

*'Eef You Do Not Play You Cannot Get Base Heets'*

# 'Mexico's Boudreau' Wins Tribe Job

## Injuns Paid Avila Bonus of \$17,500

### Second Baseman Displays Speed and Savvy; Raps Ball in Exhibition Games

By HAL LEBOVITZ  
TUCSON, Ariz.

The 22-year-old rookie sat in his usual spot at the edge of the Cleveland Indians' dugout. He made mental notes: What was the enemy hurler's best pitch? Where did the Cleveland infield play each batter? What seemed to be each batter's weakness?

But it was a monotonous game and he found it difficult to stay awake. He caught himself dozing off, his head sagging to his chest. Finally, he walked over to Coach Muddy Ruel.

"Hey, Moddy," he inquired, "I go to sleep on bench. How I stay awake?"

"Son," replied the grey-haired veteran, "why do you think I chew tobacco?"

So Roberto (Beto) Avila became a tobacco-chewer. Now, two years later, he's ready to discard the plug. He no longer is a bench-warmer; he's the Indians' regular second baseman. "On the field I stay awake allatime," he says. "I no need tobacco."

Already he has impressed Manager Al Lopez with his alertness. "A very smart boy," says the Tribe's new manager. "Always thinking. He has good baseball instincts."

#### Praise From an Expert

Those sessions with the tobacco chews weren't wasted. Says Joe Gordon, the man Avila has replaced at second, "That kid knows more about pitchers and batters after two years on the bench than most of the ten-year men in the game."

That's praise from the gods for Avila. "I pattern myself after Number Four, Joe Gordon," he reveals. "I watch him allatime. He teach me everything."

Gordon, now manager at Sacramento, recently spent an hour teaching his pupil the proper method of crossing the bag in the execution of double plays. At the moment, that appears to be Avila's obvious weakness. He has sure hands, nimble feet, knows the batters and has the instinct for making the proper play.

There has been some question about his hitting. Last season he batted .299 but was at bat only 201 times, in 80 games. "Not a true test," say experienced major leaguers. "The jury is still out."

Lopez is certain Avila, a major cog in the Tribe's pennant machine, "will be a good hitter." Explains the manager, "Bobby has a good eye, a good swing and confidence."

Currently he is setting a torrid spring training pace. He hit safely in the first 13 games he played for a .429 average, causing Slugger Al Rosen to comment, "Everytime I go to the plate Beto seems to be on base. He makes you hit-conscious."

#### Good Bunter, Too

On the field the data Avila catalogued on opposing batters has aided First Baseman Luke Easter. Avila's verbal directions shift big Luke's coverage.

Lopez has classified Avila as his second-slot batter. "He can bunt and he also is good on the hit-and-run," reasons the manager. Lopez has noted the rookie doesn't choke up with two strikes.

As a base-runner Avila must be labeled "brilliant." He knows how to get a jump on the pitcher and he has a most deceptive slide. He has cultivated the knack of decoying the tagger with an extended foot, pulling it away and hooking the bag with his other limb. He also possesses a neat fadeaway slide. In addition, his educated feet can kick the ball out of waiting hands.

An unforgettable instance of his "kick technique" occurred last season at Shibe Park. He was inserted on second base as a pinch-runner in the top of the ninth. Two men were out and the Tribe trailed the Athletics by

*Proves Jumping Bean*

*on Cleveland Infield*



a lone run. The batter slashed a line single to center. Sam Chapman owns one of the strongest arms in the majors. Chapman slipped slightly in fielding the ball, which encouraged Al Simmons, coaching at third base, to wave Avila home.

Chapman recovered quickly and his accurate throw reached Catcher Mike Guerra while Avila was no more than half-way home. Avila was so obviously out that a photo taken of the play shows First Base Coach Oscar Melillo walking off the field. Several Tribesmen were headed up the ramp to the clubhouse.

It was all over to everyone but Avila. The Mexican peppercorn headed straight for the waiting Guerra, left his feet, and while in the air, aimed his toe at the ball. It flew out of the catcher's hand. Avila was safe, the score was tied and the Indians went on to win in the tenth.

After it was over, Avila was asked, "Did you do it on purpose?"

He replied, "There was notheeng else to do."

Guerra, the fiery Cuban, didn't take it so philosophically. He refused to speak to Avila for a full month. "He talk to me now. He good fellow," says Avila today.

In another case later in the season

## Avila to Spearhead Tribe Base Charge

TUCSON, Ariz.—With Bobby Avila in the anchor spot, the Cleveland Indians will be one of the "runningest" clubs in the majors this year.

