

In Dodger Book, He's Sen-CEY-tional

By GORDON VERRELL

LOS ANGELES—Third base in the National League is one of baseball's most hotly contested positions.

There's the Reds' Pete Rose, a .310 career hitter. There's the Cubs' Bill Madlock, the N.L. batting champion last season with a .354 average. There's the Phillies' Mike Schmidt, the N.L. home-run king the last two summers with 36 and 38 homers.

And there's the Dodgers' Ronald Charles Cey, the N.L. All-Star third baseman each of the last two years.

There are those who claim that Cey should not have been selected and there are just as many, if not more, who say the selection was indeed just.

Cey is neither disturbed nor overly warmed by either opinion.

"I'm not in competition with Pete Rose or Mike Schmidt or Bill Madlock or any other third baseman in the National League," said Cey, a man who hardly has demeaned the position by batting .400 in his two All-Star appearances.

"The man I'm in competition with," he insisted, "is Ron Cey."

"I CAN'T SIT AROUND and worry if Rose and Madlock get three or four hits in a game or if Schmidt hits a home run. All that does is add pressure that I don't need. I have too many things that I need to improve on as a person as well as a baseball player, to be worrying about anyone else.

"I suppose that I'll get my share of votes, but I can't worry about that and I'm sure the others aren't worrying about what I do, either."

However, the Dodger third baseman, the top slugging third baseman in the club's history—Brooklyn as well as Los Angeles—is well aware what it means to be selected to the All-Star team.

"It means you're at the absolute top of your game," he said. "You are the No. 1 man at your position in the National League. That's something. It's unique. And the only person who can say the same thing is the No. 1 third baseman in the American League."

Cey is in only his fourth full season as the Dodgers' third baseman, a position that previously was identified by the revolving door that went with it. It has been well-chronicled just how many third basemen have been paraded through Los Angeles, some for a few seasons, most for a few weeks. The Dodgers' media guide even carries a list of all the third basemen—47 in all—and it is a point that disturbs the 28-year-old Cey.

"I'm here and that's that," he once said, not with brashness, but with confidence.

NOTHING HE HAS done since becoming the regular third baseman early in the 1973 season has caused his manager, Walt Alston, to look for anyone else.

He has improved his home run and RBI totals each year, from 15 and 80 in 1973 to 18 and 97 in 1974 to 25 and 101 last year.

He has surpassed the offensive marks of past Dodger third basemen. The Brooklyn record for RBIs was set in 1939 by Cookie Lavagetto, at 87, and until Cey came along, no one hit more than the 11 home runs by Harvey Hendrick in 1928 (Dick Allen, who hit 20 homers in 1971, played at first base and in the outfield as well as at third base).

Moreover, last year only two National Leaguers—the Phils' Greg Luzinski and the Reds' Johnny Bench—bettered Cey in both home runs and runs batted in.

On top of all that, his play at third base has improved just

as his hitting has improved.

"He made more diving stops and then jumped up and threw out his man more times last year than I've seen any third baseman do in a long time," noted Alston. "I thought he was quicker in '74 than he was in '73. Last year, he was quicker than ever."

While Cey's 1975 season was indeed a banner one, he still felt the frustration of not winning.

"That's why statistics don't always tell you the total story," he said. "As well as I played last year, it's difficult to be more pleased than I was in 1974 when we won the pennant."

"But if I play as well as Ron Cey can play, I'll be satisfied. Still, I maintain that a player can have the best year of his career and not have as good of a year statistic-wise."

IT WAS AFTER THE 1974 season that Cey won another



Ron Cey . . . His Job Is to Drive in Runs

battle of sorts, this time with the Dodger management. He took his contract dispute to arbitration, the first Dodger to do so.

"If I feel strongly about something, I don't back down," he said. "Win or lose, I do what I have to do."

He won that case and then this spring an even bigger one—a three-year contract, the first Dodger with anything longer than two years.

"What it showed me," he said, "was that the club has an awful lot of confidence in me and, too, that I have confidence in them."

"I'm well satisfied, so are they and no one is unhappy. There was some bitterness after the arbitration. But not now. Peter O'Malley believes in honesty and he believes in people who believe in themselves."

Ron Cey believes in himself, and the Dodgers, too.

He didn't panic when the club got off slowly, losing its first five games and eight of its first 11.

"We might have been a little over-anxious," he said of the bad start. "We just weren't executing and we lost some games that we should have won."

"But we're playing well now and I'm happy with what I've been able to contribute."

HE CERTAINLY contributed during the Dodgers' 12-game win streak from April 24 to May 7, hitting safely in all 12 games and producing the game-winning RBI in four of them.

Against the Cardinals, May 10, Ron clouted a two-run homer in the ninth inning to account for a 4-3 victory. The next night, he belted a pair of home runs to highlight a 4-0 win. And the next night he got the game-winning blow.

"That's my job," he said, "driving in runs. It's very difficult driving in runs when there's no one on base. But the game runs in cycles. Sometimes you go several games with no one on base, then there are times when there are guys on base all the time. You can't complain when there's no one there. You just keep going out and playing the best you possibly can play."

