

Now Only Reds Grinning at Ex-Clown Carbo

By EARL LAWSON

CINCINNATI, O.—The dirt still was clinging to the back of **Bernie** Carbo's perspiration-soaked uniform.

"I've never seen anything like it," exclaimed a still-awed Jim McGlothlin. "I've seen guys spin and fall down swinging at a pitch. But I've never seen a guy hit a ball as far as **Bernie** did and then topple backward and land flat on his back."

McGlothlin was referring to Carbo's three-run, sixth-inning homer which clinched a 6-5 victory over the Phils August 26 and made lefty Jim Merritt the National League's first 20-game winner.

"**Bernie** just waited back on that slow-breaking ball Jim Bunning threw up there, leaned back and let it all go," exclaimed Manager Sparky Anderson.

"I had to laugh when I found myself lying there on my back in the batter's box after I hit the ball," said a grinning **Carbo**.

"Everyone in the dugout was laughing, too," chimed in McGlothlin. "We just couldn't believe a guy could hit a ball that far and fall backward doing it."

The homer, which sailed into the left-center field seats at Philadelphia's Connie Mack Stadium, was the 21st of the season for **Carbo**. And the two hits he collected for the night boosted the 22-year-old's batting average to .320.

"If **Bernie** doesn't wind up with the league's Rookie of the Year award, then there should be an investigation of the balloting," commented Anderson.

Carbo's 21st homer provided him with more than the usual satisfaction since it came off Bunning, a pitcher who had given him nothing but trouble all season.

"That Bunning messes up my mind," said **Carbo**. "I'd faced him three times this season and each time he loused me up so much I couldn't hit for a week. Most of the time he would give me slow stuff. And then every once in a while he'd give me a fast ball just far enough away from me so I'd be afraid to take it."

Carbo had gone into the August 26 game determined to gain revenge.

Line Drive Just an Out

"I told myself I was going to hit everything to left field," said **Bernie**. "I was gonna force myself to wait back on that slow stuff he throws."

In the second inning, **Carbo** lined a shot which caromed off Bunning's left wrist to second baseman Tony Taylor, who threw him out.

"That really burned me up," said **Bernie**. "It was the first time I'd ever hit a ball hard off him and I didn't even wind up with a hit."

Carbo drilled a line single to center in the fifth inning and went on to score the Reds' second run of the game. And, one inning later, he slammed his game-winning homer.

"Sometimes **Bernie**'s a little slow coming around, but once he sets his mind to something, he gets the job done," commented Anderson.

There was the hex the Mets' pitching staff seemed to have on **Carbo**.

The outfielder had only four hits in 23 swings against the Mets when the Reds opened a weekend series in Shea Stadium August 21.

"The Mets' book on **Carbo** is he can't hit the good fast ball and that's unusual for a rookie," commented the former National League home-run king, Ralph Kiner.

Kiner's remark was passed along to **Carbo**.

The next day, facing Met pitching ace Tom Seaver, **Carbo** rapped out three singles and drew a walk in four trips to the plate.

"I guess the Mets will have to rewrite their book on me," cracked **Carbo** on a post-game television show.

"I can't say **Carbo** hasn't surprised me," said Anderson. "This spring, I figured that I could expect a .260 batting mark and maybe 12 homers from him."

He Knows Strike Zone

"Now, though," added Sparky, "I wouldn't be surprised if he got one of his real hot streaks and wound up hitting .330."

No Red hitter has a better knowledge of the strike zone than **Carbo**.

"He might even have the best in the league," commented Anderson, citing the 78 walks **Carbo** has drawn even though he has appeared in only 100 games while platooning with rookie Hal McRae, a righthanded hitter.

A compact, 6-0, 185-pounder, **Carbo** already has sent a drive soaring into the yellow seats at Houston's Astrodome. And that's a feat no other lefthanded hitter in the league can claim.

The rookie outfielder's tape-measure drives also have cleared the center field fence at Montreal's Jarry Park and landed in the green seats in the right-center field section of the Reds' new Riverfront Stadium.

Carbo's power, though, doesn't surprise big Ted Kluszewski, the Reds' batting coach.

"His swing has tremendous velocity," pointed out big Klu. "That's why you see the bat fly from his hands a lot of times. He sometimes generates so much speed he can't hold onto it."