"When I was catching," Manager Al Lopez explains, "I would never like to play against a running team. No one does. It gives you fits. As a result we're going to run this year whenever it's advisable."

"There isn't a slow man on our team. In addition to being able to hit for distance, fellows like Avila, Orestes Minoso, Larry Doby, Harry Simpson and Dale Mitchell are very fast. Luke Easter, Jim Hegan, Ray Boone, Al Rosen and Bob Kennedy are of average speed."

Beto's spikes blasted a ball out of George Kell's glove. The Detroit third baseman's mitt flew into the air and was cut during the play. The late Tigers planned revenge and later in the game Pat Mullin went out of his way to crash into Avila on a force at second base. The nimble infielder merely jumped over Pat and completed the double play.

Told that others may try to cut him down this season, Avila merely shrugs. "Tha's all part of da game. I no try to hurt anybody."

Although such diamond knowledge and instincts appear surprising in one whose national pastime is not baseball, Avila did begin early schooling in the game.

"I start playing when I leetle keed,

seven-eight year old," he says. "I play soccer football sam age. I better in soccer dan in baseball. I theenk maybe dat help my base-ronning."

He attended the Benito Juarez School in Veracruz, the city of his birth. He pitched for a team and played third base occasionally. "I pitch allatime 'til I tourn professional," he says.

His father was a lawyer and an older brother a doctor. Beto, highly intelligent, found school easy, his marks were good and his dad prepared to send him to the University of Mexico. He frowned on Beto's athletic achievements at Veracruz Preparatory High School in baseball, soccer, football, basketball, handball, swimming and

boxing, but he didn't complain as long as his son's grades remained high.

He didn't even object when Beto joined the Cordoba semi-pro club in 1942 at the age of 15. Here he quit pitching. "I don't wan pitch anymore because we play one, two games a week. Eef I peech one game I rest couple of weeks. I want to play allatime." It was also while he was with Cordoba that Avila switched over to second base.

#### In Shadow of Luis Molinero

"I want to play third, but we have Luis Molinero, the greatest third baseman in Mexico, so I move," says Avila. "The Athletics want to sign him in 1936 but he say no."

When offered a job with the Liga Mexicana in 1943, young Avila was convinced that he was good enough to turn professional so Beto signed a contract at 500 pesos a month with the Puebla team. Papa Avila objected bitterly, but his son promised to continue college in the off-season. He did complete two years at the University of Mexico, but when the

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4, COL. 3)



# Majors Reported Impatient to See Chandler Leave

Ready to Vest Power in Executive Council If He Doesn't Resign Soon, Asserts Scribe

By EDWARD PRELL  
Of the Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO, Ill.



A. B. Chandler

Baseball is impatiently waiting for A. B. (Happy) Chandler to make a graceful exit as its commissioner.

But if Chandler doesn't turn over the keys to his high office within a reasonable time, baseball probably will move swiftly to demand his resignation, a baseball official told the Tribune, March 31.

If a resignation is not forthcoming, the official said, the next step would be to terminate the commissioner's office. This could be accomplished by unanimous vote of the 16 club owners. The affairs of baseball then would be administered by the executive council, just as it was in the interval between Commissioner K. M. Landis' death in November of 1944 and Chandler's appointment in

April of 1945. Baseball's four administrators, in the event the commissioner's office is knocked out, would be Will Harridge, president of the American League; Ford Frick, president of the National League; Tom Yawkey, owner of the Boston Red Sox, and Warren Giles, president of the Cincinnati Reds. In major-minor league matters, George Trautman would represent the minors in his capacity as president of the National Association.

The Tribune's informant added that baseball eventually will elect a new commissioner. "Chandler talked himself out of office," said the baseball executive. "Two and a half years before expiration of his present contract, he inquired about a renewal. Club owners thought this was rushing it a bit, but to placate him they raised his salary \$15,000 a year to \$65,000 and wrote legislation that the commissioner must be notified a minimum of 12 months before its expiration date whether or not his contract is to be renewed.

"Chandler says the meeting of the owners in December last year at St. Petersburg, Fla., was a secret meeting. But what's wrong with 16 men in baseball—or any business—meeting to discuss their problems? Anyway, Chandler did not include the balloting for a commissioner on the agenda he drew up for that meeting.

## First Vote Eight to Eight

"On the first ballot of the owners at St. Petersburg, the vote was eight to eight. Chandler then requested another ballot be taken. Only after the new vote was nine to seven (12 of 16 votes are required) did anyone start calling it a sneak meeting.

"The club owners pledged to notify Chandler not later than the annual meeting last December on his contract. So there was nothing else for them to do but meet and vote on the commissioner's future.

