



## If long spring workdays make the man, then Sox's Flowers will be All-Star

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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If dawn-to-Happy Hour hard work in spring training translated into a real blossoming behind the plate and at bat, then the White Sox's Tyler Flowers will be an All-Star catcher.

For those who believe the old stereotype that spring training is half-vacation for players, where they'd limber up in mid-morning, play half the game and then go out and get in a quick nine holes, they're mistaken.

"I haven't played golf yet," Flowers said with a laugh the other day via phone from Arizona.

In the next few minutes, his description of a player's spring-training work day shows how the diligent ones will have to switch their body clocks from the Dawn Patrol to the night shift soon after they break camp.

"Usually I wake up around 6 (a.m.)," Flowers said. "I have to do a couple of things around the house with the dog (a black Lab) and such. I usually get to the (Glendale) field around 6:30, 6:45. We're allowed into the weight room around 7."



**Tyler Flowers' ability to hit for a respectable average is the only question about his overall game. Photo credit [Keith Allison](#).**

Matt Thornton, a year-round West Valley-area resident, sometimes precedes Flowers

into the Sox facility. Paul Konerko, with a crosstown drive from tony Scottsdale, arrives around the same time. At least Konerko, affectionately called “King” around the clubhouse, has beaten most of the rush-hour traffic.

“Depending upon what workout we’re doing, it’s probably 30 minutes to an hour in the weight room,” Flowers said. “Then I go get dressed and probably hit in the cage a little bit. Go from that, then get a little breakfast real quick. We have a meeting at 9 o’clock and go out to stretch.

“I enjoy it in the morning, not just the benefits of what it will do for you down the road, but also to get your day going. You wake up, you get moving and get the productivity going instead of waking up and sitting around and sitting around. You’d be dragging all day.”

### **No down time if you’re not playing**

If Flowers is not playing and thus going through the usual pre-game batting-practice routing of hitting and fielding drills, then he’ll still get in extra work around the fields. In addition to hitting, Flowers will throw to bases or practice blocking pitches.

“There’s always time when you’re not in a game to get extra work in,” he said. “That’s kind of what they expect you to do.”

Even if Flowers plays four to six innings, he does not leave the ballpark before game’s end. He’ll return to the weight room for “cooldown stuff” and stretching. “It’s a long day, it’s definitely a little more taxing, the longevity of the day,” he said.

In effect, the spring-training routine is often more time-consuming than the regular-season daily schedule.

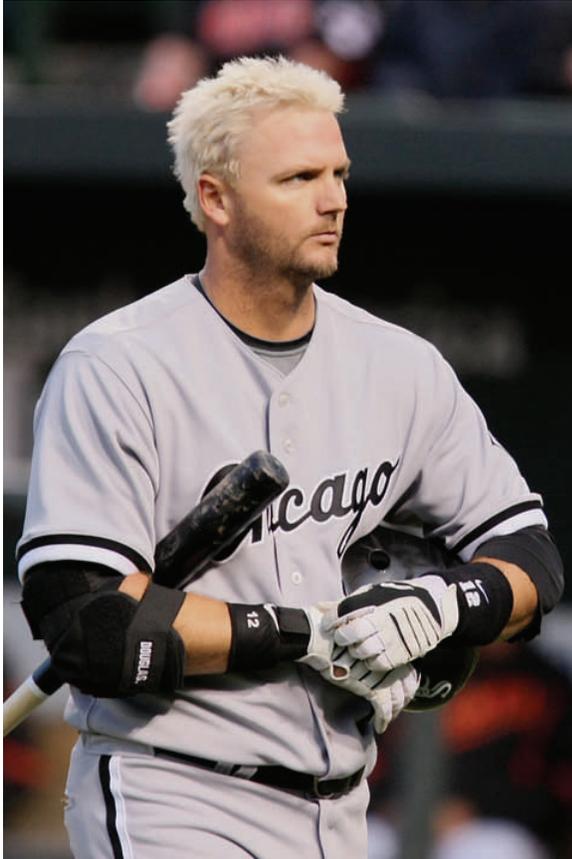
“We kind of transition into it, get out here early and get used to getting up earlier again,” Flowers said. “The first week out here is pitchers and catchers. It’s 9 to 10:30 or 11 o’clock, relatively short days. It’s a nice transition for a guy like me.

