three thousand miles away, the Padres' front office schemed different ways to acquire the right-handed North Carolina native. For three years, the club's decision makers have believed his fastball/curveball combination would play well in their rotation.

That opportunity finally presented itself during the offseason, when San Diego landed **Chase Headley** and Mitchell for the cost of outfielder **Jabari Blash** (and, more notably, the remaining \$13 million on Headley's contract).

"It definitely speaks to how they value me," said Mitchell. "This is pretty much what I've been trying to get to for the last three or four years. I've kind of been stuck in that back-and-forth spot. This is exactly what I need, and I'm honored they were able to give me the chance."

Mitchell made his Cactus League debut in **Sunday's 2-1 loss to the Angels in Tempe**. He showcased his complete arsenal and allowed a hit and a walk over two scoreless innings

Unlike in New York, Mitchell is in the rotation to stay. He's out of options, too, and the Padres have all but assured him of a place in their starting five.

"Personally, I've always trained as a starter, and I've always viewed myself as a starter," Mitchell said. "To be honest, I never even thought too much about the relieving side of it."

The numbers bear out Mitchell's assertion that he's a starter first. He owns a 5.77 career ERA from the 'pen, compared with a 3.76 mark as a starter.

The club also believes Mitchell's repertoire is one that should work as he navigates a lineup multiple times. He'll mix and match from among his four-seam fastball, two-seam fastball and cutter. And he'll complement the hard stuff with what Padres manager Andy Green called "as good a curveball as you'll see."

"It's great for him, gives him some certainty that he hasn't had, and sometimes that's all a guy needs," Green said. "It's not about some expert coaching you're giving him. It's about, 'Hey, man, you spin the heck out of a curveball, your cutter's really good, your fastball's alive. Go pitch.'"

Go pitch. That's all Mitchell has ever asked to do. In New York, that opportunity was sporadic.

When he did get his chances, he was stymied by a pair of freak injuries. In 2015, Mitchell was struck in the face by a line drive and sustained a broken nose. In '16, he missed three months after fracturing a bone in his toe.

"I had a couple little small injuries," Mitchell said. "But it was just the situation I was in. They had a lot of depth. They had a lot of 40-man starters at Triple-A for the last couple years, and they had a stacked bullpen. The jobs were few and far between."

After eight years of reporting to camp in Tampa, Fla., Mitchell made sure he got to Peoria early this spring, arriving Jan. 31.

"It's different, but it's the same," he said of Padres camp. "I wanted to get here a little early, get acclimated with everyone, how they run everything and the process of how spring's going. But once you get in the swing of things, when pitchers and catchers reported, it's kind of felt the same."

It's felt the same -- aside from his newfound opportunity. And, of course, the facial hair policies, too.

Myers working on staying locked-in in OF

AJ Cassavell, MLB.com, 2/25/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- **Wil Myers** hung around for half an hour following his Sunday morning workout, taking fly ball after fly ball in front of the right-field warning track. Skip Schumaker -- in his new role as Padres outfield coach -- stood to Myers' right, offering instruction throughout.

For the past week, the two have prepped for Myers' move back to the outfield as though cramming for an exam. The first test comes Monday against the Angels, when Myers makes his spring debut.

Of course, the outfield isn't exactly uncharted territory for Myers. He spent his first three big league seasons there, before moving to first base in 2016. Earlier this offseason, when the Padres discussed free agent **Eric Hosmer**, they phoned Myers, asking if he'd be comfortable switching positions. He said he'd happily oblige, and soon enough Hosmer's signing became a reality.

"It's a little difficult with the little things -- remembering how to get back and play the wall, footwork," Myers said. "... But I feel really good with where I'm at right now."

Schumaker, who will serve as first-base coach this season, believes Myers has all the tools necessary to be an elite right fielder. Few have ever questioned Myers' athleticism. He swiped 20 bases last season and was the sport's **fastest first baseman** (Hosmer tied for second.)

In Schumaker's eyes, it's merely a matter of focus. Over the past two years, Myers said multiple times that he preferred first base because of his constant involvement in the field.

"Wil is the best athlete on the field every single game, when he wants to be," Schumaker said. "He needs to have intent every single pitch. Being engaged every single pitch is his biggest challenge. If he does that, he'll win a Gold Glove. There's nobody more athletic than Wil Myers."

