

New mouthguard suits slugger

By MICHAEL SILVERMAN

RED SOX NOTEBOOK

It's not a tobacco pouch, a bag of sunflower seeds or a pack of bubble gum, but sitting in a "D"-shaped container in **Manny Ramirez'** left back pocket is a little device that the Red Sox slugger has been popping into his mouth before at-bats this season.

It is a high-tech mouthpiece — a Pure Power Mouthguard, to be precise — that Ramirez uses to help relax his jaw, neck and head muscles as he swings his bat. The theory behind the device is, according to Dr. **Steven Bader** of Ultimate Aesthetics in Newton and a representative for its maker, that when the muscles of the head and neck are relaxed to the point where the lower jaw position can be measured, "you can create a bite that improves strength, balance and flexibility."

Perhaps there is a link between the mouthguard and the .888 OPS Ramirez carried into last night's game.

Ramirez can wax poetic about mantra yoga, but when it comes to putting into words his inimitable approach to (and success with) hitting, he can clam up, deflect or simply not be his most articulate self.

"I love it," he said yesterday of his mouthguard.

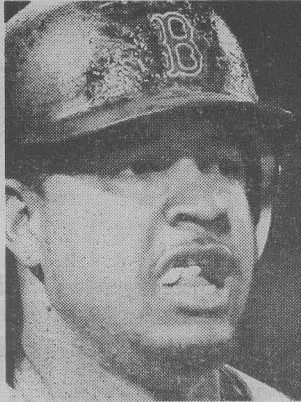
Asked why, he paused, put on a goofy grin and said, "Because it helps me stop chewing."

OK, now really, why would he want to stop doing that?

"Because I've got kids."

Ramirez may not want to get into the details, but he sat through an approximately 45-minute fitting session in Fort Myers this spring training in which an electronic device was fitted on the outside of his jaw area to get the muscles to fully relax. Then, his jaw could be opened to its fully relaxed position, allowing an impression to be made that was ultimately converted into his mouthpiece, which, when he bites on it, keeps his jaw in the relaxed position.

"It's a great tool. A lot of guys carry tension in their heads and neck," said **Paul Lessard**, Red Sox head athletic trainer. "If your head and neck are more relaxed,



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT STONE

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON:
Slumping Sox slugger **Manny Ramirez** adjusts his mouthguard last night.

you should produce more power."

Other players have been fitted for the device. Closer **Jonathan Papelbon** is such a teeth grinder that he gets debilitating migraines. He began using a mouthguard at night, which worked wonders, and he also uses another one during the day occasionally to keep him from grinding his teeth, said Lessard.

The mouthguard obviously is not slump-proof. Last night Ramirez went 0-for-3, and in the first six games of this homestand he is 2-for-18 with just one RBI and two walks. He is still stuck on home run No. 498, and has just two home runs in his last 27 games. His 28 RBI are third on the team, four ahead of **Dustin Pedroia**.

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