

Damon takes good ribbing, then has a blast

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BALTIMORE - Johnny Damon thought he was hurting from some type of abdominal injury, but he had no idea what he was dealing with until he went to see his chiropractor in Orlando on Monday.

The source of Damon's pain was not an abdominal strain as he had expected; he was suffering from four of his ribs being "out of place," something the chiropractor was able to fix with a pair of adjustments.

"I feel like a different person," Damon said. "I'm still sore, but it's more like a bruise now than a strain."



Whatever it was, it felt good enough for Damon to be back in the lineup last night against the Orioles, his first start since Thursday and just his second on the Yanks' nine-game road trip. He came back with a bang, belting a two-run home run that tied the game in the sixth inning.

Damon makes several visits to the chiropractor, Jerry Mattia, throughout the season, but Monday's session seemed to have done wonders for him, both physically and mentally.

"It's amazing," Damon said. "We've definitely got to put him on the payroll. The guy is magic."

With National League games behind him, Damon was back in his familiar role as the Yankees' designated hitter, one he figures to fill while Jason Giambi remains out with a foot injury. Damon went 1-for-4.

"Johnny Damon said he felt rejuvenated Tuesday after visiting his chiropractor on Monday in Orlando, Fla. "

"I feel pretty good," Damon said. "The rest definitely helped; not having a game yesterday, having off Sunday night and (yesterday) - the rest and the adjustment helped out. Hopefully I can be 100% real soon."

"He seemed a lot more upbeat about how he felt than over the last week," Joe Torre said. "Hopefully we can keep him that way."

If the Yankees are going to make a run at the playoffs, Damon needs to be his typical pesky leadoff-hitting self. With a .251 average, five homers and 25 RBI, Damon is well off his standard pace. Last year, his first with the Yankees, Damon hit .285 with 24 homers and 80 RBI.

Serving as DH will help Damon stay in the lineup, but the veteran is hoping to get his share of time in center field, where he has played his entire career.

"I can still go get it; it's just unfortunate how the season started with the strained calf," Damon said. "I want that challenge, because I know I can still be one of the best out there. I hit a road block this year in the field, but I know I'm pretty good out there.

"Right now, my role is DH, part-time center field, part-time right field, left field and first base. That's fine with me. I've shown everyone I can adjust to whatever situation I'm put in."

Damon entered last night in a 4-for-29 (.138) rut. His pinch-hit single on Sunday snapped an 0-for-10 skid, including an 0-for-8 mark on the road trip. Still, the alternatives should Damon not play are Kevin Thompson, Andy Phillips and Chris Basak, so the Yankees are going to let Damon play through his pain unless he is unable to do so. "Just being in there is going to make a difference for the opposing pitcher, what he's thinking," Damon said. "The team is better with me in there, even if I'm not 100%... It just hasn't been a fun year for me so far. This is a great time of year; a great time for me to get going, as well as the team."