

Super-Star Status Awaits Cedeno

By JOHN WILSON

HOUSTON, Tex. — There are people who believe Cesar Cedeno is destined to be the National League's next super star.

Heck, he hardly has to be any better than he was as a rookie to rate the toga of a great. But can he do it? Or was the Cesar of 1970 a flash? Is there a fatal flaw, as so often is the case, that will deny Cedeno his place among the Caesars of the game?

Nothing that happened in spring training indicated Cedeno is anything other than the immensely talented ballplayer who burst on the scene last year.

Of all the players Houston ever has developed, only Jim Wynn has approached Cedeno's raw physical talent—the potentially complete player who can run and throw and hit for average and power.

He May Surpass Wynn

Cedeno is larger and taller than Wynn. Cesar has shown he can be a high average hitter, whereas .282 has been the highest Jim has managed in eight years in the majors. Unless Cedeno changes his line-drive style—and Astro officials are praying he won't—he will not hit as many home runs as Wynn.

It was a happy spring for the Astros. Wynn was restored to his centerfield position and went through the pre-season schedule with noticeable cheerfulness. Club officials often commented that they expected Wynn to give the team a big boost

this year. And Wynn seemed to go out of his way to indicate he and management were wiping the slate clean of all the grievances they had been knapsacking over the years.

Cedeno, meanwhile, moved into right field with enthusiasm.

"I like to play right field," he declared. "I liked some things about center field more, but I like right field because of the throws."

Cedeno Has Strong Arm

A right fielder with a strong arm often can hold a runner on first to only a one-base advance on a single. And because he often gets the ball closer to the plate than the center fielder, he gets more chances to try to cut off runs at home. Cedeno has a good arm and, like most players with strong arms, he likes to use it.

"I want to hit over .300," Cedeno said of one of his goals, and do it for a whole season this time." Last year, Cesar batted .310 in 90 games. The fact that he didn't come up until late June probably cost him Rookie of the Year honors.

"I also want to hit more than 15 home runs," Cedeno said.

He doesn't plan to swing for home runs and he doesn't want to sacrifice average. But he believes if he hits the ball hard enough and often enough, he can hit as many as 25 homers and thereby command the respect that goes to players who hit for both average and power.

"I don't know about ribbies," he

said. "I will be hitting seventh and I don't know that I can knock in a lot there."

Cedeno obviously didn't want to set some uninspiring figure for himself, nor did he want to set an impractical one. Batting in the leadoff or No. 2 position last year, he knocked in 42 runs in 90 games.

Of course, Cedeno's seventh place in the batting order easily could change. But if things go as well as Manager Harry Walker hopes, he can afford to keep Cedeno down in the order and have real punch deep in the lineup.

Only 20 Years Old

The Dominican outfielder is 6-2 and weighs a little more than 180. He was 20 years old February 25. His name is pronounced Suh-dayn-yo. It may be a name that will go down with the great ones.

Astronotes: Reliever Fred Gladding's arm caused some concern as spring training came to a close. Fred's elbow was giving him a little trouble. . . . As Houston prepared to open the season, the five-man pitching rotation included Larry Dierker, Don Wilson, Jack Billingham, Tom Griffin and Wade Blasingame. . . . The Astros placed lefthander Ron Cook on the disabled list. He remained at Cocoa with the Oklahoma City team when the Astros returned to Houston to finish the exhibition schedule. Cook has had a sore shoulder all spring. . . . The Astros plan to lead off with Roger Metzger and have Joe Morgan bat behind him. Then comes Wynn, Bob Watson, Denis Menke, Doug Rader, Cedeno and John Edwards. . . . George Culver probably won a bigger role for himself in the bullpen plans with his spring work.



Cesar Cedeno



Jim Wynn

A's LaRussa Newest Diamond in Rough

By RON BERGMAN

OAKLAND, Calif.—Tony LaRussa has been on the road back with the Athletics for so long that it's not surprising to see him on the same route this spring.

This time LaRussa just might make it.

When the Athletics announced their 40-man roster this spring, LaRussa wasn't on it. That's really nothing new. He hasn't been protected since 1968, but he's been called up to the big club every year since then.

"I'm far from optimistic," LaRussa said about his chances this year. "I'd like to stay with this club, but I realize the problems involved. They couldn't have been too high on me to leave me off the 40-man roster."

LaRussa has caused some problems this spring for the Athletics. They're looking for a utility infielder and he's looked the best in camp.

