

# SPRING TRAINING

## An Autograph Seeker's Dream

BY BILL GLAZIER

**W**eaving through bodies to get a signature on a baseball can be a trying task for those not used to being in crowded corners.

Behind an opening in a chain link fence, dividing the player's area and the fans, stood a patient Paul Molitor, a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, doing what he does best this time of year -- accommodating everyone.

The former major league star was freely giving away his autograph prior to a spring training contest between the Seattle Mariners and San Diego Padres as a multitude of those who enjoyed his 21 years in the big leagues with Milwaukee, Toronto and Minnesota pushed their way to the front in hopes of getting his name on anything, from baseball caps and gloves to crumpled pieces of paper.

Little did they know that Molitor, one of only five players in major league history to amass at least 3,000 hits and 500 stolen bases, would stick around and sign almost everything in front of him.

"I'll try to get to all of you," he said to no one in particular, as some of the crowd tried to muscle their

way to the front. "Just be patient."

Spring training is an autograph seeker's dream where many players are at ease, talkative and willing to stand before teeming hordes of people until the ink runs dry. After all, players are far away from the pressures and glitter of the big league city, where the rigors of the 162-game regular schedule have not yet begun. While training in the spring can be draining on players, especially those getting their first shot at making a big league roster, aging veterans with a long history of success often look the most comfortable, and seem to enjoy the time spent with fans.

Optimism runs high at Arizona's nine Cactus League parks. All teams are still in first place and players, or former ones like Molitor, seem to be more cordial and accommodating to the requests of baseball diehards seeking signatures and photos.

It's not uncommon to find former baseball greats at one of the team sites, soaking up the country fair-like atmosphere, mingling with fans



PHOTO BY BILL GLAZIER

ANGELS' MANAGER MIKE SCIOSCIA GIVES HIS AUTOGRAPH TO A FAN.

and munching on specialized foods like Wisconsin beer and brats at the Milwaukee Brewers stadium or deep fried Twinkies inside the home of the Seattle Mariners.

At the Pink Pony, a popular restaurant in Scottsdale, where pictures of heroes from the past line the walls, patrons will often run into team executives, managers, scouts, sports-writers and an occasional player to talk over the day's contests. The bustling place includes jerseys of some of the game's greatest legends, including Willie McCovey, Willie Mays and Ernie Banks.

What might be most attractive

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