



All-Star pitcher Johan Santana attends Florida Everblades game

By ANGELA BUSCH

Friday, November 7, 2008

ESTERO — As athletes striving to make it to the big leagues battled on the ice during the Florida Everblades game, a superstar who'd already made it big watched from above.

Two-time American League Cy Young Award winner Johan Santana was in attendance for Friday night's Blades game against Gwinnett. It was his first-ever hockey game.

"These guys are tough," he said. "Even though I'm an athlete, this is totally different for me ... It's nothing like watching (hockey) on TV."

"I can actually see the puck."

Santana decided to come to the Blades game after attending the Luis Miguel concert at Germain Arena on Thursday night. He was announced before the game as "one of baseball's best pitchers."

Santana has been just that over the past four seasons, a three-time all-star who led the American League in strikeouts from 2004-06 and led the National League in ERA last season.

Last season was Santana's first year in the National League after eight seasons with the Twins. He was traded to the New York Mets for three players, and Santana had another Cy Young-caliber season with a career-best 2.53 ERA and 16-7 record.

It was with the Twins that Santana first came to Southwest Florida for spring training, and he came back this offseason despite the fact that the Mets train in Port St. Lucie.

He said he likes the "quietness" of the Southwest Florida area, and his daughter, Jasmily, 6, started school here.

It's also in Southwest Florida that Santana is rehabbing from arthroscopic knee surgery undergone on Oct. 1 to repair torn meniscus in his left knee. He said his physical therapy here is going well.

"I'm going to be getting everything ready in the next couple weeks," Santana said about his rehab. "I'm starting to get the full range of motion back."

That's bad news for Mets opponents next season -- because Santana completed a career year last season while pitching with an injured knee for the final month.

And he said the Blades were tough.

© Naples News