

Ranger Jeff Heats Up for HR Shootout

By MERLE HERYFORD

ARLINGTON—When Jeff Burroughs hit three grand slams in 10 days last summer en route to a total of 30 home runs in his first full major league season, the Rangers began to have visions of a super star.

When he hit his fourth career grand slam at Anaheim against Skip Lockwood and the Angels April 9, after a fine spring and a strong '74 start, the press rediscovered Burroughs and bombarded him with questions:

Do you think you'll ever catch Hank Aaron?

Do you think you can break Roger Maris' season record (61) this year?

Startled, Burroughs protested:

"HERE, I HAVEN'T even hit 40 home runs altogether (he has now) and they're asking things like that. If I give any kind of answer, I come out looking stupid. I just told 'em I didn't think I could catch Aaron or Maris or anyone else. And, furthermore, I wasn't trying to catch 'em."

Foolish or not, the queries indicated the respect the blond, 23-year-old California slugger has gained in one short year. The fact that Billy Martin has built the Ranger attack around him also has attracted attention.

While Burroughs disclaims immediate or long-range ambitions, his manager has more definite ideas.

"Frankly," said Martin. "I wouldn't want to say anything is out of his reach as far as home runs are concerned, although it's silly to ask something like, 'Will he catch Aaron?'"

"But as far as Maris is concerned, if anyone in this game is going to do it, it'll be Burroughs. I've said before I wouldn't be surprised to see him hit 50 this season. That's a tall order for a 23-year-old, but, in Burroughs, I think we're talking about the game's next great home-run hitter."

EXCEPT FOR THE long power alleys and a strong prevailing wind at Arlington Stadium, his home park, Burroughs might have reached the 40 plateau last year. Nineteen of his 30 homers were hit on the road and, in Arlington, he watched at least a dozen long shots settle in an outfielder's glove in front of the fence.

The fences have been moved in 10 feet this year, and Martin, seeking more runs, has augmented Burroughs' chances by putting three speedsters ahead of him and inserting suddenly-potent Tom Grieve in the No. 5 spot "so they can't pitch around him."

The wind didn't affect his first homer this year, a 450-foot shot into the left-field bleachers against Rollie Fingers in the third game of the season, the first of six he hit in the first 22 games. But it substantiated Burroughs' belief that with the right-center field target more inviting, he might have to hit fewer in that direction.

"It's more than psychological or a shorter distance," he said when he learned the promised alterations had been made.

"I should get more inside pitches, more over the plate. They pitched me outside all last year because they knew I couldn't reach that fence often at home. Now, if they mix up the pitches, I may get a chance to pull the ball occasionally."

Martin's reasoning is equally persuasive.

"WITH SPEED on ahead of him (a combination of Dave Nelson, Toby Harrah, Cesar Tovar and Alex Johnson), he'll get more fast balls. If they try to curve him, we'll steal 'em

blind. And if they throw him enough fast balls, sooner or later he's going to hit home runs, lots of them, and drive in a lot of runs."

