

# Astros Booming Bateman for Top Mittman Honors

By JOHN WILSON

HOUSTON, Tex.

Astro Manager Grady Hatton asked Robin Roberts about a couple of pitches he had made in a recent game. Hatton wanted to make sure Robby knew those weren't the pitches to make to a particular batter.

"I just didn't get the ball where I wanted it," Roberts explained. And to make sure no blame was placed where it didn't belong, Roberts added, "(Catcher John) Bateman called the right pitch and had the target in the right place, but I just couldn't get the ball there."

While he was at it, Roberts went on to say, "This fellow is just a real fine catcher—I'm really impressed with the job he's doing."

Hatton related the incident as testimony to the kind of work the big catcher has been doing for Houston. Without the work of Big John, the Astros wouldn't have stayed up in the higher bracket of the standings for more than a quarter of the season.

Bateman's contribution with the bat has been vital and obvious. But his work behind the plate probably has been just as important.

As Houston neared the 50-game mark, John had been out of the lineup only twice, once in a double-header and once after being knocked unconscious the day before when hit in the head by the follow-through of Doug Clemens' bat.

In another double-header in which a lefthander was going to pitch the second game for the opposition, Hatton asked John if he wanted to sit out the first one against the right-hander.

"I want to catch them both," Bateman answered.

## No Argument There

It was fine with Hatton. He likes the big fellow in the lineup and John has never shown any tendency to tire as the season goes on.

"You can't hurt him," Hatton said. "You've got to kill him to get him out of the lineup."

Bateman takes a beating during the season from balls, bats, spikes and body contact. But he seldom stays out of the lineup.

The other night, he was hit in the Adam's apple by a foul tip, and fell, gasping, to the ground.

"Another player would have been out for a week," coach Jim Busby said. But, within a couple of minutes, Bateman was cracking jokes and putting the mask back on to continue his work.

"When he stays back and doesn't get to rocking and leaning forward, he rates as a pretty good hitter," Hatton commented. "I think he could hit .300, if he would stay back all the time."

"If he hits .300, it will be the hardest .300 anybody ever hit," Busby observed, "because he's not going to get any leggers."

He meant Big John is no threat to Sonny Jackson and Jim Wynn in a foot race.

