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Around the Horn: DH/Bench

Healthy Sweeney, deeper bench key for Royals

By Dick Kaegel / MLB.com

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The following is the seventh and final installment in a series of weekly stories on MLB.com examining each Major League club, position by position. Today: DH/Bench.

KANSAS CITY -- Mike Sweeney had just pulled into the Cathedral Catholic High School parking lot in San Diego.

The Royals captain, speaking on his cell phone, was in a merry mood.

"I went to the abbey to find my soul. I'm doing my Egoscue to get my body right. Now I'm going to Cathedral Catholic to get my swing going," Sweeney said.

And off to the school's batting cages he went. Sweeney and his wife, Shara, had just returned from a weekend retreat, communing with monks at an abbey in Oceanside, Calif.

But it's Egoscue, a method of eliminating pain and rejuvenating his back, that has Sweeney and the Royals most intrigued as Spring Training nears.

Sweeney was steered to the Egoscue method, developed by Vietnam veteran Peter Egoscue 30 years ago, by fellow ballplayers Dave Roberts, David Newhan and Trevor Hoffman.

Described as a combination of core strengthening, Pilates and yoga by Sweeney, the method has become a four-times-a-week pursuit for him.

"I've never felt more flexible or stronger in my career," Sweeney said.

That's good news for the Royals, who are counting on Sweeney to be their designated hitter for a full season. That's something he hasn't experienced since 2001 when he played 147 games (and would've played 10 more if not for a suspension stemming from his encounter with Detroit pitcher Jeff Weaver).

Last year his persistent back troubles limited him to 60 games. Yet, he still popped eight home runs and had 33 RBIs.

He's confident that his new training routine will make a difference.

"I'm hoping this will add years onto my career," Sweeney said. "Because my heart burns to play."

What he's not likely to play again is first base. The Royals see Sweeney as a full-time designated hitter, which is one reason they obtained Ross Gload from the Chicago White Sox.

Gload, in 77 games last season, batted .327. Left-handed, he provides balance and backup to right-handed

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Mike Sweeney is using Egoscue, in hopes of eliminating pain and rejuvenating his back. (Tom Olmschaid/AP)

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