Myers appears destined to play right field, where he spent two seasons with Tampa Bay at the beginning of his career. **Hunter Renfro**, who lent Myers his backup glove when Myers had to order a new one, will shift to left, where he'll battle **Jose Pirela** for playing time.

Metrics pegged Myers as a mediocre right fielder during two seasons with Tampa Bay. Upon his arrival in San Diego, he was asked to move to center, where he quickly flopped.

In his first year as a first baseman, Myers was among three finalists for a Gold Glove Award. But he mostly struggled there last year. And with Hosmer on board, a move to the outfield was only logical.

"He's done it before," Schumaker said. "That's the good thing. He's been an outfielder, he's played center, he's played right. It's not like he's moving from the outfield to the infield and has never

played shortstop before. This is a refresher, a fine tune. You saw what he did when he went to first. He was almost a Gold Glover. He loves challenges, and this is another challenge."

Hedges starts spring in style

Austin Hedges tweaked his swing this offseason, an effort to limit his hand movement and keep him more composed in the box. The changes aren't particularly noticeable, but they already seem to be making an impact.

On his first at-bat of the spring, the Padres catcher swatted an opposite-field solo homer, providing all the offense in the **Padres' 2-1 loss** to the Angels on Sunday afternoon. He walked in his second at-bat, also an encouraging sign, given Hedges' on-base struggles last season.

"He saw the ball well," said Padres manager Andy Green. "I've seen him run into baseballs before, but I thought the walk was probably just as exciting as the home run. He's worked hard. There's a simplicity to it -- less head movement, easier to see the baseball. Hopefully that carries on. You don't want to read into two at-bats."

Bullpen, rotation races to overlap

Over the past few days, Green has reiterated that eight pitchers are currently competing for three places in the starting rotation. On Sunday, he split that camp into two groups -- pitchers who could also make the roster as relievers, and pitchers who won't.

Three or four places remain available in the Padres' 'pen. If **Jordan Lyles, Matt Strahm, Robbie Erlin** or **Chris Young** aren't named starters, they could still win a relief role, Green said. Meanwhile, **Luis Perdomo, Dinelson Lamet, Tyson Ross** and **Colin Rea** are rotation-or-bust options (Perdomo and Lamet have an early leg up on the other six.)

Up next

The rotation battle continues Monday, when Lyles takes the mound for the first time this spring. For the second day in a row, the Padres will face the Angels -- this time in Peoria -- at 12:10 p.m. PT on **MLB.TV**.

Kevin Towers remembered for his love of baseball and people

JAY PARIS, AP, 2/26/18

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Theo Epstein remembered when he first met Kevin Towers, as a 21-year-old intern working in the San Diego Padres public relations department. Towers was the new general manager.

“I was just out of college,” said Epstein, the Chicago Cubs president of baseball operations. “I was just a nobody, a faceless kid trying to be invisible and not get in the way. But there was never such a thing as a nobody to Kevin Towers — he just wasn’t wired that way.”

Baseball executives and managers left spring training to gather at San Diego’s Petco Park on Sunday and celebrate the life of Towers, who died from complications of a rare form of thyroid cancer on Jan. 30 at the age of 56.

Hall of Famers Trevor Hoffman and Tony La Russa were in the audience along with Colorado Rockies manager Bud Black and San Francisco Giants skipper Bruce Bochy, both Padres managers under Towers. New York Yankees general manager Brian Cashman and New York Mets general manager Sandy Alderson also were on hand.

Kirk Gibson, who managed Arizona to the 2011 NL West title when Towers was the Diamondbacks’ GM, was among the speakers.

“He looked at players differently,” Gibson said. “When we won, we won with scrappy players. I’m just grateful I got to spend time with Kevin Towers. He meant so much to me and my family.”

A Padres draft pick in 1982, Towers was San Diego’s general manager from 1995-2009 and Arizona’s GM from September 2010 until September 2014.

“There are few people that can have a moment like this,” said Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer, who replaced Towers as the Padres’ GM. “People came from far and wide to be here.”

Towers led the Padres to four NL West titles and the 1998 NL pennant.

“I took over for him and he always treated me so well,” Hoyer said. “We would meet for beers or talk on the phone and it was always with KT wanting to help me do a better job. That doesn’t

always happen and with me being a first-time GM I just always appreciated that he treated me the way he did.”