## Takes Realistic View

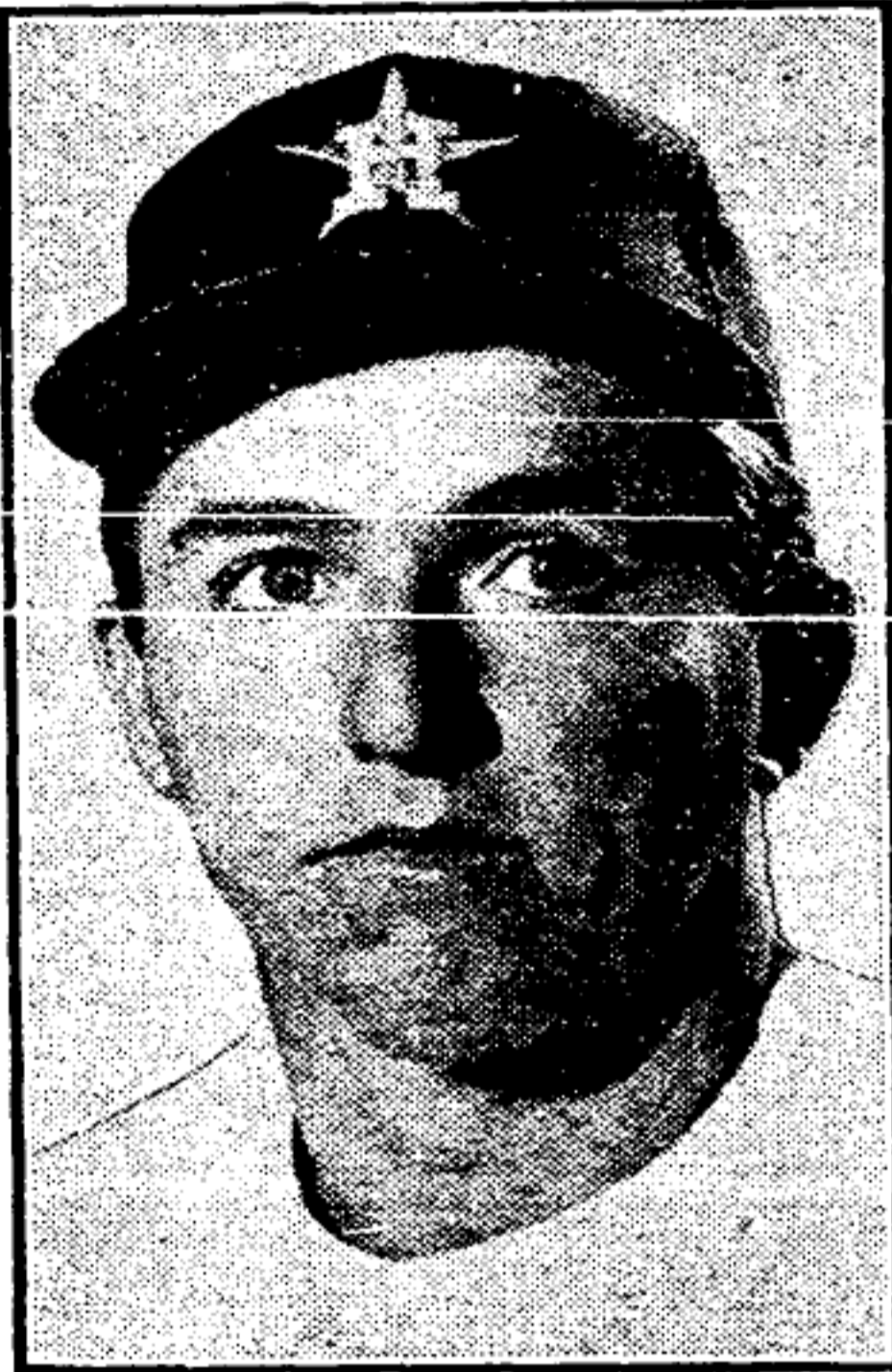
John himself has no illusions about being a .300 hitter. But he would like to get up there among the top catchers in home runs and runs batted in.

In 1965, the top hitting catchers had these marks in home runs and runs batted in: Joe Torre, 27 and 80; Jim Pagliaroni, 17 and 65; John Roseboro, 8 and 57; John Edwards, 17 and 51; Tom Haller, 16 and 49; Tim McCarver, 11 and 48. Their batting averages ranged from Torre's .291 down to Roseboro's .233.

Unless Bateman runs into trouble as the season goes on, he should rank with the top hitting catchers in the league.

Through 45 games, John had batted in 19 runs and hit seven homers. His batting average had climbed into the .280s.

And since Bateman isn't going to win many speed contests, his extra-base statistics testify that he hits the ball to the distant reaches of the ball parks. Bateman had three triples



John Bateman

and eight doubles through games of May 30.

On the night of May 28, Bateman hit his sixth home run late in the game as Houston was taking a shellacking from Pittsburgh.

"That's a fine time to hit one," Bateman apologized later. With the Astros making an unexpectedly good showing, John wants to hit them when they count.

And he has done a pretty good job of it.

The next day, the Astros were down, 2-0, in the seventh inning to Vernon Law and Pittsburgh. It looked as if Law, who went into the game with a 13-4 lifetime record

## Astros Improve Overtime Record, Cop Four of Five

HOUSTON, Tex.—Houston played more extra-inning games in 1965 than any team in the National League. Unfortunately for the Astros, they didn't win many of them. They won only seven of 23 overtime games, the poorest showing in the league.

