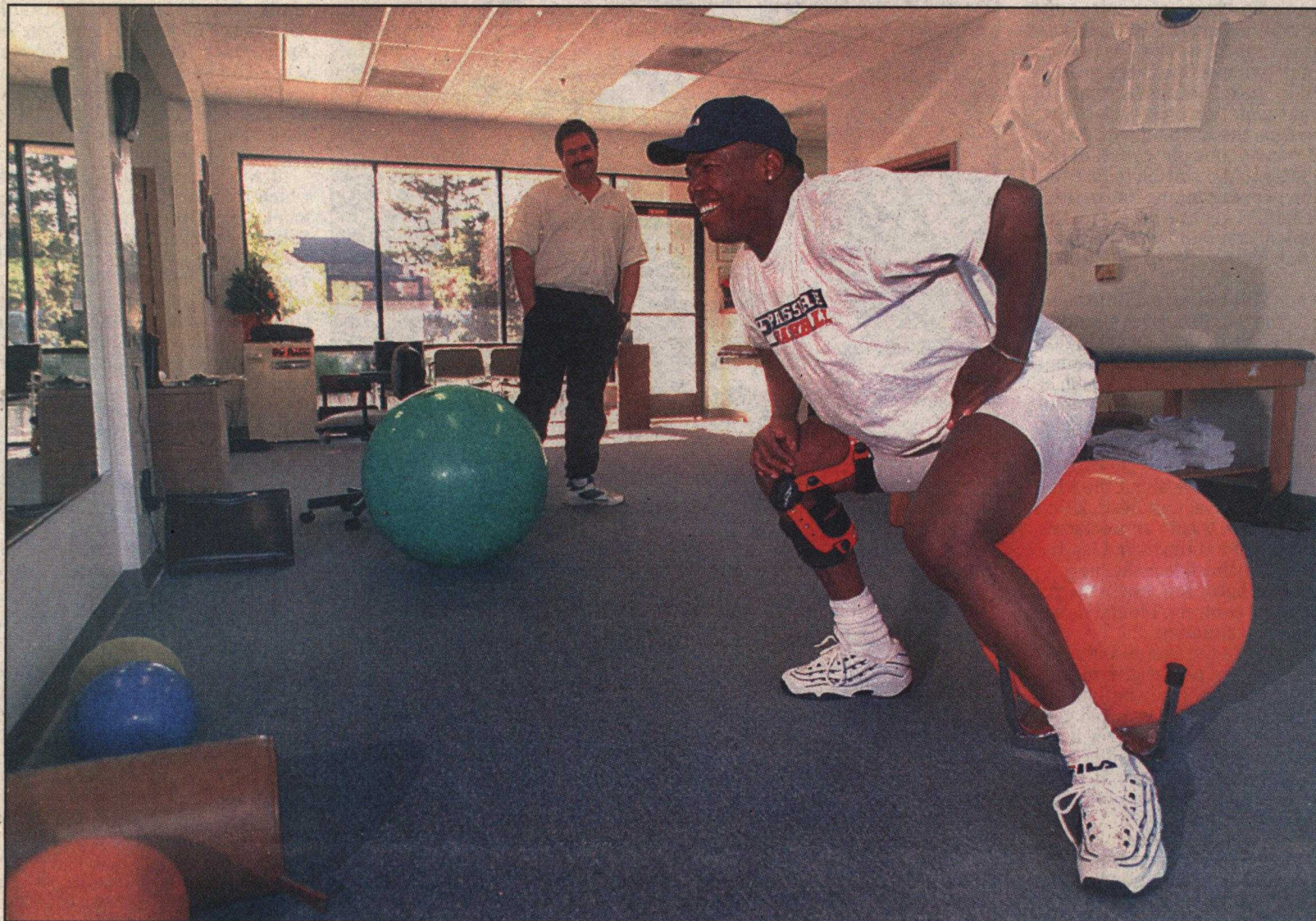


The only label Glenallen Hill thinks he deserves is...