Former St. Louis and Cincinnati GM Walt Jocketty hired Towers as a special assistant in 2015, what turned out to be Towers’ final baseball job.

“The first time I met Kevin was in 1995 at the GM meetings and I’m sure it was at the bar,” Jocketty said. “And from that time on our relationship and friendship grew. He was one of the guys that always brought all the GMs together. Kevin loved life and lived it to the fullest. He suffered a lot in the last two years but he always stayed positive and fought a brave fight. There will never be another KT.”

Epstein went on to become the GM who in 2004 helped Boston win its first World Series title since 1918 and in 2016 directed the Cubs to their first championship since 1908.

“He was my friend, my boss and my mentor,” Epstein said. “He didn’t care if you were the president of the team, an intern, or a backup beat writer for a newspaper. He treated you like you want to be treated. That was KT. It didn’t matter who you were or who you weren’t. He treated you with love and respect. And if he liked you, you were lucky enough to be dragged into his orbit, and then you were in for the ride of your life.”

At 38, Young tries to win spot on Padres' pitching staff

BERNIE WILSON, AP, 2/25/18

PEORIA, Ariz. (AP) -- There's some living history in the San Diego Padres' clubhouse this spring.

Chris Young is back with the Padres and trying to earn a spot on the staff, whether it's in the rotation or in the bullpen.

"Archaic, maybe, but I don't know about historic," the 38-year-old said with a laugh.

Actually, he is historic. Young is the last Padres pitcher to win a playoff game. On Oct. 7, 2006, the 6-foot-10 right-hander threw 6 2-3 scoreless innings of four-hit ball in the Padres' 3-1 victory at St. Louis in Game 3 of their NL Division Series.

"I don't know if that's known throughout the clubhouse," Young said. "We'll see who figures it out."

That's how long it's been since the Padres won a playoff game.

The guy who got the save that day, Trevor Hoffman, is going into the Hall of Fame this summer. The Padres' catcher in that game, Mike Piazza, went into the Hall of Fame in 2016. The left fielder, Dave Roberts, is going into his third season as manager of the rival Los Angeles Dodgers after spending five seasons on San Diego's staff.

The day after Young's victory, the Padres were eliminated. They haven't been back to the postseason since, although they came close the following season when they lost a wild-card tiebreaker at Colorado. That win remains San Diego's only playoff victory since 1998.

Young is back with the Padres after seven years away, including missing all of 2013 with arm problems. He spent the last three seasons with the Kansas City Royals, earning the victory in Game 1 of the 2015 World Series, a 14-inning epic that sent the Royals on their way to their first title in 30 years.

"I feel good," said Young, who's in camp as a non-roster invitee. "I feel healthy, excited about the way the ball's coming out right now. If I can come in and help this team win and be a veteran presence, San Diego has a very special place in my heart, some unbelievable memories. I was here when this team was good. The last winning season here I was part of, and I want to be part of the next, and the next playoff team as well."

Young's last season in San Diego, 2010, was the Padres' last winning season.

"So I've been there. I remember the good times for this organization. I know how great the fans of San Diego are and how much it would mean to them to get back there. I would love to be part of it."

Young agreed to a minor league contract on Dec. 22 and if added to the 40-man roster would get a \$1 million, one-year deal with the chance to earn \$6 million in performance bonuses: \$4 million based on starts through 29 and \$200,000 based on innings through 120. He is the oldest player in camp, with the most service time on a team that's rebuilding and isn't expected to contend for a season or two.

Manager Andy Green said Young's chances to make the team are "real." Young rejoined the Padres a day before Tyson Ross signed a similar deal. Ross appeared in just 12 games for Texas last season after recovering from surgery for a shoulder ailment in October 2016. He was San Diego's opening day starter in 2016 but didn't pitch again due to the shoulder ailment.

"Those guys are competing for rotation spots. And C.Y. has the ability to bounce to the bullpen; Tyson really hasn't done that," Green said. "But C.Y. could potentially find himself in that mix, but right now we're looking at him specifically as a starter."

Young pitched two hitless, scoreless innings Saturday in his spring debut.

"I'm not focused on the external, 'Who else is in the room,' or anything like that," Young said. "What I'm focused on is me and going out and I know what I have to do to be a successful major league player. I've done it for a long time now and I know when I'm right that I belong in the big leagues, and when I'm not right, the results haven't been good. If I'm pitching to my capabilities, I feel like I can help any club in the big leagues and I certainly want it to be here."

