

Mets aim for Amazin' in Fla.

25 years later, a title remembered

BY RAVI SHANKAR • Special to amNewYork

The Mets head into spring training with players entrenched in most key roster spots, but here are some position battles that new general manager Sandy Alderson and Mets fans should be following closely:

[1] What's on second?

Second base was an offensive black hole for the Mets last season. Regulars Luis Castillo, **Ruben Tejada** (below right) and Alex Cora combined for a paltry .220 batting average, .307 on-base percentage and just one home run. While Cora is gone and the 20-year-old Tejada is in the minors, Castillo, the front-runner for the job, still has competition. **Daniel Murphy** (left) is trying to make the difficult defensive transition to second base, fur-

ther complicated by the knee brace he'll be wearing following an MCL tear. He'll depend on his serviceable .275 major league average and .768 OPS to compensate for his lack of defensive range. A dark-horse candidate is Brad Emaus, a natural second baseman with an Alderson-friendly .364 OBP in the minors, whom the Mets acquired in the Rule 5 draft. Justin Turner also has a shot after tearing up Triple-A Buffalo last season with a .333 average and .906 OPS.

[2] Chance to get out there

Given that the Mets' starting outfielders missed 176 games in 2010, the fourth outfielder may play a crucial role. Two darlings of the Mets' farm system, **Nick Evans** (below left) and **Lucas Duda** (right), have not yet proven their major league readiness in limited appearances in Flushing. They'll compete with two newly acquired journeyman outfielders, Scott Hairston and Willie Harris. Mets fans need to hope for a breakout season, as none of these four candidates have a career average better than .257 or an OPS higher than .737.

FRESH START

- Pitchers and catchers report to Port St. Lucie, Fla., on Tuesday.
- The Mets open their spring training schedule on Feb. 26 at home against Atlanta.

[3] A start, but no end yet

The Mets' opening rotation will feature Mike Pelfrey, R.A. Dickey and Jonathon Niese, leaving two spots up for grabs — at least until Johan Santana's expected return from shoulder surgery in June. Late-season call-ups **Pat Misch** (below left) and **Dillon Gee** (right) pitched respectably in limited 2010 work, with Gee posting the better ERA (2.18) and Misch displaying sharper command (5.5 K:BB). They'll be pushed by newcomers Chris Young and Chris Capuano, who are four and five years removed from All-Star seasons, respectively, and have been slowed by injuries in recent years.

BY KYLE STACK
Special to amNewYork

Davey Johnson's 595 wins with the Mets from 1984-1990 make him the winningest manager in franchise history. He reflected on his career this week at the MSG Network's studios in midtown, where he helped preview the upcoming four-part series "Summer of '86: The Rise and Fall of the World Champion Mets." The original series will air March 1-4 on MSG.

What do you remember about Shea Stadium? I love Shea Stadium. I love the fact that fans are very educated here. I love that they challenge you every day, on radio and on TV. I had no problem with that. The only thing I regret right now is they're not doing better.

Did the '86 Mets' notorious off-field activities overshadow their on-field accomplishments?

That team was very diverse. One thing about them is they came early to the ballpark, they enjoyed being in the clubhouse and they were very relaxed when they went on the field. They competed better than anyone else.

How do you define team chemistry? A lot of guys in the league have no clue what it is. I hope you remember this: Chemistry is when you get 25 guys together and it doesn't matter what I tell them... I can tell them stuff, but if I'm not consistent with how I use them, you got no chemistry.



Davey Johnson
former Mets manager



Johnson



(PHOTOS: GETTY)

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