Jimmy Driscoll, one of the other candidates, went down in the first cut and Gonzalo Marquez, a first base-

man, never bothered to show up, increasing LaRussa's chances.

In his first 11 exhibition games, playing third, short and second, LaRussa didn't make a single error. That helped even more.

"I played winter ball this year in the Dominican Republic," said LaRussa, normally a second baseman. "I hit about .290 for the regular season and over .300 in the playoffs."

"But the biggest help to me down there was that I had to play every position because guys kept getting hurt. That gave me the confidence I needed."

A's Eye Brown, But . . .

After Driscoll departed, LaRussa's main competition was Ron Clark. Last-minute cuts dropped the A's to 27 players.

"We have an interest in Larry Brown of Cleveland," Manager Dick Williams said. "But the Indians want too much for him."

"You know," Williams continued, "the grass sometimes looks greener on the other side. We might have the fellow we need right here."

LaRussa signed with the A's in 1962 for a \$50,000 bonus. Because of the bonus rule then in effect, he spent the entire 1963 season with the A's with only 44 at-bats.

An incredible series of injuries prevented him from ever playing as many as 100 games in any season from 1964 through 1967 and his career was retarded.

He has dislocated his left shoulder twice, torn ligaments in his right arm and suffered a severe muscle pull in his back.

"One more major injury and I wouldn't play anymore," LaRussa said last year. "I have a degree in industrial management from the University of Southern Florida, so I'm not worried about a job."

While LaRussa thought last year that another season in the minors might lead to his retirement, a winter of thinking changed his mind.

Tony Won't Quit Now

"I'm 26 now," LaRussa said. "My oldest daughter is three. I'm just going to play it by ear, stick around for two or three years and see what happens."

"I've still got a year and a third to get my pension and I'd like to get that if I can."

A's Acorns: Rollie Fingers became the first A's pitcher to go nine in the spring when he set down the Padres, 9-2, March 27 on five hits. . . . Owner Charlie Finley received a number of letters complaining about broadcasts being on weaker stations this year, but he said it was the sponsoring oil company's fault and not his. . . . The A's pocket schedule, with Reggie Jackson on the cover, is laid out wrong with the months horizontally arranged instead of in the normal three vertical segments. . . . As the A's closed shop in Mesa, there were a few injuries—shortstop Campy Campaneris, jammed left index finger; infielder John Donaldson, bruised hip; third baseman Sal Bando, bruised toe; pitcher Chuck Dobson, bad back, and outfielder Angel Mangual, bruised shoulder.