“But the position players kind of have it rough. It’s (right) out of the gate.”

### **Spotlight is on as A.J.’s successor**

Flowers had an extra burden anyway coming into camp. All eyes are on him more than any other position player. He’s taken the place of A.J. Pierzynski, as reliable as any Sox after Konerko the past eight seasons.

Sox management knows Flowers can flat-out play defense and handle the pitchers bet-



**A.J. Pierzynski will be the catcher's standard to which Tyler Flowers will be compared – until Flowers establishes himself in his own right.**

times. The trick is practicing what he preaches when he's hitting.

“Man on second, nobody on, you have a pretty good idea or what they're going to try to do,” he said. “They're going to try to get you to try to hit the ball to the left side so you can't get the guy over. They'll try to do it one of two ways. They'll throw you hard inside or soft away to try to get you out in front. Your job is to wait back on the off-speed to try to hit it to the right side to get the guy over, or lay off that fastball's that's too far in that's going to be a real a challenge to hit to the right side.

### **Fear's gotta strike out**

“You can't worry about striking out and all that stuff. I'm just going up there to have a competitive at-bat. If a job needs to be done, I'll do my best to try to get that job done, whether it's laying down a bunt to get the guy to third, or inside-ing out the ball, a ground-ball to first. I'm not afraid to hit it off my fist to hit it to that side.”

ter than Pierzynski, the ultimate agent-provocateur of baseball. But in a lineup that has not replaced Pierzynski's left-handed bat and its 27 homers, Flowers' ability to at least hit his weight (245) to go along with his Adam Dunn-distance power is the big question mark. He has not yet hit better than .213, albeit in limited play, in parts of four big-league seasons.

“Right now, I feel good,” Flowers said. “My goal each time is to have a quality, competitive at-bat. You can't really control getting hits or things like that. I can control my focus and my approach that at-bat.

“(Hitting coach Jeff) Manto and (assistant hitting coach Harold) Baines and I have been working on that. It's been pretty good so far. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens the next few weeks and then get the season going. It's really just locking in each at-bat and sticking with the approach that I think will work against that pitcher that day.”

From the standpoint of a catcher guiding a pitcher through all game situations, Flowers knows what pitches will come at what

Flowers won't be trying to help plug up gaping holes in the staff with his pitch-calling. The Sox arguably have one of the deepest 1-through-12 staffs in the majors. Key components such as Jose Quintana, Addison Reed, Nate Jones and Hector Santiago learned by doing as rookies in 2012, and they'll likely be better for it.

"The young guys have had another year under their belt," Flowers said. "They showed last year they weren't afraid of any situation that came about. Whatever they got into, they were willing to battle out of it. I think we're real happy with what we've got. We've got a couple of options with starters and relievers. We've got a number of guys (citing Nestor Molina and Simon Castro) who've already been sent down who are quality pitchers. They might be called upon to help us throughout the year."

Another top Flowers goal is catching a John Danks who makes all his starts. Danks' health coming back from shoulder surgery seems to be established. Whether he'll have vintage Danks velocity out of the gate is the question that needs to be answered in spring training's home stretch.

"I think (stuff-wise) he's right there," Flowers said. "You have to ignore the stats line in the spring. He's still working on things, trying to get all the mechanics as consistent as they can. Now it's just a matter of fine-tuning things. I know he's feeling healthy and feeling good. He'll get that confidence rolling again like he's starting to get. I think he'll be just fine right back at it."



**Tyler Flowers is optimistic about John Danks, pictured here, regaining his vintage good stuff after recovering from shoulder surgery. Photo credit [Keith Allison](#).**