It's a case of maturing, not just for Cey, but the entire club.

"We made the mistake of watching what Cincinnati was doing the year we had the big lead and finally fell so far behind," he said, recalling the 1973 season. "That year, when we finally did wake up, we'd lost nine games in a row in September—and the pennant. Now we're just playing our own game and we're not worrying about the Reds or anyone else. Now, we're piling up wins that we can take into September with us."

DURING THEIR 12-GAME streak, the Dodgers, at times, appeared very un-Dodger-like. They were hitting home runs in bunches, seven in one game, in fact.

It might have come as a shock to some, but not to Ron. "Frankly," he said, "I've always associated the Dodgers with a hitting club, more than a pitching club. There's no doubt about it, we can put numbers on the board."

After a slow start himself, Cey again has regained the club lead in home runs and RBIs.

Again, the voting for the All-Star third baseman will be fierce and again Cey will be in the running. If he wins, fine; if he doesn't, well, he doesn't.

"I know a lot of people have said I'm underrated and all that," he said, smiling, "but I must be impressing somebody."

Alston's Chewing-Out Set Up Russell Bat Feast

By GORDON VERRELL

LOS ANGELES—Bill Russell hadn't played in a week, but he was summoned into the manager's office April 23.

Walt Alston, the manager, said it was a long talk.

Russell said it was a "real chewing out."

"It was the first time Walt and I had ever had a man-to-man talk," Russell said of the meeting. "I needed it. I needed the chewing out even though I knew I had played terrible. Sometimes you have to hear it from someone else before it really sinks in."

Russell returned to the lineup that night, went 0-for-2 and the Dodgers lost for the ninth time in 12 games, 4-3, in 11 innings to the Cubs.

But they won the next night, beginning a run of 12 straight victories, and it was Bill Russell who responded with two hits to begin a streak of his own.

IN SIX OF HIS STARTS after that Alston meeting, Russell had

two or more hits, going 4-for-5 with four RBIs May 7 against the Phillies and, suddenly, the Dodger shortstop was back among the National League's Top Ten hitters.

"I feel I have it going just as I did in '74," he said during his streak which helped the Dodgers win just one fewer than the Los Angeles record for consecutive victories. "I feel that I'm going to be a better hitter than I've ever been because my legs are stronger from all the exercising I did this past winter."

Russell was injured much of last season, playing in only 84 games, and wound up batting just .206 and driving in 14 runs—51 fewer than the year before when he helped the Dodgers to the National League championship.

"I thought Bill had been too complacent," Alston said of his talk with Russell just two weeks into the 1976 season. "I thought he came to camp thinking he had a job won, that he didn't have to work, that he didn't have to show

any aggressiveness. I told him his attitude was very wrong."

WHATEVER, RUSSELL bounded back from his poor start and so did the Dodgers.

But, Russell was hardly the only reason.

Ron Cey, after a slow start himself, strung together a 12-game hitting streak. Steve Garvey hit in 13 straight. Rookie Henry Cruz slugged three homers in two games against the Cubs. The Dodgers, in fact, went on a home-run tear as a team, belting a club-record seven in a 14-12 battle with the Cubs on May 5 and walloped 11 in the space of five games.

The streak, which was the longest in the National League since the Giants won 14 straight in 1965 and within one of the Los Angeles record of 13 in 1962 and 1965, jumped the Dodgers from last in the National League West to first, a lead they held onto for a week.

But Alston put little stock in the win streak.

"We really weren't that much better than we were when we were losing five in a row," he said. "We were getting guys to third base the early part of the season, but we weren't scoring them. Now we're getting a few more timely hits, our pitching has been a little better and that's been the difference."

"Anyway, it's the same old story. If you lose three or four in a row, everybody is down on you. If you win a few in a row, everybody figures you're going to win the pennant by 20 games."

Dodgers' Dope: The Dodgers' 12-game streak was snapped in Philadelphia on May 8. Doug Rau's two-year win streak also ended in the same series. Rau hadn't lost since August 3, stringing together 10 consecutive wins, before he was nailed for eight runs in 4 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings by the Phils. "The way I pitched, I couldn't have beaten Bakersfield," he said after the game. . . .

Ron Cey's 12-game hitting streak ended in the same game. . . . Steve Garvey's 13-game streak, the longest of his career, ended May 10 in St. Louis. . . . In the 14-12 victory over Chicago on May 5, the Dodgers missed by one inning of becoming the seventh team in history to score in every inning. They were blanked in the ninth.

Tom Lasorda was struck on the side of the head May 4 in Chicago when a bat, being swung nearby by Bill Buckner, snapped in half. Lasorda wasn't injured too badly. He still managed to wave home nine runs from his third base coaching box in a 9-6 victory over the Cubs. . . . Don Sutton was the winning pitcher in the 14-2 win over the Cubs, only the seventh time in 23 career decisions he's whipped Chicago. But it was the fourth win in his last five decisions against the Cubs, a club he had lost to 13 times in a row.