



Tony Armas . . . Moments of glory.

# 'Tony, Tony, Tony'— Fans Flip Over Armas

By KIT STIER

OAKLAND—The left field scoreboard at the Oakland Coliseum, working for the first time in recent memory, flashed the words in huge letters: "Tony, Tony, Tony!"

And as the scoreboard illuminated the chilly night, 50,255 A's fans chanted in unison: "Tony, Tony, Tony!"

Tony Armas couldn't believe his ears. He had stepped out for curtain calls many times in his native Venezuela, where he is a national hero. But never before had the soft-spoken outfielder been beckoned for a standing ovation in the United States.

But Armas had earned his moment of glory.

It was the A's home opener and the largest crowd in Oakland baseball history had gathered for a celebration. Armas was the hit of the party.

In the second inning the right fielder bashed his fifth home run of the season, a two-run job, among the delirious fans in the left field bleachers.

But it was Armas' three-run homer, to almost the same location, in Oakland's six-run seventh inning that had the crowd calling for him.

After the first ovation subsided, the crowd yelled for more. Once again Armas stepped from the dugout and tipped his hat to the happy throng.

It was an iron-arm pitching staff that grabbed most of the headlines as the A's swept through the first two weeks of the season. But it was Armas who provided most of the puzgch that enabled the team to set a major league record by winning its first 11 games.

He won American League Player of the Week honors twice in succession and had smacked 26 hits, including six home runs, six doubles and 22 RBIs in the A's first 18 games. Five of his hits were game winners.

All this from a guy who hit .182 during the spring and had no home runs.

"Right now the ball is looking a little bigger," said Armas in the A's clubhouse after the opener. "I still can't believe I'm hitting it so good."

The double encore also left Armas in a state of elated

shock.

"I believe it now because I saw it," he said. "That made me so happy when they called me out. It happened in Venezuela, but never here. I'm having a good time."

Armas, who played winter ball in Venezuela, said that a poor spring training didn't concern him. He figured there were a lot of pitchers in Arizona trying to earn big league jobs and that it wasn't worth sticking his neck out just for a few meaningless hits.

Armas hit 35 home runs and drove in 109 runs last season, but he didn't hit his sixth homer until his 28th game, and it took him 18 games to drive in 11 runs.

The two-homer night was a happy one for Armas, but the clout most important to him came in Anaheim on April 15.

The California Angels held a 3-0 lead entering the eighth inning. The A's scored one run and had two runners on when Armas stepped to the plate to face lefthander Andy Hassler.

Armas drilled a 1-0 pitch over the center field fence, and the A's held on to win, 5-3.

Armas was happy to have his third game-winning hit in three nights, and totally surprised that California Manager Jim Fregosi left Hassler on the mound when he had Don Aase and Steve Renko, both righthanders, sitting in the bullpen.

It may be time for all to realize that Antonio Rafael Armas, one of 14 children in a family from Anzoategui, Venezuela, is for real. He logged his fifth game-winning hit of the season when he singled with the bases loaded in the 10th inning to beat Minnesota, 4-3, April 21.

Also for real is the pitching staff that threw four shut-outs and 15 complete games in its first 18 outings. The staff earned-run average was 1.66.

A's Acorns: Center fielder Dwayne Murphy stole two home runs from the Angels in Anaheim. One was a spectacular leaping catch that no one in the park thought he could make. The very next night, Angels rookie Tom Brunansky drilled a high line drive to center. Murphy raced back, left his feet and fell to the ground. At about the time Brunansky was approaching third base in his home run trot, Murphy collected his cap and casually flipped the ball back to the umpire. The catch astonished 27,697 fans in Anaheim Stadium.

Second baseman Brian Doyle suffered a pulled hamstring in his left leg at Anaheim and was out of the lineup, enabling rookie Shooty Babitt, like Manager Billy Martin a native of Berkeley, to play every day. Babitt hit safely in eight of his first nine games. . . . Four A's were named to the All-Star ballot. They were outfielders Armas, Murphy and Rickey Henderson and third baseman Wayne Gross.

