

Cubs Boast One Big, New Asset — Callison

By EDGAR MUNZEL

CHICAGO, Ill.—As the Cubs began pursuit of the National League East title, there was one thing different about them from last season—one solid difference that requires no ifs or buts or vague optimism born of wishful thinking.

And that is Johnny Callison, the husky slugger and star right fielder the Cubs acquired in a winter deal with the Phillies.

Callison, plagued by groin injuries the past two years, escaped any recurrence during the exhibition campaign. Aside from the discomfort of a stiff neck for two days, he came through the training period in excellent health.

In the process, he had the best spring of his 11-year career in the major leagues. Johnny led the Cubs in hitting with .412 and in runs batted in with 20 in 23 games.

But even more important was the fact that Callison entered the regular season as refreshed mentally as he was physically. The change from the Phillies instilled the new drive and zest in his play. It's a new game for Johnny.

Starting All Over

"Everything's new," said a smiling Callison. "Being with the Cubs now is like starting all over again. At least that's the feeling I have. This team has a great chance to win the pennant. Just look at the lineup."

"For the first time in many years, I can say that spring training actually was fun. We beat everybody and won the Cactus League championship. I know that doesn't mean much. In fact, it doesn't mean anything once the season starts."

"But do you know that's the first time I ever was on a club that won anything? It's a good feeling to be with a winner."

"Now I like to come out to the clubhouse early again and spend some time just talking and kidding around. When you go out to play a game with these guys, you know, and they know, we have a chance of winning."

"There's no ifs about it. They know they can do it. It's the best lineup in the whole league. And I'm glad about it because this is what I wanted—to be with a contender."

Big Season in '64

For Callison, the last few years with the Phillies had become quite a chore.

He had his biggest years in 1964—when the Phillies blew the pennant after having a lead of 6½ games with only 12 games to go—and in 1965. In each of the two seasons, he topped 30 homers and 100 RBIs.

But then the Phillies tried to go for veteran players and they went steadily downhill. And Callison's own batting production went down with the club.

It is a rather commonly accepted view that the Cubs are aging. This may be their last good shot at a pennant. But Callison differs.

"I believe people get that idea because of Ernie Banks, who is 39," said Callison. "Except for the bullpen, the rest of the team isn't old at all."

"Don Kessinger and Randy Hundley are only 27, Glenn Beckert is 29, Ron Santo is 30 and Billy Williams and I are 31. That's

certainly not old. All of us have four or five good years left. And then there are two young starters in Ferguson Jenkins and Ken Holtzman, and Bill Hands is just 29."

Injured in Venezuela

Callison's leg problems began in the 1959-60 Venezuelan Winter League when he hurt his left knee diving for a ball. A tendon was strained and he had to have the knee drained when it puffed up. That summer with the Phillies, he reinjured it.

"Now, after years of pounding on the legs, calcium has built up in the knee and it pains me periodically," said Johnny. "In trying to favor it, I developed the groin injuries."

"In 1968, it was the left groin and last season the right one. This type of injury takes forever to heal because you keep aggravating it. It bothers you hitting as well as running."

"If I can just escape reinjury," Callison said, "I'm sure I'll have a good year. I'm really looking forward to hitting in Wrigley Field."

Daylight ball is going to be wonderful after all that night ball in Philly, especially since the lights there were bad."

Bruin Briefs: Bill Hands, left behind in Arizona when the team broke camp so that he wouldn't aggravate his bad back in the cold weather, rejoined the team in time to work the third game of the season. He pitched for the Tacoma (Pacific Coast) farm club to keep in shape. . . . Randy Hundley's chip fracture of the left thumb was a little slower in healing than expected. He was out of action the first week. . . . Steve Barber, released outright by the Brewers, was working out at the Cub minor league camp and might be signed by the Wrigleys.

Jim Hickman's grandfather, Leonard Turner, died in Henning, Tenn., and the veteran outfielder attended the funeral April 8. . . . J. C. Martin, the ex-Met filling in for Hundley, was hitless in his first game with the Cubs, but grounded down two would-be base thieves. . . . Bob Procniar, United Airlines agent shepherding the Cub



John Callison

chartered flights, had his topcoat carried off and the one left him was four sizes too big. . . . "That walker's so big," cracked the Cubs, "if he'd cut off the pockets, he could sell them to the Boy Scouts for sleeping bags."

