

Hammerin' Hank All Set to Nail R. I. P. Sign on The Hat's Shift

By WAYNE MINSHEW

ATLANTA, Ga.

If Pirate Skipper Harry Walker and other National League managers plan another "Aaron Shift" next season, they're in for a rude awakening.

The Braves' Hank Aaron was here to talk contract the other day, and he obviously didn't like the fact that his average dipped to a career low of .279 last campaign, although he led the league with 44 homers and 127 runs batted in.

"I'm going back to my old style of hitting," said Aaron. "Last season, I'd made up my mind I was going to lead the league in home runs and I tried to pull each pitch.

"Now, I'm going to hit the ball where it's pitched and try to mess up that Walker a little bit. I want to get my average back up there."

While Hammerin' Hank got his share of homers, his pulling tactics actually worked against him in the long run, because it wasn't far into the season before every opposing pitcher was throwing the great right fielder nothing but outside pitches, which he tried to pull, often with negative results.

"I can remember only two balls I hit to the right side of second base last season," said Aaron. "One was a home run off Sandy Koufax' change-up in Los Angeles, and the other was off Bob Gibson of the Cardinals in Atlanta."

Hank Tells of Leg Injury

Aaron, ready to begin his fourteenth season with the Braves, also revealed for the first time a leg injury suffered in an early-season charity exhibition game here against the Twins.

"As you probably remember, it was raining some that night and the field was slippery. I pulled something behind my right knee and it never felt the same the rest of the year. I just couldn't get that quick start you need to beat out the leg hits."

Why didn't he say something about it earlier?

"I didn't want to allbit," said Aaron, who obviously has never needed a crutch.

At any rate, Aaron's 1966 figures are still mighty impressive, and he admits he's expecting a salary raise.

"I think I deserve one," he said. "I've been up here 13 seasons now and have never had a bad year. But we're not too far apart now; we'll be all right."

He expects to sign in time to be at spring training by March 1. After a winter of playing handball, Aaron appears physically fit.

"I'm ready to go right now," he said, grinning.

Aaron to Miss Eddie

Aaron, of course, was half of baseball's greatest home-run-hitting duo which has been diminished by one since the end of last season with the recent controversial trade of Eddie Mathews to the Astros.

"I'm going to miss Eddie," admitted Aaron. "We were more than just teammates. He was a guy I could communicate with."

"We helped each other, I think. The competition between us was good for both of us. I think I helped make Eddie a better ball player, and he made me a better player."

"But I think we have a good club, and we could just win this thing."

If the Braves don't win, Aaron likes the chances of the Giants, then the Pirates.

"San Francisco is the club that's

Right Off the Dome

"LETTERS FROM LEFTY"

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Blanchard Can't Resist Old Urge—He'll Rejoin Braves

ATLANTA, Ga.—You can take John Blanchard out of baseball, but you can't take baseball out of John Blanchard.

At least that's how Blanchard himself explains it, and he'll attempt a comeback with the Braves next season after a brief one-year retirement from the game.

"After you've spent as many years as I have in the game, you really miss it," said Blanchard. "I'll be at spring training with the Braves, and I just hope I can make the club."

Blanchard, now 33, made a name for himself in 1961 with the Yankees, batting .305 with 21 homers and 54 runs batted in. He was a pinch-hitter of some magnitude that year and helped the Yankees to an American League pennant and a World Series victory over the Reds.

Subsequently, he was traded to the Athletics and on September 9, 1965, was purchased by the Braves, with whom he played ten games, collected one hit—a home run—and batted .100.

"I'm glad to see John's coming back," said Braves' Manager Billy Hitchcock. "He'll help us. We'll use him primarily as a catcher, but he's played some outfield and first base and you know what kind of pinch-hitter he is."

The Braves can also use Blanchard's lefty bat in the lineup, for Mack Jones is the lone regular at the moment who bats from the portside.

going to be tough," he said. "Since Koufax retired, you can kinda eliminate the Dodgers. It was a struggle for them, even with Koufax."