## Fast-Moving A's Taking Bay by Storm

(Continued From Page 3)

Music pumps you up, makes everybody feel better."

When a product is developed, the next step is to market it: something that Finley never appeared to understand. Two months before the start of the season, more than 30 representatives of the A's were knocking on the doors of business houses. They sold 3,500 season tickets, compared to the club's total of 75 a year ago.

Then, the club acquired a bona fide radio outlet. No longer must fans climb to the top of a tree to hear games. The San Francisco station has network affiliates throughout northern and central California.

Team President Roy Eisenhardt also thought it would be a good idea if some of the games were broadcast in Spanish. All home games and those in Anaheim and Seattle will be aired for the area's large Spanish speaking population.

There are advertising spots on the radio, on television and on billboards.

For their first six home dates, against Seattle and Minnesota, the A's drew crowds of 50,255, 20,131 (in a drizzling rain), 29,834 (Cap Day doubleheader), 22,141, 10,939 and 16,573 on a Wednesday afternoon. Such figures are unheard of in Oakland.

After the opener, a 16-1 rout of Seattle that included five home runs, Henderson enthused:

"A crowd like that makes you feel like you can do anything you want to do. That's what happened tonight."

That's what happened the first three weeks of the season as the A's roared to a 17-1 record, including a major-league record 11 straight wins at the beginning of the season. It was not yet determined if the 17-1 getaway was the hottest start in major league history. Other fast starts included 14-1 by the 1966 Cleveland Indians and 22-2 by the 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers. Those clubs, plus the 1962 Pittsburgh Pirates, had shared the mark of 10 consecutive games won at the start of a season (since 1900).

"The one thing that stood out was the fans," said Cliff Johnson, a newcomer from the Chicago Cubs. "Fan enthusiasm in this area is supposed to be poor. But the way we turned them on set the stage for the future."

Shooty Babitt, a rookie second baseman from Berkeley, bought 40 tickets for the opener so his family and friends could be part of the party.

"I felt like I was playing in the air the whole game," said Babitt.

A's pitchers had registered 15 complete games in the first 18. Right fielder Tony Armas had six home runs, drove in 22 runs and had five game-winning hits in that span.

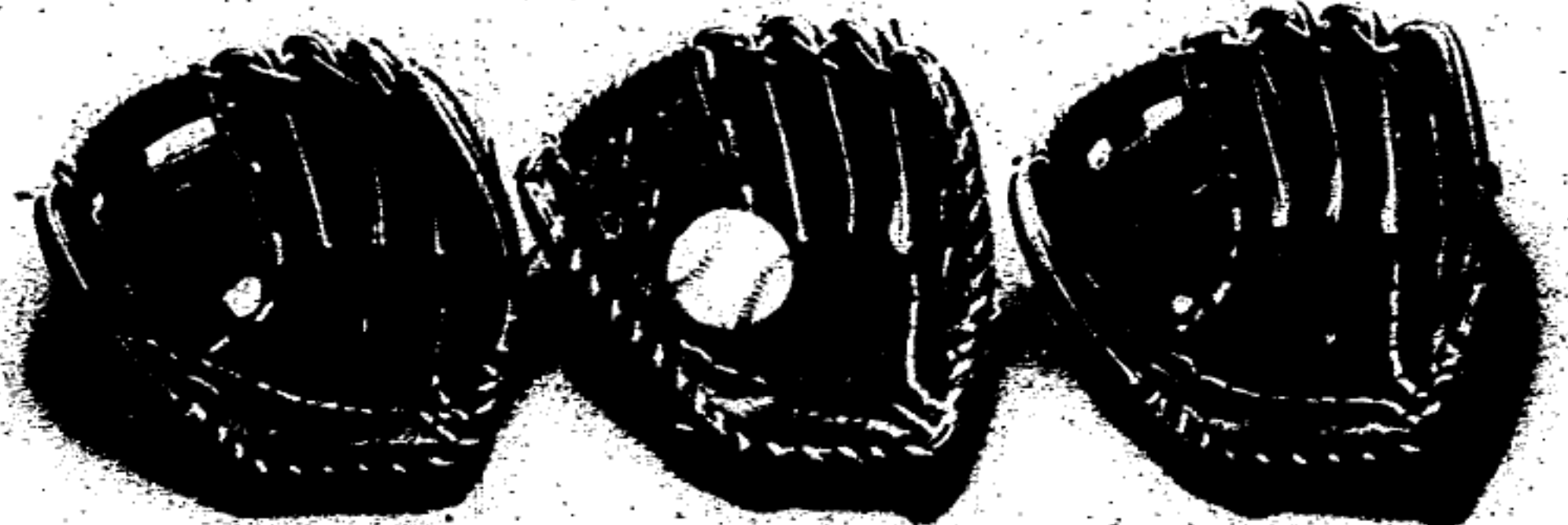
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# May Has Last Laugh in 'Frisco