A Hectic First Flight for Jim McDonald

By NEAL RUSSO

NEW YORK, N. Y.—Jim McDonald took his first plane ride recently—at the age of 79. The little guy had been too busy to get up sooner. He took tickets at Ebbets Field from the week it opened until the Dodgers fled west in 1958.

He was at Ebbets Field 35 years—in addition to his regular job with one New York city office or another. He also had been a batting practice pitcher for the Dodgers at 15. And he handled clubhouses and took tickets at old Washington Park, as well as at Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds and Madison Square Garden.

Jim finally was lured out of his Brooklyn home to go to spring training this year.

"I was on the cuff," he said. He meant that his four sons and one daughter gave him the trip as a Christmas present.

Joe Is Met Official

One of the sons is Joe McDonald, player development director for the Mets.

"They lost his luggage at the Tampa airport, his wallet was lifted and he had to worry about the air controllers' strike," Joe said. "What a first flight! I had to buy him some clothes when he got to Florida."

Ticket-taking has been a generation thing in the McDonald family. Grandpa McDonald also was a ticket man at Ebbets. The extra money enabled three of Jim McDonald's four sons to get through college. The fourth didn't go to college but is doing fine as an IBM engineer.

Jim McDonald got the baseball bug when he was 9. He and some friends made holes in a fence at old Washington Park and put their names over the holes. That gave them exclusive rights to the holes.

"Later we'd watch the games from the fire escapes of the Italian flats next to the ballpark," Jim recalled. "It cost 10 cents to sit up there, 15 cents for a doubleheader. And you were only 50 feet from the park. Sometimes you got a chair."

Jim had been a shortstop and pitcher in semipro ball.

"He's the reason I'm where I am in baseball now," said grateful son Joe. "Pop would take me out at 8 in the morning to work

out. We'd be out 10 to 12 hours a day, just taking time out to eat."

Joe, a Fordham grad, didn't get far as a player. He was first baseman-manager of the Ardmore Air Force Base team.

Joe got into baseball through Fred Corcoran, well known sports entrepreneur. One of Joe's duties was to shepherd ailing Ty Cobb each year at the Hall of Fame ceremonies in Cooperstown.

Cobb Steady Talker

"I roomed with Cobb," Joe recalled. "He was so sick by then he never seemed to sleep. He'd just take baseball with me day and night. I learned a lot. Cobb was good to me. He even gave me a wedding present—a cookbook. That was something because he wouldn't give away snow in winter."

Joe was only 12 when he began taking tickets.

"I was a turnstile boy—got 49 cents per game," Joe recalled.

"I worked for the Cardinals and once when I got close to the manager Eddie Dyer and one of his coaches when they were conferring, Dyer ordered me to move away," Joe recalled.

Joe said his mother never objected to his father being gone so much because of his ball park moonlighting.

"The only time I ever saw her mad was when Pop would chew tobacco in the house and use a Campbell's bean can as a spittoon," Joe remembered. "Pop had amazing accuracy, but now and then there'd be too much of a splash—and Mom didn't like that."



JOE AND JIM McDONALD . . . A baseball family.

Bullpen Strong—Look Out for Mets


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performed well in the first week—better than any first week in their history. And the way the bullpen came to the rescue during the early days, the rest of the clubs were served the notice that the Miracle Mets of 1969 are back at the same old stand for 1970.


Met Musings: The Mets will lose Nolan Ryan for two weeks in June when he goes away for his Army summer camp training. . . . When Bud Harrelson stole a base in the

St. Louis series, it equaled his entire production for 1969. Last year, he was coming off a knee operation and the Mets kept him in harness. But, this year, he'll get the go-go sign from Jim Hodges whenever the manager feels the opportunity is right. Harrelson has a goal of 25 thefts. . . . The Met infielders were instructed by Hodges not to play in on the edge of the infield grass on Astro-Turf fields when they are trying to prevent a runner from scoring from third. Gil feels the balls take


such a swift skip off the artificial infields that it isn't necessary to play in. Hencefore, his infielders will play at medium depth. . . . After unruly Pittsburgh teenagers overrun Forbes Field on opening day and threw all sorts of garbage at Ron Swoboda and Cleon Jones, Hodges received three phone calls at his hotel that night from irate fans who wanted the Mets' manager to know they apologized for the hooliganism. "I think it was nice of them to call," said Gil, "and I told them so."




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