

Bowa's Career Sets Model for Determination

By RAY KELLY

PHILADELPHIA—Every aspiring young athlete should be told about Larry Bowa of the Phillies. He is modern baseball's version of the old "Rags to Riches" theme . . . achieved the hard way!

The skinny shortstop from Sacramento, Calif., wasn't even good enough to make his high school team. He was ignored in the draft and got a chance in Organized Ball only because of the ingenuity and persistence of a scout.

And when he finally reached the big leagues, a Philadelphia newspaper put out a screaming headline: "Bowa a Disgrace to National League."

IN ADDITION, Larry was his own worst enemy. He was the "Last Angry Man" of every league he ever played. He ranted. He raved. He also brooded and he broke things like helmets, bats and water coolers. He couldn't even get along with himself.

All things considered, Bowa didn't have too much going for him—on the surface.

Underneath that 155-pound frame, however, was a big heart and a burning desire to make good in spite of everything. It's true, there were times when he doubted himself, but never for long.

"I never had to tell myself to hang in there," he explained. "Hell, I did that automatically."

BOWA IS THE SON OF A ballplayer. His father Paul was a third baseman in the Cardinals' organization who also managed two years before giving it up "because of moving around too much."

Larry learned the basics of infield play from his father, but as a youngster, he did it on his own terms. "Nobody pushed me," said the Phillies' slick fielder, "but my Dad was always ready to throw or hit to me."

Yet if anyone with a runaway imagination had told Bowa that he was destined to rewrite the record books for fielding excellence by a shortstop, become a two-time National League All-Star and turn into a switch-hitter with a .305 average, he would have laughed himself silly.

Not only has Bowa put these achievements on his list of credits, but he's also one of the highest-salaried shortstops in the history of the game. Going into this season, he is on the second year of a three-year pact calling for slightly more than \$300,000.

"I DIDN'T DARE daydream such impossible dreams," he said with a chuckle.

Small wonder. Besides being skinny and only 5-10, Bowa lacked the fluidity and grace usually associated with a top shortstop. And while the pitchers never did knock any bats out of his hands, they came close. As a righthanded hitter, he also had a nasty habit of "bailing out."

Happily, Larry could run and throw and, as Branch Rickey used to say, "that's not bad for starters."

As a youngster, Bowa's main trouble—besides his temper—was impressing anyone. He was almost totally without what the scouts call "good action."

STILL, THERE WAS something Eddie

Bockman, the Phillies' veteran West Coast scout, liked about Bowa. He kept pestering the Phillies' front office to sign the kid from Sacramento and the front office kept putting him off.

Finally in November, 1965, the winter baseball meetings were held in San Francisco and Paul Owens, then farm director for the Phillies, was supposed to come out and take a look at the young prospect. But Paul got tied up somehow and that's when Bockman came to the rescue.

The scout just happened to have some movies he had taken of Bowa in action and, using the bedsheet in Owens' hotel room as a screen, Bockman staged what amounted to a film tryout test.

The upshot was the signing of Bowa by the Phillies—for \$1,500.

"I didn't care, I wanted to play," said Larry.

HE BEGAN AT Spartanburg (Western Carolinas) the following season and almost immediately decided he had no business in such an embarrassing trade.

"You won't believe it," Bowa said, "but it was the first game I ever played and who do you think was pitching for the other team? Some guy named Nolan Ryan. He struck me out four times. I didn't even get a foul tip. I wanted to go home. I felt like I was over-matched. But Bob Wellman, who was my manager, took me in his office and said:

"Hey, young fella, don't let that bother you so much. That guy who punched you out those four times in a row is someday going to be a super star—with that kind of fast ball."

So Bowa hung in. He played at San Diego (Pacific Coast), Bakersfield (California), Reading (Eastern) and Eugene (PCL). It was at the last stop somebody suggested he try switch-hitting and somewhere along the line Gene Mauch told him, "Don't worry, Larry, you're going to be a big leaguer one of these days."

BY THEN THE PHILLIES were trying to rebuild under Frank Lucchesi, who had managed Bowa at Eugene. Larry won the starting job at shortstop and got a giant morale boost when the skipper told him, "I don't care if you hit .026, the job is yours."

Of course, Lucchesi had an advantage over the so-called experts who were wondering about Bowa.

"This kid doesn't look pretty with the glove, but he can play," Lucchesi kept insisting.

Doc Edwards, the old catcher who was finishing out his career with the Phillies, felt the same way about Bowa. "You've got to watch him every day," he said. "The more you see him, the better you'll like him. I promise you that."

BY THEN, THE National League teams all were playing Bowa at what the writers humorously described at "Little League" depth. The outfielders played Bowa so close it became a joke around the circuit. The shortstop was especially feeble swinging lefthanded.

"But don't forget," Larry reminded, "I was learning to switch hit against the best pitchers in the business. It's not the same as learning how to ice skate in the Olympics, but it's close."

In spite of that horrible start and all that outside static, Bowa finished up his first season with a respectable .250 batting average. More important, other players were starting to realize how good he was with the glove.