More than a few times, **Carbo**'s teammates have had to run for cover when his bat sailed into the dugout. And, there was one occasion this season when his bat landed in the third row of box seats beyond the visitors' dugout at Chicago's Wrigley Field.

"All I've got to say," commented Anderson, "is the guy



Bernie Carbo . . . Carrying Cincinnati Banner in Rookie of the Year Parade.

who made **Carbo** the Reds' No. 1 choice in the 1965 free-agent draft knew something."

However, the Reds' front office had reason to entertain doubts as they watched **Carbo** flounder through his first three seasons in the minors.

In those days, too, **Carbo** had his doubts as to whether he really wanted to be a professional ballplayer, even though baseball had been his life since he was big enough to hold a bat.

That first summer away from home was an agonizing experience for **Carbo**, an only child.

A Homesick .218 Hitter

"There I was," recalled **Bernie**, "a 17-year-old kid getting off the plane in Tampa and knowing no one. A man met me, introduced me to another young kid and told me he was my roommate."

The other kid was Steve Mingori, a pitcher who's now in the Cleveland organization.

"I guess I must have written 1,000 letters that summer," said **Carbo**. "There wasn't much else to do. I didn't have a car to go anywhere. Steve and I shared an apartment and we didn't even have a radio or a television set."

Carbo's homesickness was reflected by the .218 batting mark he compiled for the Tampa club in the Florida State League in 1965.

"I was real depressed," said **Bernie**. "I used to look forward to the trips we made because it was something different to do . . . something that got me out of the apartment."

In those days, too, **Carbo**'s temper made him his own worst enemy.

And more than a couple of times the temper cost him money. Like the \$200 fine he once drew for dismantling a dugout faucet during a temper tantrum.

Those were the days, too, when **Carbo** considered an umpire his mortal enemy.

Bernie moved up to Peninsula (Carolina) in 1966, his first full season in pro ball.

"The first three months of the season I was kicked out of five games by umpires," he recalled.

That's when he received a letter from the league president informing him that another banishment would result in a suspension.

"I always thought they were against me," said **Bernie**. "Now I know better."

Carbo first came into contact with Anderson in the Flori-

da Instructional League the fall of 1967. He had just completed a season with the Reds' Knoxville (Southern) farm club, where he had batted a disappointing .201.

By then, **Carbo** had earned the reputation for being the team clown.

"You can't believe how bad **Bernie** was as an outfielder," said Anderson. "I've seen him get down on his knees to catch balls. Why, the guys on the bench would actually cheer when he made a catch."

Today, **Carbo** is more than adequate defensively. And his arm is one of the strongest in the league.

"He's improved more than 100 percent since I first saw him," said Anderson.

Anderson can claim some of the credit for this.

"But," Sparky hastened to add, "**Bernie** deserves most of the credit. He has worked hard to improve himself."

It was at Asheville (Southern) in 1968 that **Carbo** first began to show the promise the Reds had seen in him when they made him their No. 1 draft choice three years earlier.

An End to Clowning

Anderson was **Carbo**'s manager that year and one of the first things Sparky impressed upon **Bernie** was that he didn't want any clowns on his team.

"When they start calling a guy a clown on my team, he's gone," Sparky told **Carbo**.

Anderson drove **Carbo** relentlessly.

"At first I thought he was picking on me," said **Carbo**. "Then I realized he was just trying to help me."

Hour after hour, **Carbo** would shag fly balls fungoed to him by teammate Dan McGinn, now a pitcher for the Expos.

Anderson also worked toward curbing **Carbo**'s temper. **Carbo** grins at the memory of the day he was chased by an umpire in 1968.

"Sparky had told me to keep my mouth shut, but I didn't," said **Bernie**. "And, after the umpire chased me, Sparky followed me into the clubhouse yelling, 'Whatever the fine is, I'm doubling it.'"

Anderson proudly pointed out that no one on the club breaks up a double play at second better than **Carbo**.

"He's ferocious," said Sparky.

This probably stems from **Carbo**'s days as a linebacker for his high school football team.

Getting married has helped **Carbo**, too. He took pretty Susie as his wife in the winter of 1968.

"You learn about responsibilities then," said **Bernie**.