This year, the Astros have cut down on the number of extra-inning contests and are enjoying it more. The Astros have won four out of five games that went beyond the regulation distance.

against Houston, was going to continue his effectiveness.

And this would have been a particularly damaging loss to Houston. It would have vaulted Pittsburgh over Houston into third place; it would have given Pittsburgh four wins in the five-game series, and it would have sent the Astros off on a seven-game trip with a question in the players' minds as to whether they were beginning to slip.

## Homer Knots Count

But with one on in the seventh, Bateman drove a Law pitch into the left field pavilion, tying the score, 2-2. And Jim Gentile ended the game with his seventh home run as he smashed a Roy Face pitch into the seats in the bottom of the eleventh.

"You'll think it's about to happen (that the team will sag and plunge downward)," Busby said after that game. "And then they fight back and win one and you're started again."

**Astronotes:** Houston's bench strength was cut when Nate Colbert was called for two weeks' National Guard duty. . . . Dave Nicholson had his first four-hit night, May 25, against New York. Dave had a homer, double and two singles. In three games, against both left and right-handers, Nicholson reached base ten out of the 12 times he went to the plate. . . . Claude Raymond has been one of the league's hottest relievers. The Canadian has six saves and two wins. Manager Grady Hatton uses him in either long and short relief when a game is at stake. . . . Ron Taylor pitched five innings in three games after going on the active roster and gave up no runs. Houston made room for Taylor by optioning Duke Sims to Durham (Carolina). Sims had been drafted at the winter meeting, and the Pittsburgh organization had to pass on taking him back before he was eligible to be taken

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## Sonny No. 1 Shortstop, Says Teammate Morgan

HOUSTON, Tex.—Joe Morgan says he doesn't believe any shortstop in the league covers more ground or "catches the ball better" than his keystone teammate, Sonny Jackson.

"The only problem he ever has is that he gets a little scatter - armed sometimes," Morgan said.

In Houston's first 44 games, the team had reeled off 40 double plays, ranking second in the league, and most of the credit was due the young second base combination.

off the 25-man roster. . . . The Astros were in the throes of a batting slump when they opened a series in St. Louis, May 30. "We scored nine runs in five games with Pittsburgh; we won two and could have won two more," Hatton said.

## MORGAN

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But he is simply confident enough and realist enough to admit he has thought about it.

"If I play well enough to deserve to make the All-Star team, I'll make it. If I don't do well, I won't," Morgan said. "That's all there is to it. And as for leading the league, sure I would like to do it. But what I really want to do is hit .300. If I do that, I'll be satisfied."

## Joe's Goal Was 100 Runs

Joe had a rather unusual goal last year. He wanted to score at least 100 runs.

"From watching the baseball statistics, I had noticed that the real good players either scored 100 runs or batted in 100," Morgan explained. "And occasionally there was the real great player, like Willie Mays, who both scored and batted in 100."

Joe went into a slump for a couple of weeks toward the end of the season and almost failed to reach his goal.

He made it on his last time at bat in the last game of the season.

"Lee Maye hit a single with me on second and scored me with the 100th run," Joe recalled. "I told Lee I would never forget him for that hit."

Joe got four hits in the last game to raise his average to .271.

"That was one of the most satisfying games I ever played, because I really did want to get my average over .270," Morgan said.

## Losses Marred Achievements

Joe recalled that in a couple of his other best personal days, a little of the edge was taken off because his team lost.

"We lost the day I got six hits in Milwaukee," Morgan remembered. "And we lost the day I got a home run and three hits off Sandy Koufax."

Morgan this year has been getting on base nearly every other time he comes to the plate. And, as a leadoff man, he has been doing very well at driving in runs.

The little Californian had a characteristically simple answer for his RBI production.

"It's John Bateman getting on base and the pitcher sacrificing him to second," Morgan explained. "That's when I come to bat!"



JOE MORGAN . . . A Little Guy Who Stands Tall at the Plate