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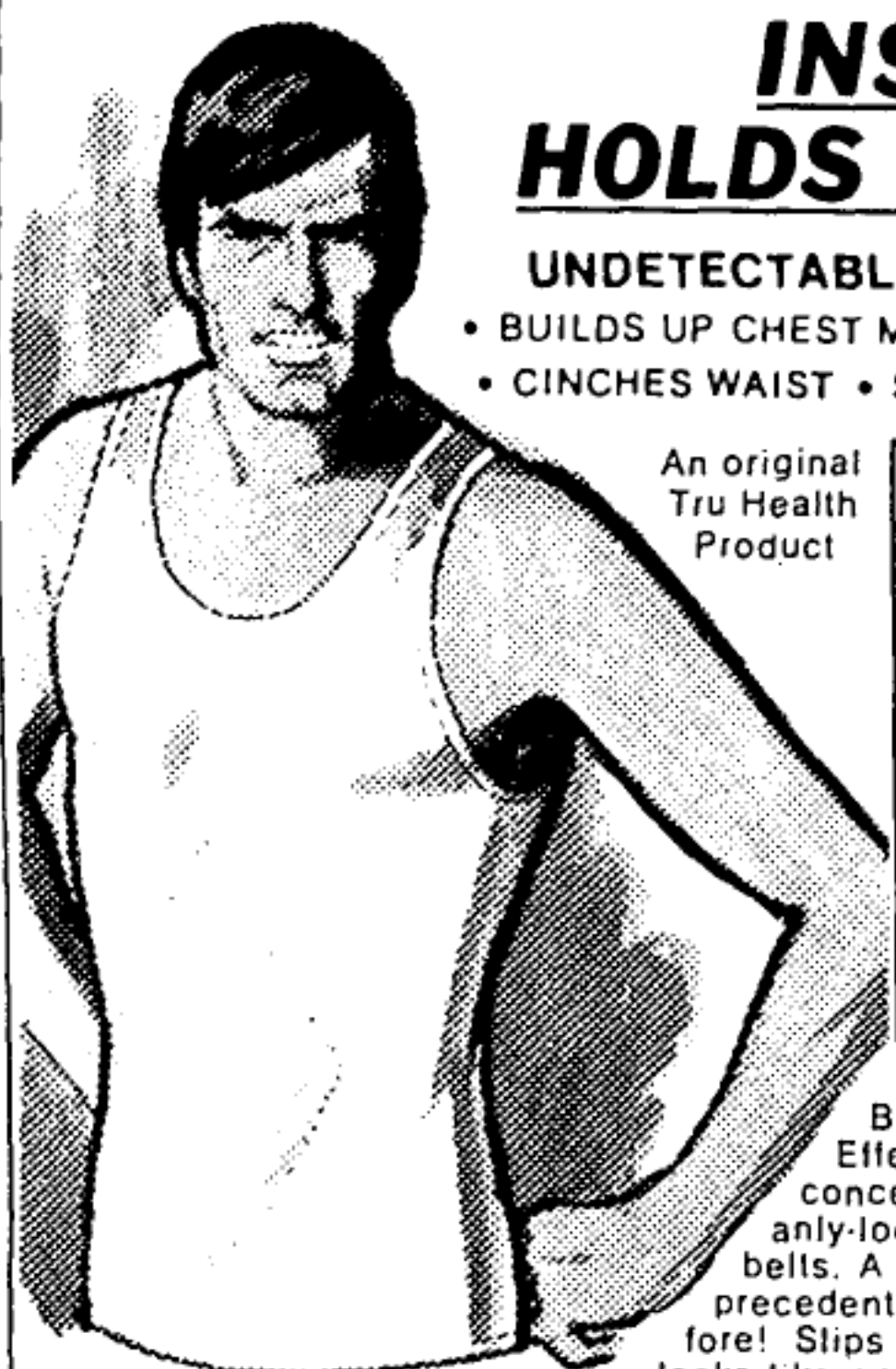
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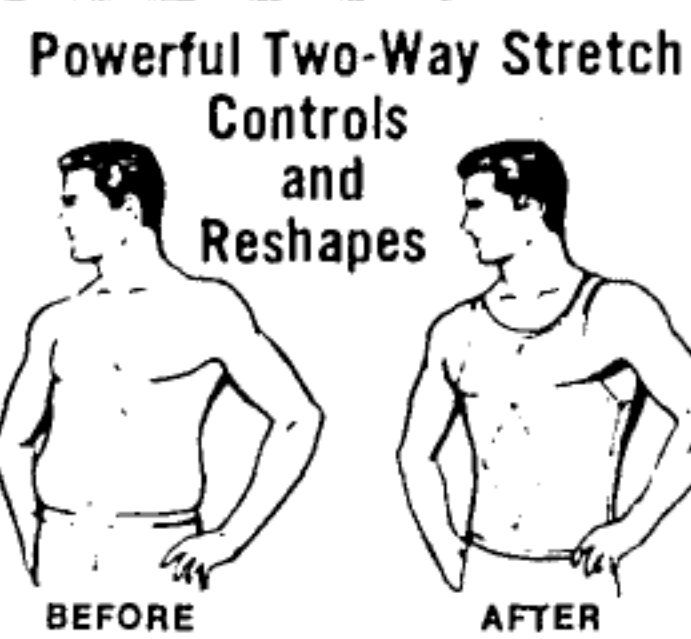
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High Pay Demands Made LeFlore Ex-Tiger

By TOM GAGE

DETROIT—When it was over and done, even the Detroit Tigers were surprised they had traded Ron LeFlore.

"We had never talked about trading him to the Expos," General Manager Jim Campbell said after completing the deal. The Tigers received pitcher Dan Schatzeder for LeFlore.

"It just happened," added Campbell, "we were not shopping him around."

The Tigers are going to miss LeFlore. Gone are his 78 stolen bases, his .300 batting average and his excitement. But gone also are his contract demands—which, in the final analysis, were the reasons why the Tigers traded their center fielder. Money was the root of the entire deal.

The two sides—LeFlore and his agent, Ken Fishkin, on one side and Campbell and the Tigers on the other—had been haggling for weeks over the size of LeFlore's next contract.

At the end of the 1980 season, LeFlore can become a free agent and the Tigers were already fearful of losing him. Their big pitch to keep him, a contract offer of nearly \$3

million for six years—more than they had ever offered a player—had been turned down.