"Even after his failure to get the necessary votes, I am confident that had Chandler elected to return to his office in Cincinnati instead of making speeches over the country for his retention that he would have had a better chance of getting a new contract in the recent March convention at Miami Beach, Fla."

The baseball man said that, in his opinion, the owners harbored no specific major objections to the commissioner.

"It was an accumulation of incidents," he explained. "Chandler seemed to take it for granted he had a lifetime job. He even took credit for baseball's booming post-war attendance. Many owners were irked at him for taking credit for the players' new contract and the pension plan.

"Some were alienated when he insisted on sticking to the five-year ban

## Miranda Polling Players on Naming Commissioner

CINCINNATI, O.—Claiming the raising of the majors' salary minimum to \$5,000, the creation of the player welfare and pension fund and the granting of the right of player representation on the Executive Council are fruits of an attempt at player organization, H. I. Miranda of Lexington, Ky., is sounding out major league players on proposals for other benefits through the National Baseball Players Organization, which he is organizing. Among the proposals is one providing for a players' commissioner.

A questionnaire recently sent by Miranda to the players requests their opinions on the following policies: Players should have players' commissioner with stature equal to owners' commissioner to arbitrate players' rights; players' commissioner office should have half of owners' commissioner's share of World's Series gate receipts; players should negotiate own contracts, with no help from National Baseball Players Organization, except upon written request by player; player should have half of profits from own sale or trade; player of each major league club should have own elected representative to vote on hiring or firing of commissioner; one per cent of gate receipts of each major league game should go to help support National Baseball Players Organization and players' welfare fund.

against players who had jumped to the Mexican League in 1946. He went against advice, from attorneys and owners, to reinstate the players after they had done a three-year penance. It was the owners who set up the players' pension plan, into which baseball pays 87 per cent, the players 13 per cent. The owners also are responsible for the new contract which grants players many concessions."

Chandler, in Chicago on March 20 en route to Los Angeles, said he has advised the club owners he will step out as soon as his successor is named, but if too much time is required to select one, he will leave the post when it seems to his advantage to do so.

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## Chico Passes Up Day Off, Wins \$225

ALPINE, Tex.—Chico Carrasquel, 23-year-old Venezuelan shortstop of the White Sox, has trouble putting one word after another in English, but he knows that payday is no time for a player to take a day off.

A year ago as the White Sox played the Browns here, Chico won a \$100 gift from Herbert L. Kokernot, wealthy West Texas rancher, for hitting one of four home runs. When the two teams appeared here again March 30, however, Carrasquel was scheduled to rest until he learned that Kokernot planned to

give cash prizes to the players leading each side in assists, base-hits and total bases, as well as rewarding pitchers \$20 for every strikeout.

"You rest me tomorrow, okay?" Chico said to Manager Paul Richards. The Chicago pilot agreed.

Kokernot finally awarded \$640 in a game won by the White Sox, 4 to 3. Yes, and Senor Carrasquel was the big winner, taking away \$225 for collecting two hits and handling four assists, leading his side in both phases, and tying Al Zarilla for total bases.

## 'Greenberg Help Me More Than Anybody,' Says Avila

TUCSON, Ariz.—Roberto Avila, the rising Mexican star, has high praise for Cleveland General Manager Hank Greenberg.

"He help me more than everybody," reveals the second sacker. "He come to ball park early last summer to work with me. He teach me plenty."

## AVILA

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

elder Avila saw how well his son was doing in "beisbol," he quit objecting.

In 1946, the year Pasquel raided the big leagues, Avila batted .360 to finish second in the league. One of his teammates was Sal Maglie, now an ace hurler with the Giants. Molinerb worked with young Avila constantly. "He ees like my beeg brother, even now," says the Tribesman.

That lusty batting average brought scouts from the Brooklyn Dodgers, Boston Braves and Washington Senators to Puebla. The Dodgers offered a bonus "of six-seven thousand dollars. You know Branch Rickey," observes Avila. "He don't want to pay any money."

"I say not enough. Other offer more, maybe \$9,000. I say no. I wait. I got lucky. I sign for Cleveland next year."

That "next" year, 1947, he hit .347 to lead the league. "Cleveland Scout Slapnicka watch me whole month and half. I don't know he's watching. He offer me \$17,500 and I sign."

## Bad Luck—Twice

Before reporting to the Indians, he played winter ball in Cuba. He hurt his knee in a slide ("first time I get hurt in baseball"), delaying his arrival for spring training by two weeks. He met the club in Los Angeles and was shipped to the Baltimore farm for seasoning.