Braves' Bunts: The Braves' caravan, which will visit 22 southeastern cities before spring training, is rated another big success. With Joe Torre, Pat Jarvis, Clay Carroll, Mack Jones and a couple of others making most of the trips, the Braves are greeted enthusiastically wherever they appear. . . . Paul Richards, the new vice-president of baseball operations, was introduced by Chairman of the Board Bill Bartholomay to a meeting of stockholders as "the man who will be responsible for bringing our first pennant here in Atlanta." . . . A group of 14 officers was accepted by stockholders, including Bartholomay, who remains chairman of the board and who will assume presidential duties from departing John McHale. . . . Bartholomay called 1966 a "successful year financially (the club showed a profit of almost \$1 million), but rather disappointing artistically. It is not a happy day," he said, "to awaken on July 27 and find yourself below the Mets in the standings." . . . Renovations are under way on the playing surface of Atlanta Stadium, and Bartholomay said, "It will take a monsoon to rain us out next season." . . . Lefty pitcher Herb Hippauf, with the club briefly last season, has decided to retire at 26.



Hank Aaron



THE BRAVES got a head start on knocking off the birds, the flying species, that is, not the Cardinals, when Manager Billy Hitchcock, coach Whit Wyatt and infielder Denis Menke visited the Callaway Gardens Hunting Preserve in Georgia.

Morgan's Hoping Deeds Will Back A Bold Forecast

By JOHN WILSON

HOUSTON, Tex.

The Johnson administration people aren't the only ones thinking about the credibility gap.

Joe Morgan doesn't want to create one of his own.

"If we don't finish in the first division, I'm going to be in trouble," the Astros' second baseman said. "I've told too many people at home that we're going to move up," he explained. "Now we've got to do it."

Joe came to Houston for the annual baseball dinner and to join a group of Astro tub-thumpers on a good-will tour. He has spent the winter at his Oakland home, whiling away the time trap-shooting, hunting, playing billiards, golf and basketball.

"It's my last winter as a free man," Joe said in excuse of his luxurious existence. Another thing Morgan did in the winter was get engaged to his high school sweetheart, Gloria Stewart.

They will marry some time this spring.

Joe also has been working out some and doing a lot of thinking about baseball. He has been running under the advice of his high school coach, Nick Garedakis of Oakland's Castleman High.

Striving for More Speed

"I'm trying to increase my speed," Morgan explained. "I'm trying to get track man muscles in my legs, rather than bulky ones like I've had."

Joe is certain he has fully recovered from the broken knee cap he suffered when hit by a batted ball last June 25. Although he played the last two months of the season, he never fully regained the form of the first part of the year.

"I played basketball twice a week and it never bothered me at all," Morgan explained. With spring training so near, Joe has quit basketball so as not to take any chances on getting hurt.

In last year's pre-season evaluations of the Astros, speed on the bases was figured as one of the team's chief assets.

Shortstop Sonny Jackson exceeded all expectations, stealing 49 bases, ranking second in the league. But Jim Wynn, who had pilfered 43 bases the year before, stole only 13. Morgan stole 11, nine fewer than in his freshman season.

Morgan missed nearly six weeks, of course, and Wynn missed more



Joe Morgan

than two months after crashing into a fence. Still, they hadn't been as big threats on the bases as had been hoped.

"I know Jim is going to steal more bases this year," Morgan said. "He has to; he's just too good a runner not to. And I think I can do better. That's why I've been working on my running this winter."

Joe also has been thinking about hitting and fielding. The fact is, Morgan probably spends more time thinking about baseball than any other Astro. Some players believe it hurts their playing to think about the game too much.

Joe Always Thinking

Morgan is just the opposite. He believes he must think things out and prepare his mind for right thinking on the field.

In effect, Joe feeds his mind information, the same as a computer is programmed.

He came to spring training last year saying he was not going to swing for home runs but was going to hit for average.

He explained he had been thinking about it all winter.

And he never wavered from the resolve. Morgan was hitting .315 when he was struck on the knee, June 25.

When he got back in the lineup, he had lost a little of his timing and a little of his speed and finished the season at .285.

Morgan is a little embarrassed that he made 21 errors last year. He is positive he can improve on that.