"The thought of losing him next year had a great bearing on the trade," said Campbell. "We couldn't turn down the prospect of having a good, young pitcher for four years to keep a good player who might be gone in a year."

LeFlore was bewildered, then hurt, at hearing the news. "The Detroit organization has meant everything to me," he said. "It gave me the chance to play."

"I thought they wanted to win. That's what they have been telling the public, and even I believed them. Everybody did. But they don't want to win as much as they are pretending. This proves it."

"I did a good job for them, I was a good ballplayer. I didn't think they'd ever trade me, but I guess the contract stuff got to them."

The Tigers were reluctant to trade LeFlore. They were even hesitant to bring up his name.

"I was surprised when they mentioned him," said Expos' president John McHale. "Other teams had inquired about Schatzeder but we told them he was untouchable. Then LeFlore's name came along and we had to listen."

The Tigers know what kind of player they've given up: "I can see a division pennant for Montreal with this trade," said Tiger Manager Sparky Anderson.

But they are also very aware of the caliber of pitcher coming their way.

Schatzeder was 10-5 last season for the Expos. His 2.83 earned-run average was best in the National League among southpaw starters.

"We had to come out of the winter meetings with a left-handed starter," said Anderson. "That was our main goal, but we knew how hard it would be to get one."

"I'd like to think that my input, my opinion of Schatzeder, had a lot to do with the deal," Anderson added.

Anderson indicated that Schatzeder will be his No. 2 starter behind Jack Morris, a 17-game winner.

Kirk Gibson and Dave Stegman stand as the heir apparents to LeFlore in center field for Detroit.

Tigers Notes: The first order of business for Detroit was the completion of the Rusty Staub deal the Tigers made with Montreal last July. They settled on minor league catcher Randy Schafer and cash estimated at \$149,000.

Astros Black Out in Search for Power

By HARRY SHATTUCK

HOUSTON—The Houston Astros must either postpone their search for a power hitter or find him within their own organization.

General Manager Tal Smith met only frustration in trying to swap pitching—the Astros' strength—for power—the Astros' weakness—at the winter convention.

The Astros' best hope seemed to hinge on a potential Joaquin Andujar-for-Bill Robinson trade with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Andujar, twice a National League All-Star, is expendable because the Astros also have Joe Niekro, J. R. Richard, Nolan Ryan and Ken Forsch in their pitching rotation. Rob-

inson is available because the Pirates are loaded with hitters.

The teams couldn't reach agreement in Toronto, though presumably such a trade remains possible.

More elaborate speculation involved the Astros who were rumored to be getting Dave Winfield, Fred Lynn, Dave Kingman, Ron Cey, Greg Luzinski, Andre Thornton and Jerry Martin. Such speculation is routine for some clubs, but is familiar to the Astros only since new Owner John McMullen proved he is willing to empty his pocketbook by signing free-agent Ryan to a \$1 million-per-year contract.

Smith dismissed rumors almost by the hour. On Monday he said, "We have possible matches with eight teams." On

Tuesday he said, "That total has been cut in half." On Wednesday he said, "We have nothing working within our division." On Thursday he said, "We have less than a 10 percent chance of making a deal with an American League team," and after Friday he went home.

All this was no surprise. True, the Astros, who hit only 49 homers last year and are slightly overbalanced with left-handed hitters, need added run-production. But also true, Houston came within 1½ games of a division championship in 1979 before signing Ryan.

Manager Bill Virdon suggests his team's offense may be improved even without any changes.

"Several of our players have shown in the past that they're capable of hitting better than they did last year," Virdon said. He cited Cesar Cedeno, Jose Cruz, Enos Cabell, Art Howe and Alan Ashby as players who were slightly (but not far) below their career norms in average and/or run production in 1979.

Cedeno could hold the key to Houston's fortunes. He was (1) recovering from a 1978 knee operation and (2) bothered by severe illness last year, so his subpar season is explainable. The Astros have talked with several other clubs about possibly trading Cedeno, but assuming he remains in Houston and is fully healthy, he remains among baseball's great talents.

Outfielder Danny Heep and catcher Alan Knicely, co-winners of the Southern League most valuable player award last season, are other potential sources of power. Heep hit 20 homers and Knicely 33 for Columbus.

"We should be able to score more runs next year," Virdon said.

But the trade talk no doubt will continue.