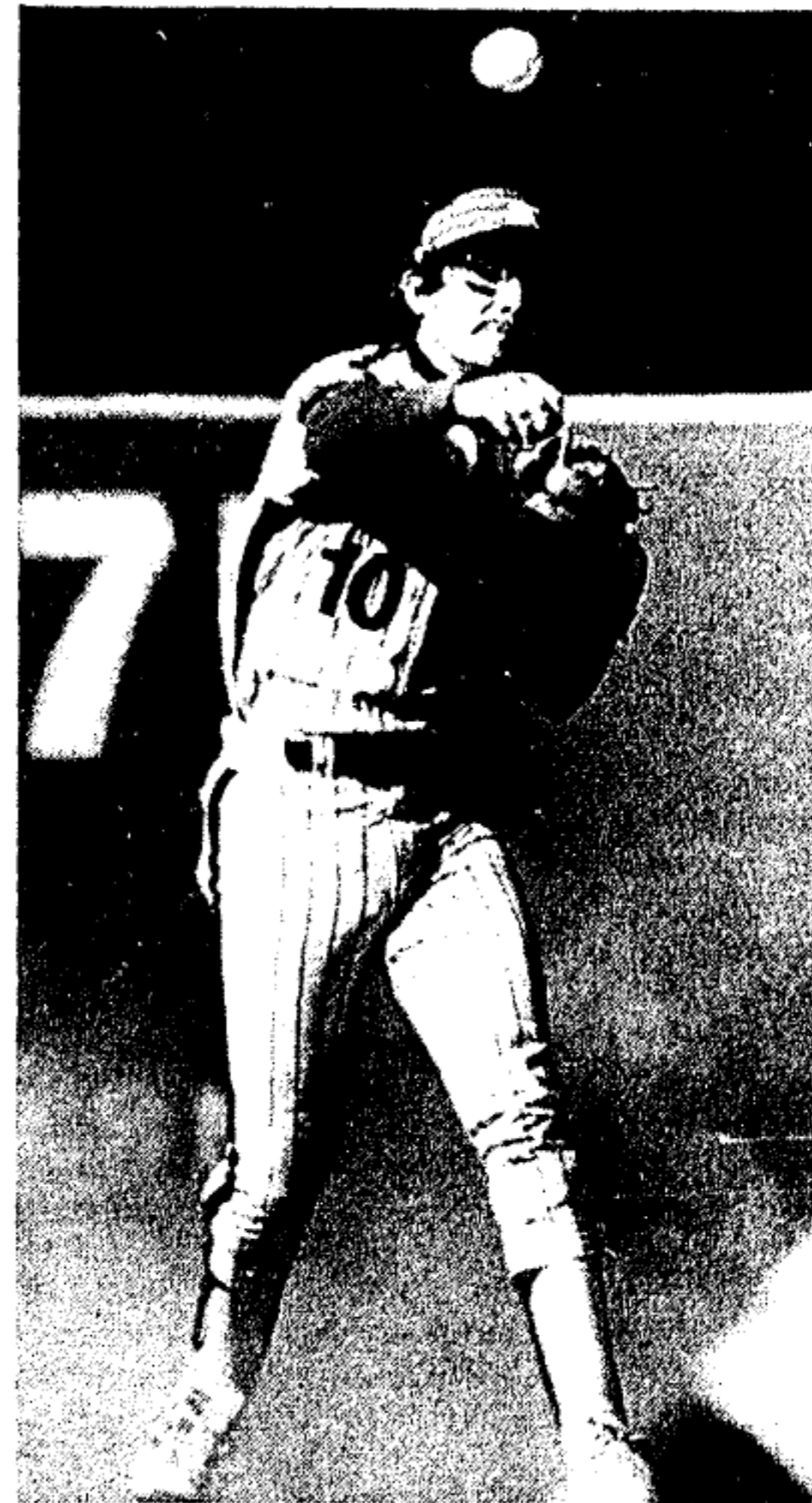
The 1971 season removed all doubt about Bowa's ability. He batted .249 and went through the entire season with only 11 errors, for a record-breaking percentage of .9869. Then he promptly broke that record the following season with .9874 and only nine miscues. He also hit .249.

TO GIVE YOU SOME idea of Bowa's glove-manship, in six seasons with the Phillies he has accepted 4,127 total chances with only 82 miscues, getting 25 of those last season when he hurt his shoulder after coming back from a broken hand injury.

The irony of it all is that Bowa, with all that surehandedness, never learned to be graceful.

"I watch myself fielding a ball on television and I can't believe it," he said with a laugh. "But my father used to say it doesn't matter how you look, just how you do it."

A measure of Bowa's success can be



Larry Bowa . . . Guts, Grit

traced to Bobby Wine, who was the Phillies' good-field, no-hit shortstop during the Mauchian years. Now a Phillies' coach, Wine found out he could make a lot of plays easier by just using the glove hand.

