

Blefary Has Curt Soph Jinx Reply-- Pow! Sock! Wham!

By DOUG BROWN

BALTIMORE, Md.

Curt Blefary kept bravely insisting, "There's no such animal as the Sophomore Jinx," but the words were beginning to sound a little hollow, even to the Oriole outfielder.

After a strong performance in spring training, when he hit .320, banged five homers and drove in 14 runs, the American League's 1965 Rookie of the Year came up empty in his first three regular-season games.

Curt's batting frustration did not pass unnoticed by his mates. "Don't worry, Curt," Luis Aparicio said devilishly, "I vote for you as Comeback Player of Year next season."

Angered and puzzled by his 0-for-12 start, Blefary sought the counsel of batting instructor Gene Woodling.

An extra-batting-practice session before the fourth game was arranged, with Woodling himself doing the pitching.

"On Gene's first two pitches, I got jammed," Blefary recalled, and that surprised Woodling possibly even more than it did Curt, for the old outfielder never was noted for a strong arm.

Something Was Wrong

"If I can overpower you," Woodling muttered, "there's got to be something wrong."

It wasn't long before he discovered what.

"Gene found I wasn't waiting for the pitch," Blefary said. "I wasn't ready because my bat was moving while the pitcher was releasing the ball."

"Gene's got to be one of the greatest hitting coaches who ever lived, the way he picked up my mistake so quick."

While it is possible to over-estimate the importance of an extra session of practice, or a hitting tip, there were instant results in this case.

That same day, against the Yankees, Blefary popped up in his first turn, then ended his 0-for-13 drought

Orioles Enjoy Record Gate Sale for Game With Yanks

BALTIMORE, Md. — The Orioles had the largest gate ticket sale in their history when 21,205 fans unexpectedly turned out for the game with the Yankees on April 17.

The advance ticket sale was light (total paid attendance was only 27,802), but a combination of a 7-2 win over the Yanks the day before and a pleasant Sunday afternoon doubtless was responsible for the rush of ticket purchasers.

The Orioles' previous largest gate sale was 20,619 for a double-header with the Indians in 1955. The total paid attendance that day was 34,109.

The three-game set with the Yankees, the Orioles' first home series of the season, attracted 75,554, putting the club almost 25,000 ahead of its attendance pace last year.

with a home run and followed with a single and a double.

Actually, the renewal of batting



CURT BLEFARY . . . Sees No Whammy

prosperity for Blefary should have been predictable. In his rookie season last year, Curt abused New York's pitching at a .370 clip, while collecting seven of his 22 home runs.

When the series with the Yankees was over, Blefary's claim that

"there's no such animal as the Sophomore Jinx" took on new meaning. It is, he feels, strictly a state of mind—sophomoric thinking, if you will—and he places no stock in it.

"All it is," he said, "is a second-year player failing to bear down. After a while, he gets down so far, he can't get back up, even though he has started to bear down again."

"It's all mental. I don't expect to have any jinx."

"Lot of Horse Radish"

To be perfectly blunt about it, Curt looks on the jinx as "a lot of horseradish." He says this even in view of the fact that two of his teammates, Wally Bunker and Sam Bowens, were trying to tear loose from the shackles of a slump following fine freshman seasons.

The jinx strikes in various disguises. Injuries probably were the chief reasons behind the second-year decline of Bunker and Bowens with the Orioles.

Bird Seed: Curt Blefary received two awards before the April 17 game with the Yankees—the A. L. Rookie of the Year trophy as voted by THE SPORTING NEWS and the Ford Frick plaque emblematic of his selection as the league's top first-year player by the Baseball Writers' Ass'n of America. . . . Roy Merriken, veteran Baltimore Sun photographer, was presented with the game ball

Curt Working Diligently To Improve His Fielding

BALTIMORE, Md. — During spring training, Curt Blefary felt secure enough to concentrate on his fielding. He still isn't a polished outfielder—every fly ball is an adventure—but he has worked diligently to improve.

"I'd like to improve my fielding 600 per cent," he said. He has already shown improvement by playing a shallower left field at the suggestion of Manager Hank Bauer.

Now he's working on going back. "You know," he said, "it's just turning around and running back to the point where you think the ball will come down."

at the Orioles' 1966 home opener. Merriken was covering his fiftieth consecutive Bird home opener. . . . The Orioles raised their record against the Yankees (since 1959) to 73-64 by winning two out of three, April 15-17. The Birds are the only club in the league with a winning mark against the Yanks during that period. . . . Season ticket holders will be invited to occupy the Orioles' deluxe "Sky boxes" on specific dates.

Frank Robby's High-Flying Start Puts Bird Fans in Lofty Spirits

By DOUG BROWN

BALTIMORE, Md.



Frank Robinson

Back in the winter, when he was in town for a round of public relations appearances, Frank Robinson was told by some kind soul that Oriole fans are impatient.

"My advice," the man said, "is to get three hits on opening day and go from there."

Frank winced and said, "I'm sorry to hear that, because I'm a slow starter."

Small wonder, then, that Robinson admitted to a little nervousness as he awaited the Orioles' home opener this year.

"Sure, I'm a little more nervous than usual," he said. "I know they'll be watching me real close and that they expect a lot out of me."

They expected a lot . . . and they got it.

After five games, Frank was hitting a towering .412, 31 points more than "the other Robinson," Brooks. They were tied in home runs with three apiece and B. Rob-

by was leading in RBIs, nine to four and hits by 8 to 7.

Only once before since arriving in the majors in 1956 has F. Robinson experienced the delight of a fast start.

"I'm usually slow from opening day until mid-May," he said. "The only exception was last year."

Hold His Bat Straight Up

"I think the reason is that I changed the way I hold my bat to straight up. It makes me quicker. The other way, with the bat hanging back, it takes longer to get it out in front. It also keeps me from leaning over the plate too far."

Manager Hank Bauer, hoping to get the most out of Frank's bat while it was hot, even flashed the sign to "hit away" in a 3-and-0 situation during the opening series in Boston. Even a great hitter like Robinson isn't allowed to swing at a 3-and-0 pitch without permission.

"When Frank saw the sign to hit on 3-and-0," Bauer chuckled, "you should have seen his eyes light up."

Result: Frank swung and drilled a serve by Boston's Dave Morehead over the left field fence for a home run.

Johnnie Walker Red, so smooth it's the world's largest-selling Scotch.