By NICK PETERS

SAN FRANCISCO—Milt May, an object of scorn for his erratic throwing at the start of the season, is enjoying the last laugh. He's perhaps the most successful free agent of 1980.

When the Giants signed the veteran catcher (along with Rennie Stennett and Jim Wohlford) last December, they knew they were taking a gamble.

After all, the injury-riddled May had only sporadic success in four American League seasons and was coming off a 1979 campaign in which he was limited to 71 games with Detroit and the Chicago White Sox and a .266 average because of a shoulder injury.

Manager Dave Bristol and General Manager Spec Richardson realized May's arm wasn't among the best in the majors, but they wanted the 29-year-old backstop to provide leadership and hitting.

The Giants' brass was correct on all counts. May's throws were weak in the early games, as evidenced by 25 steals in the first 26 attempts against him. May had suffered a broken left collarbone last year.

But there was nothing the matter with May's handling of pitchers and, above all, his hitting. By late June, former regular catcher Marc Hill had been sold to Seattle and May firmly was established as the No. 1 catcher, given an occasional breather by scrappy Mike Sadek.

The latter, however, was placed on the disabled list with

a knee injury in mid-July and May was playing every day on a swing through Pittsburgh and St. Louis.

In a weekend series against the Cardinals July 18-20, May's bat matched the scorching heat. In the three games, he was 6-for-11, with four doubles and a grand-slam homer.

The streak enabled May to soar past Jack Clark for the team batting lead with a .295 average. Since June 2, he was batting .360.

May's grand slam came in the top of the ninth, erasing a 7-4 St. Louis lead and giving the Giants an 8-7 victory. It was his third career slam and gave him six game-winning RBIs this season.

"I was hitting around .290 when I was in the National League with Houston, so I know I can hit," said May. He batted .289 with the 1974 Astros and .241 with them in '75 before switching leagues.

"I wasn't getting discouraged early in the season because I knew there was a long way to go. I'd felt in the spring that we had a pretty good club, but we're just now starting to play like we're capable."

May was testy when asked about his early throwing problems.

"I didn't understand the criticism at the time, but it didn't bother me," he said. "I think you guys (reporters) overestimate the effect of what you write on me. I don't read what you guys write, so it doesn't bother me."

But the important thing isn't how May relates to sportswriters. The weak-armed catcher is deftly handling the

club's young pitchers and has their respect. Moreover, he is supplying much-needed punch for a team sorely lacking in the ability to hit with power.

"He's done a great job for us," said Bristol. "We didn't get much hitting out of our catchers in the past, but Milt has been a big plus for us offensively."

"The last time I saw him, he was playing for Pittsburgh and Houston and he was dangerous. Playing regularly has improved his throwing and hitting and has enabled him to learn the league and the hitters again."

"We knew his arm was only average," Bristol admitted, "but we've tried to compensate by having the pitchers do a better job holding the runners at first. A lot of those stolen bases in April weren't his fault."

May has staged a turnaround in that department. After his ghastly 1-for-26 start, the catcher has thrown out 20 of 53 runners, making him 21-for-79 overall.

After all, nobody's perfect.