# A true professional



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Glenallen Hill performs physical therapy exercises at Gerry Van Dyke's Coast Rehab in Aptos.

## Hill has persevered, prospered in pro baseball

*Editor's note: This is the ninth in a series of profiles on the Top 10 athletes in Santa Cruz County history, as voted by Sentinel readers*

By **DAVID KIEFER**  
Sentinel assistant sports editor

#2

Santa Cruz County Sentinel's  
**ALL  
CENTURY  
Team**

**GLENALLEN HILL**

**I**N 1989, Glenallen Hill saw something special in a fellow rookie, a young wild-swinging player for the Chicago White Sox.

Hill, of the Toronto Blue Jays, was so impressed with the player's effort that he found him after the game and presented him with three of his own bats.

The player was Sammy Sosa, and that meeting says a lot about the respect and appreciation Hill has for the game of baseball and the men who play it.

"I appreciate guys who are gamers," Hill said. "I didn't know him, but I wanted to let him know I appreciated his energy for the game."

Hill knew from age 10, while growing up on the Santa Cruz Westside, that he was going to be a professional athlete.

He always thought it would be in football. His parents, however, wouldn't let him play, because his older brother, Felton, broke his leg in three places while playing for Cabrillo College.

"Every year I would bring home Pop Warner

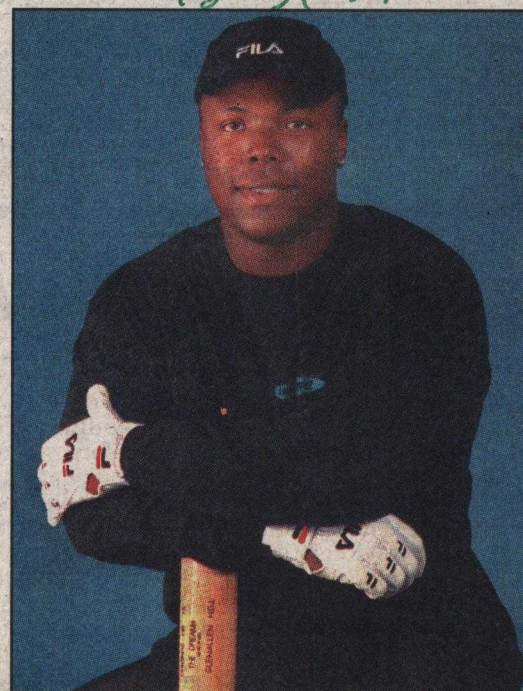
football pads," Hill said. "And I'd always take them back, crying."

Hill said he never considered baseball until fifth grade. He was playing in a youth league basketball game at Mission Hill Junior High when he dived for a loose ball while heading out of bounds and knocked himself out against the wall.

One of his teammates, Bill Domhoff, came to his aid and made sure Hill got home safely. A friendship developed, and it was Domhoff who convinced Hill to join a baseball team.

In two months, he will begin spring training with the Chicago Cubs in preparation for his 12th major-league season.

His friendship with Domhoff had another effect as well. Hill eventually married Domhoff's



Glenallen Hill says he would like to coach someday.

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# Hill

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sister, Lori, his second wife, and they live with their one 1-year-old daughter, Heleyna, in Santa Cruz.

Hill, 34, has two other daughters, Simone, 13, and Chanel, 8, who live in Florida and Hayward, respectively.

His earliest memories are "always having a stick or a ball in my hand," he said. He can remember playing at the Baptist church across the street and hitting a ball over trees and houses.

And he played sandlot football, getting so scared of getting tackled or knocked into a pole that, "I didn't get tackled."

"I've been the fastest guy on every team I've ever played for in sports, even as a professional. Even though I've got bad knees, at times I'm still the fastest."

## Career Highlights

- Minor League Player of the Year for AAA Syracuse team
- First Major League home run was a grand slam that put Toronto in first place
- Ranks second among active players with 10 pinch-hit home runs

When his parents finally allowed him to play football as a Santa Cruz junior, he made the most of it, rushing for 1,165 yards as a tailback in nine games his senior year. Though he earned a football scholarship to Arizona State, Hill turned it down to sign a pro baseball contract in 1983.