"IT GIVES YOU BETTER balance, a longer reach and makes you feel comfortable," Wine pointed out and Bowa listened. Between the two of them, they started a trend among shortstops.

"Dave Concepcion and Roger Metzger are both going to the one-handed method," Bowa said. "You have to do it on AstroTurf."

But don't get the idea the synthetic carpets are a joy to all the infielders. Not Bowa, anyhow.

"Some of those fields get as hard as concrete after a few years," he explained, "and you'll get some bad hops from balls hitting the seams. You also have to learn how to play the hitters sharper."

GETTING DOWN TO the nitty-gritty, however, Bowa's proudest moments came last season when he achieved the ultimate—a .305 batting average (.288 lefthanded). Since Dave Cash, the Phillies' second baseman, also hit .305, it gave them the distinction of being the first keystone combination to hit over .300 in the National League since Eddie Stanky and Al Dark did it in 1948.

Once again it was the old familiar story of hard work and determination. Billy DeMars helped considerably, too. He's the Phillies' third base coach who made a special project out of turning Larry into a respected hitter.

"I can't say half enough for Billy DeMars," said Bowa. "He was the most obliging coach I ever saw. It didn't make any difference to him, night, day or in the afternoon, he was always ready to throw in batting practice for me and offer helpful advice. In fact, he still keeps reminding me of the basics on hitting."

ALWAYS ANXIOUS to try anything which might speed up the improvement process, Bowa went in for weight-lifting two years ago and, while his weight stayed the same, he added some sting to his bat. He even hit a ball into the left field stands in San Francisco's Candlestick Park two years ago—his first over-the-fence jobber—and his dad and mother were watching!

Perhaps the biggest change of all in Bowa is his disposition. He's learned how to control himself and, coincidentally, it all started when Cash came over from the Pirates in 1974.

"You've got to stop fighting yourself and everybody else," Action Dog told Bowa. "You've got to be relaxed at the plate. Those pitchers eat up guys who can't control themselves."

Funny thing, Larry never let his temper affect his fielding. To the contrary, the longer the batting slump, the better he fielded.

"MY FATHER ALWAYS told me if you aren't doing anything else, you'd better be able to picket," the player said.

But right now, Larry Bowa, a 30-year-old, can do it all.

Unlucky Oates Lost to Phils With Broken Collarbone

By RAY KELLY

PHILADELPHIA—Somehow, it didn't seem fair for Johnny Oates to wind up in the hospital with a broken left collarbone. Not in the first game of the National League season.

But that's the rub of the green, as they say, and now the Phillies must get along without their gummy catcher for six to eight weeks. And don't think he won't be missed.

There was nothing Oates or anybody could have done about it. The inaugural game with the Pirates was on the line in the ninth inning when Dave Parker came racing home from third base, trying to score the trying run on Bill Robinson's fly to left field.

IT HAD ALL the makings of a storybook finish as Oates stood

there with the ball and 227-pound Parker bearing down on him before 42,147 fans.

The ball and Parker arrived almost simultaneously—and that was too bad for Oates and the Phillies.

For the 6-5 Parker, a former football player with exceptional speed, lowered his shoulder and put a hit on Oates that literally drove the catcher into the ground—as the ball trickled out of his glove.

"I'm sorry about Oates but I had to do it," said the talented Parker. "Either I jar the ball out of his grasp or the game is over."

JERRY MARTIN, the Phillies' left fielder who made what he described as "the best throw of my life," agreed there was nothing

Oates could do except stay there. "It's too bad the throw didn't get there a foot sooner," Martin said. "I don't think Johnny had a chance to get control of the ball or get out of his crouch."

As it turned out, Parker's score sent the game into overtime. The Pirates went on to a 5-4 victory when the Phillies' Ollie Brown lost Richie Hebner's fly in the sun for a three-base error.

Afterward, Buc Manager Danny Murtaugh agreed there aren't many players better suited to clutch situations than Parker.

"He's so big, so fast and so strong," said the Pirates' manager. "He also is pretty determined."

THE PHILLIES felt a lot worse about losing Oates than they did

about the defeat. After all, Johnny has become something of a fan favorite here ever since he was acquired as a throw-in in the deal for Richie Allen with the Braves last May.

By the middle of last season, Oates had taken over the main catching role with the Phillies. He hit .283 and was confident of improving this season.

"Now I know our pitchers, and that should help," he pointed out.

Luckily, the Phillies have Bob Boone available to take over for Oates, with the veteran Tim McCarver as backup until another replacement is brought in.

Philly Flips: Don Seger, the

Phillies' popular trainer, wound up in the hospital after complaining of chest pains during the April 11 game with the Pirates. He underwent tests before getting the okay to go back to work. Seger missed the Phillies' trip to Montreal and so did sportscaster Harry Kalas, who was hospitalized in Florida for a blood clot which developed while he was recovering from a broken ankle. Kalas also stayed home for additional tests.

Steve Carlton, beaten by the Bucs in his season debut, was pleased with his performance. The Pirates said they never saw the veteran lefthander throw harder or better.