Young was released by the Royals in mid-June with a 7.50 ERA in 14 appearances, including two starts.

Young has been reunited with former Royals teammate Eric Hosmer, who signed a \$144 million, eight-year deal last week.

"He's probably one of the most intelligent, brilliant teammates I've had," Hosmer said. "What's amazing to me is, C.Y., you talk to him off the field, he's as polite as they come, but once that game starts, I don't think there's anybody who competes more than he does. It's little things like that, when he's on the mound, it drives you to do what you can to win a ballgame."

Padres Honor Late G.M. Kevin Towers

By Derek Togerson, NBC7, 2/25/18

Kevin Towers was not just a great baseball man. He was simply a great man.

The longtime Padres General Manager passed away in late January, another victim of cancer (although he fought it off a lot longer than anyone thought he could). On Sunday at Petco Park the Padres held a celebration of life for the man known affectionately as KT.

Padres legends like Trevor Hoffman and Bruce Bochy were there but KT had an influence on all of baseball. Hall of Famer Tony LaRussa, Yankees GM Brian Cashman, Cubs GM Theo Epstein, and former Cardinals and Reds GM Walt Jocketty all got up to tell stories about one of their favorite human beings.

It's fitting that the event was held at Petco Park because, as Padres Executive Chairman Ron Fowler said, he's a major reason the best ballpark in the big leagues even exists.

"I don't think Petco Park would be here if 1998 had not happened. And KT was the one who put the ball club together that went to the World Series," said Fowler.

That team helped lead the way for the vote that approved the downtown ballpark. After Fowler, several others took turns sharing their love for KT:

"Baseball is designed to be inclusive and bring people together from all over the globe. KT loves people old and young, from all races. He fought to the very end with a fearlessness and optimism and toughness and passion. I'm so happy to have been inspired by Kevin Towers." – Padres Principal Owner Peter Seidler, Cancer Survivor

"Kevin Towers was the most genuine, honest, decent, and fun-loving baseball executive I've ever known. Hiring him at the age of 33 to be the general manager of the Padres turned out to be one of the best decisions I ever made. Loved throughout the game, KT was a good, good man. Thank you KT, and rest in peace my friend. I will keep your spirit and memory with me always." – Former Padres Executive Larry Lucchino

“Kevin loved life. He was always upbeat and positive and made everyone he met feel like his best friend. He suffered a lot the last year but he always stayed positive. There will never be another KT.” – Reds Executive Advisor Walt Jocketty

“He lived life the way it was supposed to be. He lived life like a king. Joy every day, max effort, and don’t waste time. Kevin never wasted time. You had a treasure here on the west coast. You were lucky to have him.” – Yankees G.M. Brian Cashman

“You never knew what kind of day you were going to have when you worked with Kevin and I mean that in the good way. Every day was fun.” – Padres Assistant General Manager Fred Uhlman Jr.

“I never ever heard anyone say anything bad about Kevin towers. In 35 years I never heard anyone say anything bad about him. Even players that Kevin released have a soft spot for him. His love of life and his great human qualities are the legacy he gave to all of us.” - Barry Axelrod, Sports Agent and longtime friend of KT

“There was never such a thing as a nobody to Kevin Towers. It didn’t matter who you were or who you weren’t. He would treat you like an equal. If he liked you, you were lucky. He would pull you into his orbit and you were in for the ride of your life.” – Cubs G.M. Theo Epstein

The title of the celebration was all too fitting: KT, A Life Well Lived.

Kevin Towers lived more in 56 years than most of us could wedge into 560 years. Anyone who had the honor of meeting him is better off for it.

Padres celebrate the life of late GM Kevin Towers

FOX 5 DIGITAL TEAM, FOX5, 2/25/18

SAN DIEGO -- Fans, friends and baseball legends descended on Petco Park on Sunday to honor late Padres General Manager Kevin Towers.

The event was billed as a "celebration of life" for Towers, who died last month after a battle with thyroid cancer.

Towers left a lasting legacy after his tenure as Padres GM from 1995 to 2009.

He is often credited for his role in the Padres 1998 World Series run, and was lauded as a talented scout and mentor.

The celebration gave fans and loved ones alike a chance to celebrate Towers' contributions to the team and to San Diego at large.