**GI-antics:** Bob Knepper's record on the road slipped to 1-10 at St. Louis July 20, but the lefthander pitched brilliantly before the Cardinals scored twice in the eighth for a 2-1 victory. It was 140-plus degrees on the Cardinals' synthetic turf that day and the Giants attempted to combat the heat by gulping salt pills and ammonia water, placing their feet in buckets of ice in the dugout and using ice-soaked cabbage leaves under their caps. "I tried it for one inning, but I felt silly," said second baseman Joe Strain. "Besides, when I took the cabbage out after the first inning, it looked ready to eat—like sauerkraut."

Larry Herndon's two-run homer in the 15th at Chicago gave the Giants a 2-0 victory July 22. It was Herndon's first game-winning RBI of the season. The game was suspended because of darkness July 21 and was continued at the start of the 13th inning before the regularly-scheduled game. . . . Mike Ivie ripped two doubles in the 15-inning contest for his most productive game since his return. One of the two-baggers was off Bruce Sutter, who limited the Giants to one hit in 1979. "It felt good," said Ivie. "I'm just a little overanxious at the plate."

Righthander John Montefusco was placed on the 21-day disabled list because of a torn rib cage muscle.

## Armas Belts Win Hand in Oakland

By KIT STIER

OAKLAND—Many in the small Oakland Coliseum crowd of 6,506 stood and applauded. Tony Armas was slowly making his way to the plate.

Armas, 27, is becoming a local hero. The A's suddenly have a power hitter and fans want to see the Venezuelan unload a tape-measure job every time he strolls to the plate. Opposing pitchers are gaining respect for the A's young right fielder.

As the applause subsided, Armas stepped into the box. After watching a couple of pitches from Cleveland's Rick Waits, Armas grounded out to second base.

Armas's production that day consisted of a run-scoring single to center in a three-run eighth inning. Final score: Oakland 3, Cleveland 0.

Armas' name was hardly mentioned in the Sunday papers because Rickey Henderson and Dwayne Murphy had literally stolen the show. Just before Armas' single, Henderson stole home and Murphy swiped second. It was the A's seventh steal of home and 10th double steal of the season.

What the fans wanted from Armas was a repeat of his performance of the previous evening, July 18. What a show:

In the fourth inning, Armas belted a solo homer that was still on the rise when it cleared the fence in left center.

In the fifth, with one aboard, Armas drove another ball to nearly the same spot. The only difference in the 400-foot shots was in trajectory. The two-run blast went up and out. The solo affair simply went out.

The home runs gave Armas 21 for the season, and seven in his last eight games. He also had 66 runs batted in.

In three previous major league seasons, Armas hit 26 home runs. But then Antonio Rafael Armas was always injured. Outfield walls and other obstacles kept getting in Armas' way. In 1979 he played in only 80 games. Knee and shoulder injuries forced him to miss most of the season.

"I think this year's gotta be my year," said Armas during his hot streak. "This year I have been more careful."

Playing every day has made the difference to Armas. "I have a chance because I have some power and I play every day," he said.

Armas is using a lighter bat, the result of advice from Felipe Alou. Tony also stands farther back in the batter's box.

"Because of injuries, this is the first time he's really had a chance to show what he can do," said Manager Billy Martin. "He's been getting the big hits all season. He's an aggressive batter, always goes up there swinging. I think Tony has convinced everyone he's for real."

Armas does more than carry a big stick. He also has eight assists and frequently opposing runners have contained themselves because of Tony's right arm.

Against Detroit recently, Armas dropped a routine fly. The batter headed for second only to find the ball awaiting him.

Armas, who has 10 brothers and three sisters, is currently earning \$34,000 annually. It's a cinch Owner Charlie Finley will be signing bigger paychecks next year.