"I went the first two weeks without making an error," he recalled. "Then I made one on a soft liner. Later I started picking up bad habits. I made a lot of the errors by catching the ball when it got to me rather than me playing the bounce I wanted."

Morgan admitted he doesn't figure out everything he does wrong himself.

"Foxy talks to me about things," he explained, referring to Houston coach Nellie Fox. When Foxy tells him, Joe programs the information in his mind.



'30' on No. 41

Braves Place Eddie's No. 41 In Moth Balls

By WAYNE MINSHEW

ATLANTA, Ga.

No Brave will ever wear shirt No. 41 again. Eddie Mathews' old number has been permanently retired.

That step was taken at a meeting of club stockholders at Atlanta Stadium, January 19. Chairman of the Board Bill Bartholomay read a resolution that Mathews' number be retired, and it was carried unanimously.

"Eddie was a great player for the Braves for a long time," said Bartholomay. "He was truly a super-star."

Mathews was traded recently by the Braves to the Astros, along with pitcher Arnie Umbach, for pitcher Bob Bruce and outfielder Dave Nicholson. The deal provoked much controversy by the way it was handled (Mathews was told by a sports writer) and by ensuing happenings (a letter of apology was addressed to "Edward" Mathews instead of Edwin).

Plenty of Publicity

"Eddie's departure created a lot of publicity. This happens when you trade a super-star," said Bartholomay.

"But the policy of our operation is we will do things that aren't immediately popular that will help our ball club in the long run. The Mathews trade is in this category."

The Braves' principal owner said further: "I believe we have taken steps to strengthen what we already felt was a good club. We will be as good as our young pitchers will carry us."

Later, Paul Richards, vice-president of baseball operations, gave Braves' fans new hope with an optimistic report about two of the club's better youthful hurlers, Pat Jarvis and Dick Kelley.

"People have been asking me about Jarvis and Kelley," said Richards. "They want to know if they can repeat. Well, I'm looking for them to improve. I think Kelley and Jarvis did it last year with good stuff and good pitching."

Jarvis had a 6-2 won-lost mark—most of it coming late in the season—and Kelley was 7-5.

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Chances of Overtaking Babe Better Than Even, Says Hank

By WAYNE MINSHEW

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—Babe Ruth's magnetism—they call it charisma now—still lives.

The Braves' Hank Aaron is made aware of the fact by fan letters from people, most of them old-timers, who request that Aaron not challenge Ruth's record of 714 career homers.

"I've gotten them," said Aaron, "and quite a few, too. They're not vicious or anything like that. The people who write the letters just don't want Babe Ruth's record to be destroyed."

"They don't want anybody to bother Ruth's record."

And what about Hank Aaron? Is it possible he could be reached by sentiment?

"I think," he said, grinning, "that it would be a helluva thing if I could break the record."

Plenty of baseball observers give the Braves' star the best chance among present players to outdistance the Babe's long-standing mark, a record many have considered to be unreachable.

Aaron's chances have been talked up ever since he went over the 500-homer plateau during the 1968 campaign. Now with 592, he is expected to soar past 600 early this season. He needs 122 to tie Ruth.

Aaron Is Optimistic

Also, Aaron has helped add fuel himself by saying he thinks his chances are good to accomplish the feat.

Actually, he only began to think about Babe Ruth after he collected his 3,000th hit last season at Cincinnati, that being his most coveted goal all during his productive career with the Braves.

Talk of Hammerin' Hank overtaking the Babe has had far-reaching effects . . . all the way to Las Vegas, where they'll take or give odds on just about anything one would care to lay a buck on.

Thus an Atlanta newspaper asked Jimmy (The Greek) Snyder to determine the odds on Aaron's chances and even found him to be a sentimentalist where Babe Ruth is concerned.

"I hope nobody does," said long-time baseball fan Snyder. "But I'd say Aaron has an even chance of doing it."

Snyder took into consideration Aaron's age, 37, and the parks in which he plays, especially his home playground, Atlanta Stadium, in

which home-run hitting is conducive.

Aaron was asked about Snyder's odds.

