

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Padres put hitters' vision to the test, and the winner is Giles in a walk



Greg Maddux laughs with a friend Wednesday as he walks to a practice field during his first day as a special instructor at the Padres' spring training camp in Peoria, Ariz. (/ Charlie Riedel/AP Photo)



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February 18, 2009

PEORIA, Ariz. – How does Brian Giles discern balls from strikes better than the typical hitter?

“I don't know,” said Giles, whose career on-base percentage is .404. “I just don't know. Maybe it helps to have an open stance, to get a better look at the pitch. I've always been a hitter who works the count.”

A bigger part of the answer came Wednesday when the [Padres](#) tested the depth perception of their hitters.

Giles scored an A-plus on the exam, which entailed peering through special glasses at an illuminated circular symbol.

At 38, Giles has better depth perception and other visual skills than many young major leaguers.

The bigger story along those lines was that the Padres expanded their testing of hitters' eyesight, in the belief that they can sharpen some of their visual skills before and during the season.

“Hopefully we can help a guy who is hitting .225 or .230, and if he gets an extra 10 hits it can make a big difference,” trainer Todd Hutcheson said.

Padres slugger Greg Vaughn credited San Diego eye doctor Carl Hillier for helping him to shorten a hitting slump in 1998, and it was Hillier who put players through a battery of visual tests Wednesday.

"We're looking at the visual skills for athletic performance, and these go far beyond the ability to see 20-20," said Hillier, who is part of the San Diego Center for Vision Care in Encinitas and Lemon Grove. "We're looking for ability, skill and endurance."

Hutcheson said the visual testing exceeded that of any previous Padres spring camp and was endorsed by new hitting coach Jim Lefebvre and minor-league manager Greg Riddoch. During the season, specific eye exercises will be prescribed.

"If we improve an athlete's perception of depth, think how much better they are going to be," Hillier said.

In the late 1980s, Padres hitters tested their visual skills by touching flashing lights on a large box. The science now is much-improved, said Hillier, who also works with athletes from sports such as volleyball and golf.

"There are quite a few teams doing this," Hutcheson said.

Notes

– Greg Maddux began his part-time gig as a [spring training](#) instructor and said he eventually might like to become a regular coach. "I love baseball," said Maddux, a future Hall of Famer who retired in December. "It's what I've always done and it's all I really know."

He said he doesn't miss the sore-leg phase of early spring camp and enjoys retirement, yet probably will not realize that he's retired until he drives home to Las Vegas next week.

He said he might throw batting practice Thursday. "I'd rather do that than stand around and lean on my fungo all day," he said.

– Padres cleanup man [Adrian Gonzalez](#) has recommended Mexican pitcher Walter Silva, and the Padres have looked into signing the right-hander, who had a 4.21 ERA with 60 strikeouts and 49 walks in 115 1/3 innings with Monterrey in the Mexican League last year. Gonzalez said he believes Silva, 32, can become a reliable No. 4 or No. 5 starter in the major leagues.

– Catcher [Henry Blanco](#), given permission to arrive late because of a family matter, is to check into camp tomorrow, manager [Bud Black](#) said.