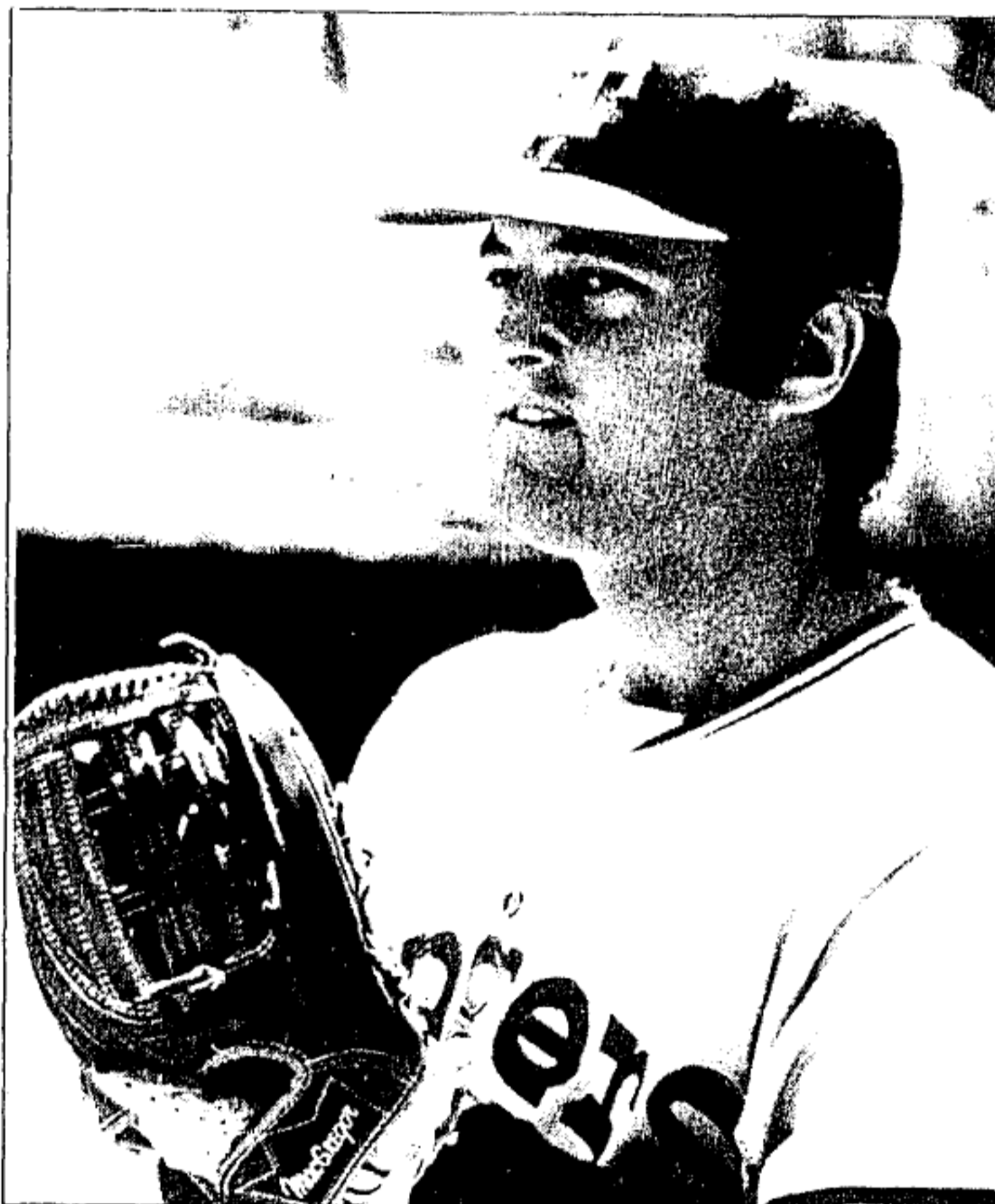
"That's my goal," said Burroughs. "RBIs, not homers. The last thing I want to do is go up there thinking about a home run. I might be thinking homer a little subconsciously during these early games, but I try to fight it. I've got to forget about home runs and concentrate on driving in runs."

"Last year, I got all my homers when I was just trying to meet the ball, hit it up the middle. If I worry about home runs, I won't hit any. When I used to try consciously to hit the ball out of the park, I didn't make good contact consistently and I was frustrated every time I missed."

There were a few helmet-throwing indications of frustration last year before Burroughs developed a new philosophy. When he went on a homer binge in midseason, he readjusted his thinking and admitted he was "trying for 'em." Then he went back to his old ideas when the RBIs began to build up to an eventual 85.

HE ENDED THE season at .279, but in his last 102 games, starting June 15, he batted .305. He had a 13-game hitting streak, longest in the Rangers' two-year history, in June, and hit 22 of his homers in his last 81 games. In addition to his three slams, he hit two homers in a single game twice—at Cleveland August 26 and at California exactly a month later.

As an indication of his power, Burroughs has posted three of his grand slams in what are generally conceded to



Jeff Burroughs . . . Time Will Tell

be the three toughest hitters' parks in the league—Texas, California and Oakland.

He got No. 1 last July 26 at home against the Angels' Bill Singer, appropriately powering it over a bleacher sign which read, "Burroughs Bomb Drop."

No. 2 came at Oakland four days later, a first-inning wallop off Vida Blue which sparked Jim Bibby's no-hitter.

The third was at Chicago, off Cy Acosta, on August 4.

No. 4 this year in California also was struck on behalf of Bibby, who also has benefited this season from a three-run Burroughs homer.

THREE AGAINST righthanders, one against a lefty. Not only the Rangers have regarded Burroughs highly since his day at Long Beach High School. He was the nation's No. 1 draft choice in June, 1969, after being highly rated by scouts of every major league team.

Don Pries, ramrod of Baltimore's farm system, scouted Burroughs as a prep star and maintains: "At that level, he was one of the two best prospects I've ever seen. I thought then and I still think he can be one of the great home-run hitters."

Whitey Herzog agreed completely last year when he gave Burroughs, who had had brief sporadic visits to the Senators-Rangers, a chance to play regularly for the first time.

"With his classic swing and a strong compact body, all he needs is an opportunity to develop," Whitey reasoned. "We're not going to do a thing to his batting except try and help him be more selective at the plate. How can you improve a swing like that?"

When Martin took over the team for the last month of the season, Burroughs was in the midst of a hot streak which carried through spring training, during which he led the Rangers in hits, homers and RBIs—more than twice as many of the latter as the next man. He has six spring homers, including a couple of slams.

BILLY IMMEDIATELY began to lay plans for '74 with Burroughs ticketed for a key role.

In his brief career, Burroughs has cracked 10 homers against Oakland, including three this year which helped the Rangers gain an even break with the world champions in their first six meetings.

