

## Swisher back with Indians following funeral

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By TOM WITHERS

The Associated Press

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — For Nick Swisher, being back among his new teammates brought comfort after a few difficult days.

Swisher returned to spring training camp with the Cleveland Indians on Sunday after leaving the team to attend his mother's funeral in Ohio. The Indians weren't sure when Swisher would be back and his arrival was a welcome sight to them — and just what he needed.

"It's nice to get around the guys, man," Swisher said. "It takes your mind off stuff. ... It's nice to go back home and see everybody. It's such a bad time. But it's nice to be back here doing what I love, just getting back in my routine."

Swisher left the Indians last week following the passing of his mother, Lillian Marie Malizia, who died in Columbus, Ohio, following a second battle with leukemia. She was 63.

As he took batting practice under a cloudless Arizona sky, Swisher smiled, laughed and joked around with other players near the cage. The Indians signed the 32-year-old to a 4-year, \$56 million contract this winter. He missed the club's first full-squad workout on Friday as well as Saturday's practice; manager Terry Francona wasn't counting on him being back so soon.

But Swisher was at the team's training complex on Sunday morning ready to go.

"I didn't even want to call to check and see when he was coming back," Francona said. "We

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were trying to prepare for the day. I told (hitting coach Ty Van Burkleo), 'If he's here, he's here. If he's not, he's not.' You've got to take care of what you've got to take care of. But there's a little different vibe when he's around and I mean that in a really positive way."

Swisher batted .272 with 24 homers and 93 RBIs for the Yankees last season. He played mostly in the outfield for New York but he'll be Cleveland's primary first baseman. The Indians signed free agent Michael Bourn last week to a 4-year, \$48 million contract and will play him in center field with Drew Stubbs in right and Michael Brantley in left.

Swisher didn't offer many details about his mother's passing and added he was anxious to return to some sense of normalcy.

"The last thing I want to do is bring any more attention to this situation that what has to be," he said. "It was nice. It was good to go home. The service was beautiful. We've just got to move on. We've got to do our grieving and just move on."

Notes: Francona was hoping to speak with Team USA manager Joe Torre and Team USA pitching coach Greg Maddux about possibly getting relievers Chris Perez and Vinnie Pestano to pitch during a spring training game during their first week of training for the World Baseball Classic. ... Francona loves to get on the field during workouts. On Friday, he caught — he's a left-hander — during a drill with infielders and pitchers. On Sunday, he pitched some batting practice. \_\_PUBLIC\_\_