Astros Notes: Gerry Hunsicker, who has served as an administrative assistant to Smith, is switching jobs. He will join the club's scouting and player development department after spring training. . . . The Astros will open spring camp February 28 for pitchers and catchers, March 4 for the full squad. . . . Houston pitching coach Mel Wright is reported "feeling great" and anxious to begin the 1980 season, according to Virdon. A tumor on Wright's lung was deemed inoperable in September.

Peters Can't Peddle Palmer, And Orioles Breathe Easier

By KEN NIGRO

BALTIMORE—Hank Peters spent what seemed like a year one week in Toronto, sitting by the telephone. But what he heard mostly was the sound of silence.

"Hardly anybody ever called," sighed the Baltimore Orioles' general manager after making just one minor deal at the winter meetings. "It was almost insulting. We sat there and the only people we heard from were reporters. The way some of these teams act, you would think they finished in first place instead of us. It really startles me. Like every other year, we had to take the initiative."

The solitary trade brought to the Orioles Hawaii-born Lenn Sakata in exchange for relief pitcher John Flinn. Sakata, a good defensive second baseman who hit .300 last year at Vancouver (Pacific Coast), has an outside shot at sticking with the Birds next season, but probably will wind up at Rochester (International). However, his big chance could come in 1981 when the Orioles may be forced to shift Rich Dauer to third base if Doug DeCinces plays out his option.

Peters, of course, was not all that disappointed that he returned home with his team intact—a team that buried the rest of the American League East and went on to capture the pennant. But he had wanted to obtain a hard-hitting outfielder and discussed such people as Al Cowens (Kansas City), Al Oliver (Texas), Sixto Lezcano (Milwaukee), Dan Ford (California) and Cesar Cedeno (Houston). The bait in each case was Jim Palmer, the three-time Cy Young Award winner who had earlier requested a \$3.5 million extension of his contract and given the Orioles a list of clubs he would consider joining if a trade could be worked out.

But nothing materialized.

"We wanted to find out how much interest there was in Jim," Peters said. "We did a lot of soul searching and we decided to examine all our options. But I want to emphasize again that these were only exploratory talks."

The problems in trading a man of Palmer's talents were self-evident from the start and, despite all the huffing and puffing, it became obvious at the meetings that the man with the highest number of wins (186) in the 1970s would remain an Oriole.

"Jim's staying here," Peters said. "It's a dead issue for now."

In fact, there were indications that Peters and new Owner Edward Bennett Williams had agreed to sit down

and negotiate with Palmer's agent, Ed Keating, and try to work out some kind of extension.

"I'm interested in getting together and having some good dialogue with Jim," Peters said.

It was almost as if both sides went to the brink of war and then suddenly realized they really love each other. The more the Orioles discussed a trade for their star righthander, the more they appreciated how much he meant to them. And the more Palmer heard his name mentioned, the more he seemed to want to stay right where he's always been—in a Baltimore Orioles' uniform.

"I found the response in Baltimore to be terrific," Palmer said. "When I would go out to eat, people would stop me and say, 'Please don't leave.' I would miss it here. My arm feels fine and I've got some new exercises for my elbow. Besides," Palmer asked, "if I left, who's going to aggravate Earl?"

Earl is Manager Earl Weaver, who has had many ups and downs with his talented pitcher. It just wouldn't be the same without the two of them pointing at each other on the mound, screaming at each other in the dugout and patting each other on the back in the clubhouse.

"I don't want to lose a guy I've been so close to for so long," Weaver said. "I enjoy all that stuff most of the time. After it's all over, you laugh about it."

Indeed, Weaver seemed relieved that nobody left.

"I knew it would be hard for us to do something," he said. "But we won 102 games last year. If we couldn't come up with the right deal, I didn't want to come up with the wrong one."

So what the Orioles are saying to the rest of the American League is: come and catch us if you can.

Orioles Notes: Weaver will formally sign a two-year extension of his contract next month when he returns to Baltimore from his Miami home for a banquet. "I didn't ask for a lot of money," Weaver said. "But there are still some details to be worked out as to deferments and an insurance policy." . . . Former Owner Jerry Hoffberger plans to file an appeal over the \$2,500 fine imposed on him by Commissioner Bowie Kuhn for permitting Maryland Governor Harry Hughes to throw out the first ball in the World Series. "I want a hearing," Hoffberger said. "I think I deserve one. It's a matter of principle." . . . While Palmer was the top pitcher of the '70s, Lee May was one of the top hitters. May finished fifth in home runs (270) and third in runs batted in (936).

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