There he developed a hernia, which kept him out of the lineup. The Baltimore club suggested an operation at the city's famed Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Beto called his dad long distance. "You come home," ordered Senor Avila. "We have good hospitals here. Your brother can see everything ees right." So Avila returned to Veracruz and underwent a successful cutting.

Since Avila was a bonus player, the Tribe was forced to keep him on the varsity roster in 1949, and he sat on the bench, learned how to chew and absorbed baseball knowledge.

Spud Goldstein, the traveling secretary, asked him one day, "Is everything all right for you here?"

Replied Avila, "Everything fine. But in Mexico I be like Boudreau, star player, beeg hero. Here I be leetle rookie."

It's true that Avila is the Boudreau of Mexico. The postman is swamped daily with mail from Beto's native land. When the Tribe played in border cities, such as San Diego, Manager Lopez was beseeched with requests to please play Avila. During the past winter Beto became even more like Boudreau. He managed Cordoba, the team with which he began his career. "We feeneesh first," reports Avila happily.

With Rosen, Ray Boone and Easter, Avila forms an infield quartette with the least experience in the majors—and the greatest possibilities.

## Won Flag as Pilot

Avila welcomes the opportunity. He has confidence in his ability. Even as early as 1949, when he came through with a clean single as a pinch-hitter, he shrugged off a "Nice going, Bobby."

He simply answered, "Eef you do not play you cannot get base heets."

"Did you manage like Boudreau?" he was asked.

"Everybody manage deefrant," he replied. "Boudreau feeneesh fourth, Cordoba feeneesh first." After a laugh he added sincerely, "Boudreau nice fellow, he help me."

He has improved immensely his ability to speak English. "Study in school for two years," he explains. He can read the language extremely well. Dr. Don Kelly, the Tribe physician, finds him, "a brilliant boy with an I. Q. well above the average."

Now 24, he figures his college days are over. "Too hard to study een winter and play ball een summer," he admits. "I try to get into business in Mexico next year. I like to be in baseball long time." He also is contemplating marriage after the current season.

Beto's father died in 1948. Since his four older brothers have families of their own, Beto's baseball salary supports his 64-year-old mother and his three younger sisters.

# LOOPING THE LOOPS

By J. G. TAYLOR SPINK

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Gil Hodges of the Dodgers are outstanding individual examples that come to mind.

But probably the greatest mass example of position-shifting in baseball is supplied by the Phillies, defending National League champions.

Outfielder Richie Ashburn started as a catcher, Outfielder Dick Sisler as a first baseman, Second Baseman Mike Goliat as a first sacker, Shortstop Gran Hamner as a second baseman and Third Baseman Willie Jones as a shortstop.

Ashburn couldn't throw, so Manager Eddie Sawyer converted him into an outfielder. Goliat had played only two games in his entire career at second base, but when the Phils needed a second baseman the skipper moved him to that job. Jones was only a fair shortstop, so they made a great third baseman out of him.

More than 40 present-day stars began their diamond careers in jobs other than those they now hold. Matt Batts, catcher of the Red Sox, started as a first baseman-catcher-outfielder for Canton in the Central League. Steve Bilko, now making a strong bid for the first base job with the Cards, began at Allentown as a fly hawk. Outfielder Larry Doby was a second baseman when he got his chance with Cleveland. Carl Furillo, great outfielder of the Dodgers, was a pitcher at Pocomoke City.

## Musial Started as Pitcher

Babe Ruth was a hurler for Baltimore and for the Red Sox before Ed Barrow shifted him to the outfield. Stan Musial, Cardinal star, was a good pitcher—33-13 in the minor leagues—before a sore arm sent him to the outfield. He also has played first base satisfactorily.

George Sisler, another St. Louis immortal, was a pitcher and outfielder for the University of Michigan and hurled several games for the Browns before he became a first baseman.

Honus Wagner, the greatest shortstop of all time, played the outfield for Louisville and Pittsburgh before Manager Fred Clarke asked him to play shortstop.

We could go on and on reviewing a list of the great and near-great and point out many astonishing shifts. Bobby Bragan was a fine shortstop for the Phillies before Hans Lobert shifted him behind the plate in 1942. Branch Rickey made a catcher out of Outfielder Don Padgett.

Shifting men from the outfield and infield to behind the plate seems to be a favorite device of Rickey, a former catcher himself. He is now attempting to turn a rookie, Dale Long, from a first baseman to a lefthanded catcher and is experimenting with Pete Reiser back of the plate.

## Versatile Ben Chapman

One of the most remarkable changes in shifting positions was that made by Ben Chapman, now manager of the Tampa club of the Florida International League.