The classic swing paid off for Jeff in another sport last winter.

He teamed with Denver Broncos' running back Bob Anderson to win the American Airlines Celebrity golf tournament in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and quipped:

"I made more here in a week than I made all last season. Bob Short and I must have a talk."

HE FLEW TO Minneapolis where talks produced a substantial raise, but only a hint of what Burroughs can expect to collect if the ball continues to boom out of American League parks. It's gone out everywhere but in Baltimore and Yankee Stadium.

Burroughs averaged a homer every five games last year, but almost one every two games in the first two weeks of '74. He can't expect to maintain that pace, but a goal of 100 or more RBIs seems reasonable after 20 in 22 games.

To be the next great home-run hitter, Burroughs undoubtedly will have to outpace Reggie Jackson, but even there he has one small advantage. He outomered the A's star, 30-29, for their first full seasons.

The Rangers Are for Real, Brash Billy Warns

By RANDY GALLOWAY

ARLINGTON—The month of April does not make a season. But it can make an impression, which is exactly what the Rangers accomplished.

Firmly established as the worst team in baseball the past two seasons, the Rangers were generally considered capable of living up to that reputation this season.

Not by Billy Martin, however. As far back as November and the winter meetings in December, Martin boldly was predicting he would field a contending team. No one took him seriously, passing it off as part of Martin's brash nature. But he continued to preach that gospel through spring training and into the season.

WHILE HE couldn't get any buyers from the media, he apparently sold it to his players. He wrote each player a letter in January, outlining his spring program and emphasizing that a new era was dawning for the Rangers.

On the last day of April, when the Rangers wiped out a five-run deficit and took a 12-10 victory at

Milwaukee, it was obvious he had some believers. That win gave them a 13-8 record and they held first place in the A. L. West by 2½ games.

"I know what a lot of people around the league are saying," noted Martin. "They're looking at our April record and shrugging it off."

"SO I DON'T really think we've convinced anyone that we're for real yet. But we will. It takes time. But when we're playing this way in June and July, they'll sit up and wonder what the hell's going on in Texas. But by the time they start taking us serious, we're going to be well on the way to proving my point."

In four years as a manager, Martin never has fielded a losing team. His poorest record was the 71-65 mark at Detroit last season. He was fired on September 1.

"The same people who said we couldn't win here also said we couldn't win at Minnesota and at Detroit," stated Martin. "They were wrong then and they're going

to be wrong now."

THE RANGERS' big April—their .619 pace was the best in the A. L.—was the result of exceptional pitching, mainly from Ferguson Jenkins and Jim Bibby, a league-leading team batting average and a defense that performed much better than expected.

Jenkins was 5-1 in the first month, losing his only game on two unearned runs. The trade with the Cubs for the 30-year-old righthander looked like a steal.

Bibby had a 5-2 record in April. As expected, he was somewhat erratic, brilliant one game, not so sharp the next. But the Ranger bats were getting him the runs to win.

JEFF BURROUGHS, with six homers and 20 RBIs in April, and Tom Grieve provided the power. Then Jim Spencer got hot in mid-April, as did rookie Mike Hargrove, who was playing in Class A last season.

Dave Nelson, Alex Johnson and Jim Fregosi were hitting around .300 and when Fregosi was side-

lined with a back ailment, speedy Len Randle stepped in at third to hit surprisingly well.

Cesar Tovar started the opening game April 6 and went 0-for-4. He was nursing an injured ankle at the time, so Martin took him out of the lineup, and Tovar didn't return until the second game of a double-header in New York April 28. He responded with three hits, then started the next game against Milwaukee and added three more hits, including a three-run homer and a two-run single.

THE MAIN AREA of concern was the bullpen, but Martin made moves in late April which he predicted would strengthen his relief pitching. He sent Pete Broberg and Steve Dunning, both ex-starters who lost jobs to Steve Hargan and David Clyde, to Spokane (Pacific Coast). Then he activated righthander Jackie Brown, impressive at times last season, and lefthander Jim Shellenback, a Martin favorite because of his sinker ball,

who pitched at Spokane last year.

Ranger Ramblings: Catcher Rich Billings went on the 21-day disabled list after suffering an ankle injury April 27 in a home plate collision with Bobby Murcer of the Yanks. The Rangers called up Bill Fahey to replace him, leaving the catching in the hands of two rookies. Jim Sundberg is the other catcher.

Delighted with the progress of Cleveland pitching castoff Steve Hargan, the Rangers signed another ex-Tribe hurler in late April. Lefthander Mike Kekich, released by the Indians during the spring, threw in batting practice for the Rangers one weekend in Oakland. Martin liked what he saw and had him signed to a Spokane contract. There's an excellent chance he'll get a major league shot in the near future.

David Clyde turned 19 April 22 and celebrated five days later by beating the Yankees, 6-1, in his first complete game in the majors.