

Rocker returns after a two-week suspension

ATLANTA — John Rocker has served his time.

The Atlanta reliever, suspended the first two weeks of the season for offending foreigners, minorities and gays, rejoins the roster Tuesday night against the Philadelphia Phillies.

Rocker drew mostly cheers when he pitched at Turner Field in an exhibition game April 1, two days before opening day. No organized protests were scheduled in conjunction with his return, although a civil rights official once again called on Atlanta to trade Rocker.

"It's still a blemish on the [Atlanta] organization ... and, to a certain degree, a shame for the city," said Michael Bond, deputy director of the NAACP's Atlanta chapter.

After his exhibition appearance in Atlanta, Rocker returned to Florida for extended spring training. He was back with the team in Milwaukee last weekend, working out during the games and doing everything else like a regular team member.

"I don't think it will be a problem when we're in Atlanta," manager Bobby Cox said. "John still has many fans in Atlanta. I'm not worried about it."

Atlanta, who was off Monday, split its first 12 games without Rocker. Their next nine games are in Atlanta, easing the transition for the controversial closer who saved 38 games last season but made infuriating comments in a December issue of Sports Illustrated.

Rocker was banned from baseball until May 1 by commissioner

Bud Selig, who also imposed a \$20,000 fine. But arbitrator Shyam Das reduced the suspension to the first two weeks of the season, cut the fine to \$500 and allowed Rocker to report to spring training on March 2.

The pitcher apologized to his teammates in a private clubhouse meeting and issued a statement expressing remorse for his statements. But he has refused to discuss the issue since that day.

"We've talked about this so much, that now it's just time to go out and get it over with," Cox said. "We're not making a big deal about it. That's [the media's] thing."

Atlanta's next road trip begins April 28 in laid-back San Diego. But Rocker figures to receive his harshest reaction in places like

Philadelphia (May 12-14), Chicago (May 29-31) and definitely New York, where Atlanta meets the Mets in a four-game series beginning June 29.

Already, photocopied flyers have been passed out at Shea Stadium advertising "John Rocker Battery Day" for Atlanta's first series in New York, where fans are still outraged by the pitcher's infamous interview.

"Imagine having to take the 7 train to [Shea Stadium] looking like you're [in] Beirut next to some kid with purple hair, next to some queer with AIDS, right next to some dude who got out of jail for the fourth time, right next to some 20-year-old mom with four kids," Rocker told the magazine.

He also said, "The biggest thing I don't like about New York are the

foreigners. I'm not a very big fan of foreigners. You can walk an entire block in Times Square and not hear anybody speaking English. ... How the hell did they get into this country?"

Baseball is concerned about providing security for Rocker outside of Atlanta.

"It won't only be New York," Selig said. "He got booed [during an exhibition series] in Venezuela — a lot — and all over."

Atlanta is hoping that Rocker will handle the wrath of the fans differently than he did during last year's playoffs, when he engaged in a verbal war with New Yorkers even before his magazine interview.

The Associated Press

Sale of Royals a go, thanks to boost in stock market

By Ronald Blum
The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Before discussing realignment and the proposed sale of the Kansas City Royals, baseball owners had a bigger concern Monday.

"What's the market doing?" More than one owner asked this question in the hallway before the start of their two-day meeting.

After learning that the Dow Jones Industrial Average and the NASDAQ composite index each

posted gains of 200-plus points, they got down to business. The \$96 million sale of the Royals to David Glass was the most pressing item.

"It seems like a slam dunk," Kansas City president Mike Herman said. "It will be unanimously approved."

Glass has been the Royals chairman since September 1993, about six weeks following the death of founding owner Ewing Kauffman. Under Kauffman's succession

plan, the team was put up for bidding to Kansas City-area individuals and companies, with the money going to charity.

Last September, baseball owners refused to approve a \$75 million purchase by New York lawyer Miles Prentice.

Glass, the former chief executive officer of Wal-Mart Stores Inc., then re-entered the bidding. He said the Royals will be run a little differently once he is the owner, not just the chairman.

"There have been lots of decisions we had to defer during the period of time we thought we would shortly have an owner," he said.

"We probably have fewer dollars committed beyond this year than any other team in baseball. That was sort of deferring for the person who owns the team so they can make that decision."

While the Royals' sale appeared headed for approval Monday night or Tuesday, it became clear

there would be no vote on realignment until June at the earliest.

Commissioner Bud Selig has floated a plan that would shift Arizona from the NL West to the AL West and move Tampa Bay from the AL East to the National League.

In addition, it's possible the AL could have four teams in the West and East, but six in the Central, and the NL could junk the wild card and go to four four-team divisions.

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (April 18). Save your pennies this year, and you may be able to take another honeymoon. Get your partner to save up, too, and it's a sure thing. You already know where you want to go by April. Put the budget into place in May and stick to it. If the carrot at the end of your stick is gorgeous enough, you'll be glad to save all summer. As autumn approaches, a controversy brews. Will your date want to go to your favorite spot, or not? Costs may seem too high in November. Make your break in December, with or without your companion. Share your stories with friends in February.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Today is a 7 — There's a beautiful full moon tonight, but things are changing. This marks the culmination of one phase and the beginning of another. You may decide to make a change in your career, too. You don't always go for the money, but this time it could be wise.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 5 — This might be a good evening for romance if you think arguments are romantic. Some people do, but you might think it's too much trouble. Well, lots of times it is. You will probably win, eventually. That should make it more interesting.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Today is an 8 — You'll be pretty successful at whatever you do, at first. As the day progresses, even simple chores will get harder. So, while things are easy, do some planning. Get your tough chores out of the way first thing.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 7 — You have a lot of good friends who'd like to spend time with you. A party at your place is possible, but make it a potluck. Don't spend a bunch of your money on this endeavor. Let the others pitch in, too. That'll make it much more fun — for you!

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is an 8 — Getting what you want is easier in the morning. If you want to talk people into doing things, you'd better do it early. Even you will be more flexible in the morning. Later, you, and everybody else, will be more stuck in your ways.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 5 — Money's on your mind, most likely. It's quite possible you'll be able to make a lot of it, too. Is more education required? Well, that's doable. It may not be easy, but it's certainly possible. Let the hassles motivate you to work harder.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) — Today is a 7 — Where's the money coming from? How are you going to spend it? Will your partner or mate help out? You generally do better when working with a partner, but don't delegate all the responsibility. Keep some of that for yourself. It's good for you.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21) — Today is a 6 — You're going to get stronger as the day and week continue. You may notice changes already. The most intense work phase is giving way to a shared workload. Give somebody else the benefit of your experience.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 7 — Friends and group activities are important early in the day. Meet with your group and figure out what you want to have happen next. Tonight's plans are likely to be thwarted, but don't despair. If you can't get together now, you can later.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 7 — This would be a nice evening to get together with close friends. If they can come to your place, great. If you ask them to bring part of the feast, you're even smarter. You don't want to have even more work to do after a tiring day. Share the load.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 7 — Travel and higher education look good, but not necessarily easy. You need to increase your knowledge in order to be the enormous success you know you can be. That's true even if you already know a lot. There's more out there!

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 6 — Money is your focus. It's a fine day for planning, but not for action. Mechanical breakdowns could make your life difficult. If you can postpone a trip until tomorrow, it'll be much easier. Same thing goes for any other risks you were considering.

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