Ben was a third baseman when he came to the Yankees from St. Paul, but he made so many wild throws that Joe McCarthy shifted him to the outfield. He dropped out of the big leagues as an outfielder, pitched for and managed Richmond of the Piedmont League and came back to the Dodgers as a pitcher, and was traded to the Phils as a pitcher and soon became their manager.

Reb Russell, one of the greatest White Sox pitchers 40 years ago, injured his arm, went to the minors and came back to Pittsburgh as an outfielder. Bob Chesnes of the Pirates was an infielder, but came up to the Bucs as a pitcher, hurt his arm and now may try to become an infielder in the minors again. Larry Lajoie, who shares all-time second base honors with Eddie Collins, was an outfielder at Fall River. When he reported to the Phils, he was placed at first base. Later he moved to second. Gene Bearden, 1948 World's Series pitching hero, started as a first sacker at Moultrie, Ga.

Goose Goslin and Sam Rice, outfield immortals for Washington, started their careers as pitchers. Rice was a hurler for the Senators until Pitcher George Dauss of the Tigers tripled off his delivery one day in Detroit.

That afternoon in the clubhouse, Rice cut off his pitching toe plate. "When a guy like that can hit a triple off me, I'm through pitching," he said, and he never went to the mound again.

Bobby Thomson of the Giants, now one of the National League's greatest

## Sisler's Shift Was Result of Dream by The Mahatma

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — There have been countless reasons for shifting a player from one position to another, but George Sisler probably was the only one transferred because of a dream.

Branch Rickey, who switched George from the mound to first base, where he gained Hall of Fame immortality, was asked about the shift some time ago.

"Did you," asked a reporter, "ever dream that Sisler would become so great a first baseman?"

Rickey, now general manager of the Pirates, gave the scribe a startled look.

"Why did you use the word 'dream'?" he snapped.

"Purely by accident," replied the writer.

"Well, it was because of a dream that I did shift him," confided The Mahatma. "One morning I said to my wife, 'Jane, I dreamed last night that I put George on first base and he was great.' We made the change and George soon was the greatest of them all."

outfielders, started in New York as a third baseman.

Jimmie Foxx, listed among the game's greatest sluggers, was an apple-cheeked, 16-year-old catcher when Connie Mack signed him.

And Mickey Cochrane, one of the greatest backstops of all time, almost became an outfielder. Cochrane was such a poor judge of foul balls and dropped so many pegs to the plate that Connie Mack put him in the outfield in spring training of 1925 and he would have remained there if Cy Perkins had not sprained an ankle.

Mel Ott, the Giants' great home run hitting outfield star, reported to John McGraw as a catcher. Bob Smith was a fine shortstop for the Braves for several seasons, then he decided to become a pitcher and was a good one.

Among other surprising changes in position made by players was that of Jimmie Dykes, who started as a third baseman and, in turn, played third, second, first, caught, pitched and played the outfield. One day at Shibe Park, he played an inning at every position. Jimmy Bloodworth of the Phillies is another jack-of-all-trades.

There are many reasons for shifts of position. In the case of Bucky Walters, he did not hit well enough to hold down a regular job as an infielder, so Jimmie Wilson, who recognized his great arm, put him on the mound.

## Good Hitter Okay Anywhere

Sometimes it is an accident that makes a star. Don Padgett was shifted from the outfield to catching because he broke a leg and lost his speed—but he could still hit.

The great Wagner was switched by Fred Clarke to the Pirates' infield because the regular shortstop hurt his finger, refused to play, and Manager Clarke determined not to have that sort of a man on his club. He asked Wagner to help him out at short.

Ruth was turned into an outfielder because his hitting was even more valuable than his pitching, which also was great. Bob Lemon was not a good enough hitter to play every day, so he became a star pitcher. Gil Coan, Washington's fine outfielder, was a second baseman. Hank Greenberg, one of the game's finest first basemen, learned to play the outfield. Rudy York, also of the Tigers, came up as a catcher and took over Greenberg's job so the Tigers could have the benefit of the fine batting of both.

Jackie Robinson learned to play first base in three weeks and Gil Hodges gave up catching and became the Dodgers' first baseman—one of the best in the league—and Robbie went back to second.

The explanation of the wholesale shifts is that the best players usually are the most versatile. Pitching is an exception, of course. But there still isn't an outfielder in the league who thinks he couldn't pitch better than the man on the mound—and there isn't a pitcher who doesn't think he can hit better than the best slugger in the outfield.

The best advice to youngsters with baseball ambition is to develop versatility and learn the rudiments at more than one position. For when the route to the majors is blocked in one direction, the pathway may open in another.