Hill was drafted by the Blue Jays in the ninth round after Santa Cruz coaches Bill Dodge and Gary Sakamoto wrote to scouts to take a look. Hill hadn't even made the All-County baseball first team.

"There was no one in my family that knew anything about what being drafted meant," he said. "I had to explain it to them. I was totally naive, totally."

"When you come from a small town and it's a close-knit place, I think a lot of people didn't really recognize what a special athlete I was."

"I was not a person that needed other people to believe in me, but I think when I finally made it to the major leagues, people started to think back and realize what an incredible athlete I was."

Hill was 18 when he was assigned to Toronto's Rookie League team in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada. He had only been out of California twice before, once to Elko, Nevada, for a Colt League tournament, and

once to Louisiana for a family reunion.

"I grew up extremely fast," he said. "I was this little surfer kid from Santa Cruz, who didn't fit the stereotype of a black athlete. I didn't talk with a slang dialect and I didn't have a southern accent. They could not figure me out."

It wouldn't be the first time Hill would be misunderstood or, he believes, mislabeled.

Hill said his career was undermined after a run-in with Triple-A Syracuse manager Bob Bailor, whom Hill thought was losing control of the team.

Hill played his way onto the Toronto roster by being named Minor League Player of the Year after a .321, 21 homer, 72 RBI Class-AAA season in 1989. But he was limited to platooning, a role that's been hard to shake, because, he said, of a bad reputation picked up in Syracuse from the incident with Bailor.

"I was a young player full of life, but after that, I started to lose faith in the people running the system," Hill said. "I get this label that I'm a troublemaker and I've been fighting that stereotype my whole career."

When Hill did earn a full-time job as the San Francisco Giants right fielder in 1995, he again felt he was treated unjustly, by being benched by Dusty Baker, whom he still considers a friend and mentor, for supposed fielding deficiencies in 1997.

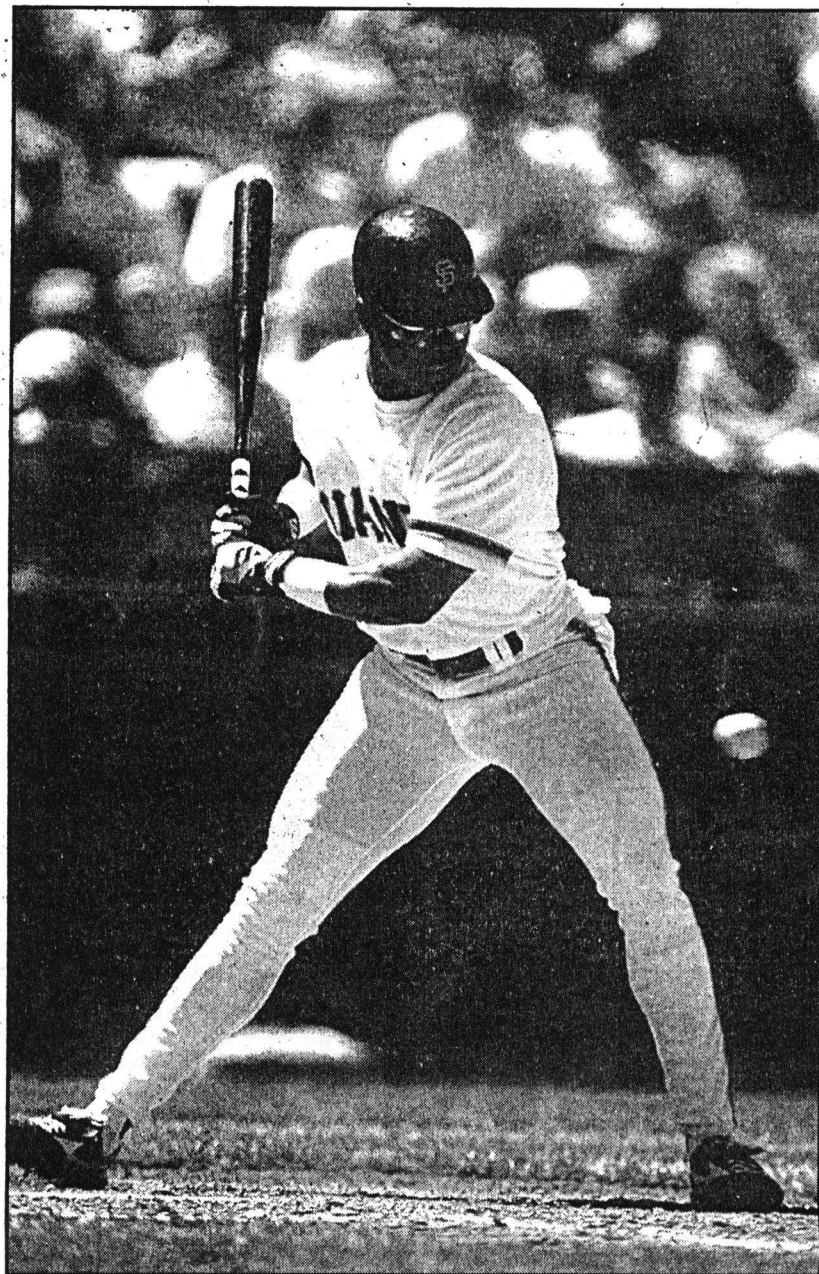
"I took right field by (storm)," he said. "I didn't care about the wind, rain, and cold (at Candlestick Park). But I felt that wasn't appreciated. The issue of fielding is not legitimate. They chose to make me a scapegoat because I was in the final year of my contract. I found myself in a no-win situation."