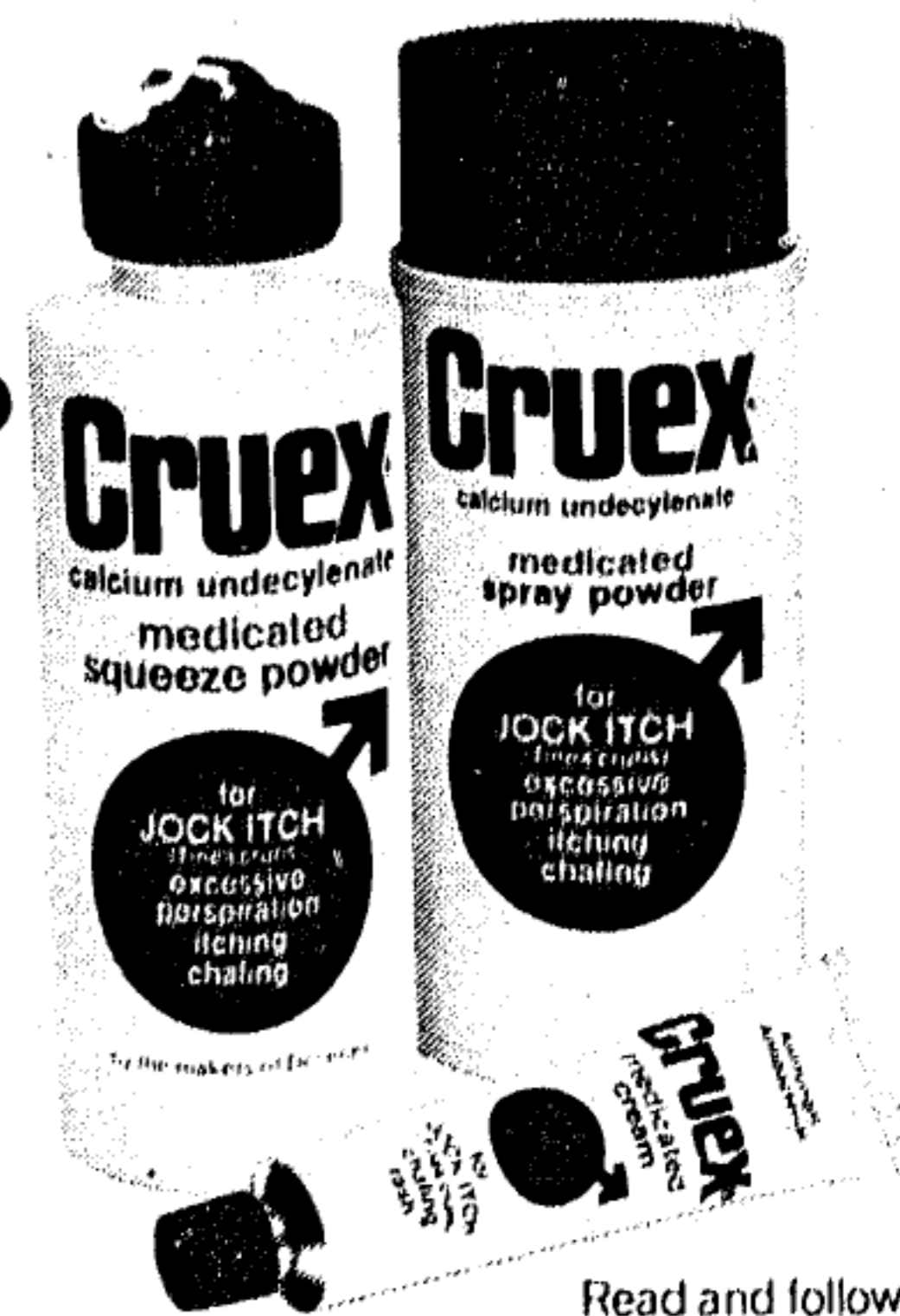
**A's Acorns:** When Rick Langford went 14 innings to beat Cleveland, 6-4, July 20, it marked his 12th consecutive complete game, a club record. Langford set the previous mark in 1979. . . . The A's have played five 14-inning games this

season and won four. Langford, Matt Keough and Mike Norris have gone the route for wins.

Martin may go to a four-man rotation after the A's complete a rash of doubleheaders. Steve McCatty may become the A's righthanded stopper in the bullpen. . . . On July 21, the A's drew 14,588 against Toronto, giving them 530,979 for the season, the most they have drawn at home in a season since they attracted 780,593 in 1976.

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