"Well, let me put it this way," he said. "If all goes well and I stay healthy, I think my chances are better than even."

The Braves' slugger, however, apparently does not like the full attention where the subject of catching or overtaking Ruth is concerned.

"I think Willie has a good chance," he said, "if he wants to hang around long enough."

He meant the Giants' Willie Mays, who will enter the coming season with a total of 628 homers, but who is 40 years old. Mays and Aaron spent much of the winter telling newsmen the other guy has the better chance.

"I don't dwell on it," said Aaron, who will talk about personal milestones only when pressed. "But if I stay around and stay healthy I think I have a good chance."

Somebody figured Aaron can pass Ruth if he averages 30.5 homers over the next five seasons. That means



Hank Aaron

he would be 41 when he does it. Will he still be slugging at that age?

"If Willie can play until he's over 40 in San Francisco, where it's windy and chilly, I certainly can play when I'm 40 in Atlanta," said Aaron.

Hammerin' Hank concedes he is in a good park to achieve the record.

"It's took me only around two and one-half years, I think, to hit over 100 homers in Atlanta," he said, "so you can see it's a good park for me."

And for those worried about Ruth's image, Aaron says forget it.

Babe's Place Secure

"I don't really think anybody ever would take his place," said Aaron. "Even if he was passed, he still would be looked upon as the greatest home-run hitter. He did so many things to remember . . . like the time he pointed and hit the homer off Charlie Root in the World Series."

Aaron smiled. "I'd like to do that sometime," he said.

"But even if I should break it," continued the man many consider to be the best righthanded hitter since Rogers Hornsby, "I'd look for somebody to break mine."

Wigwam Wisps: Ralph (Road Runner) Garr was an early camp sensation with the bat, and the speedster was successful on his first four stolen-base attempts. . . . Felix Millan has been bothered with a sore arm. . . . Sonny Jackson has been impressive in center field, especially at utilizing his speed to cut off drives hit in the alleys. . . . Comebacking Cecil Upshaw, who missed last season because of a finger injury, said, "My fast ball is as good as it ever was, but my breaking stuff isn't sharp yet." . . . Steve Barber, who once won 20 at Baltimore, also has turned some heads in early outings. Barber was credited with both of the Braves' first two Grapefruit League wins. . . . Marty Perez, who is getting the first crack at the shortstop position, booted the first two balls hit to him, but has performed well since. . . . The Braves' traveling secretary, Don Davidson, and PGA golfer Ken Still are close friends. But when Still looked up at the recent PGA tournament here and saw the 4-2 Davidson following his action, he cracked, "Well, what do you know, I have half a gallery." . . . Jim Nash and Cecil Upshaw are writing columns for their hometown papers this spring.

Orlando Has No Grudge, No Worries

By WAYNE MINSHEW

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—Orlando Cepeda was the last Braves' regular to sign this spring but, upon reporting at camp, showed no visible scars from contract hassles with Paul Richards.

In fact, he was perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones, including winter-long trade rumors.

First, Cepeda talked of his contract difficulties and denied he ever requested a two-year pact as reports from Puerto Rico said he had.

"I'm used to all this now," he said of his tough negotiations with Richards. "I'm like Billy Graham . . . I never hold a grudge. What's done is done. Now, let's see what we can do on the field . . . I think we're gonna have a good club."

Cepeda is coming off one of his best years. He batted .304 with 34 homers and 111 RBIs last year, then spent the winter hearing rumors he would be traded away from the Braves.

The rumors failed to disturb the righthanded slugger. "They didn't bother me at all," he said. "No matter where I play, I have to do my job."

"I can't anticipate such things, so why worry about a trade? I could worry for three months and it not happen, which, of course, it did not."

"So why worry? Life is too short to worry about

small things. I don't want to be traded because Atlanta is a great city, and I enjoy playing there. But if they do trade me, they trade me, that's all."

Meanwhile, if his physical appearance is indicative, Cepeda is set for another productive year.

"I worked hard all winter," said the former Giant and Cardinal who became a Brave in 1969 when he came from St. Louis for Joe Torre. "As soon as I got home to Puerto Rico, I played basketball every day."