"I talked to the Giants and asked them, 'Can you please give me a highlight tape of every ball hit to me in right field?' If I sucked as an outfielder, I wanted to know it. I asked for the tape all winter, but they never sent that tape. It solidified the things that I was feeling were not justified."

To Hill's credit, he kept his disappointment to himself, and refused to let it be a distraction to the team, which would go on to win a National League West Division title.

"I was told I could win my job back, but I hit .318 the rest of the season with no job back," Hill said. "But one thing it taught me, is how to come off the bench and play. I think I became the best fourth outfielder in baseball and I take pride in saying that."

A power-hitting outfielder, Hill (6-foot-3, 236 pounds), has a career batting average of .271, with 158 home runs and 526 runs-batted-in



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file photo

Glenallen Hill said he was mislabeled as a poor outfielder by manager Dusty Baker of the San Francisco Giants.

in 1,042 games, but has never had 500 at-bats in a season, and realized he will end his career as a role player.

After eight pinch-hit homers — the most in club history — in two seasons with the Cubs, Hill recently signed a one-year contract with a club option for 2001.

"I'm not a platoon player because I can hit right-handers and left-handers equally," he said. "That's why I'm so valuable."

Hill, a right-handed batter, hit .300 in 253 at-bats last season, going 8-for-11 off Arizona flamethrower Randy Johnson and had five game-winning RBIs.

But after four knee surgeries, Hill can see the end of his playing career. After his contract runs out, he would like to remain in the game as a major-league coach, or perhaps even a Santa Cruz High one.

Hill has come to grips with not

having the career that he believes he was capable of, but he hasn't let his disappointment affect his demeanor in the clubhouse, where he is a valued and trusted player.

He said he learned how to be a team player from Robby Thompson, his Giants' teammate.

"He was a true professional," Hill said. "He touched my life. He had the most influence any player had on me. He knew how to win the respect of his teammates."

When Hill left the Giants, Barry Bonds called his loss the toughest thing for the team to overcome as it attempted to win a second consecutive division title. Hill appreciated that.

He hopes he will be remembered in the same manner.

"What I want most of all is for people I played with to say that I was the greatest teammate they ever had," he said.