Plenty of Running

"We played three-on-three, half court. It was just fun stuff, but I got in a lot of running and stayed in shape."

Meanwhile, Cepeda is sorry about what happened to his buddy, Rico Carty, over the winter. Carty seriously injured his left knee in a Dominican League game, which gives him something in common with Cepeda.

Cha Cha suffered a severe knee injury in 1965. He worked with weights, ran extensively and visited doctors daily following surgery and made a successful comeback.

Advice for Carty? "Yes," said Cepeda. "Work, work, work. That is the only way."

AstroTurf Notes

Mod Sod Is In

by DAN BISHOP



Opening Day, which has the most exciting sound in baseball lexicon, is only a flip of the calendar away. That thrilling moment, which stirs the imagination and starts the adrenalin pumping in baseball fans throughout the land, takes on special significance this year.

* * *

Six major league teams—the Houston Astros, St. Louis Cardinals, Cincinnati Reds, San Francisco Giants and Philadelphia Phillies, in the National League, and the Chicago White Sox, in the American League—will be performing on sparkling green AstroTurf, which provides consistent playing characteristics without changing the complexion of the game.

* * *

The very first AstroTurf installation was in Houston's fabled Astrodome in 1966. Now, one-fourth of all the major league teams enjoy AstroTurf's advantages: uniform surface, all-weather field, great traction and impact absorption, all-day usability and easy maintenance.

* * *

The Astrodome, the world's first air-conditioned, all-purpose, domed stadium, was completed in 1965 at a cost of \$31,600,000, including access roads and parking. It has a seating capacity of 45,000 for baseball and 52,000 for football.

* * *

Philadelphia's Veterans Stadium, newest in the majors and the largest in the National League, is to be dedicated in April. The fourth stadium in Phillies' history was constructed at a cost of \$45,000,000. It will seat 56,371 for baseball and 65,000 when converted for football. The AstroTurf playing surface will be similar to that at Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati, with a solid synthetic infield except for sliding boxes at each base and circular skinned areas at the pitcher's mound and home plate.

* * *

Candlestick Park in San Francisco, where AstroTurf was installed prior to the 1970 season, currently is the scene of a multi-million dollar renovation program that will boost seating capacity to 54,000 for baseball and more than 60,000 for football. When the Giants played their first game at Candlestick April 12, 1960, it had a capacity of 42,500.

* * *

Busch Memorial Stadium, focal point in the redevelopment of downtown St. Louis, was dedicated by the Cardinals May 12, 1966, as the first phase of a \$51,000,000 improvement program undertaken by Civic Center Redevelopment Corp. Four years later, AstroTurf was installed in the St. Louis showplace, which seats 50,126 for baseball and 50,492 for football.

* * *

Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati, opened June 30, 1970, has a unique distinction. This \$45,000,000 dual-purpose installation may be the only stadium ever to play host to the All-Star Game, league championship series and World Series in its first season. Erected on a 48-acre site in downtown Cincinnati, it seats 51,744 for baseball, 56,200 for football and was the first outdoor major league stadium to feature a complete AstroTurf playing surface.

* * *

White Sox Park, which traces its history to July 1, 1910, saw the very first outdoor installation of AstroTurf in the major leagues. AstroTurf was laid on the infield for the start of the 1969 season. About six blocks away from the White Sox' present 46,550-seat stadium is the site of old Comiskey Park, at 39th street and Wentworth avenue, where the American League's first game was played April 24, 1901. That Opening Day program was strictly a Chicago-Cleveland affair because three of the scheduled inaugurals were rained out.

* * *

Cincinnati and Philadelphia also are rich in Opening Day history. Cincinnati, birthplace of the first professional team in 1869, has enjoyed the privilege of opening in its home park every year while the other N. L. clubs alternate. For the Good Burghers of Rhineland, Opening Day is like the Mardi Gras.

* * *

Philadelphia provided the setting for the first game ever played in the N. L. Boston defeated Philadelphia, 6-5, April 22, 1876, three days before the other pioneer teams swung into action.

AstroTurf

SURFACES BY **Monsanto**