

# Chambliss a '10' on Every Scale

ATLANTA—It isn't easy to substantiate, their record being what it is of this sitting, but a new and stable force in the flighty personality of the Atlanta Braves may be located at first base.

## FURMAN BISHOP



Not that Chris Chambliss has had any measurable effect in bringing about peace between the clubhouse and management.

The most noticeable feature about Chambliss is that you don't notice him at all if you don't pay close attention. Until the game starts.

After it's over he seems to vanish again, fading into the silence of that cubic area assigned to him in the dressing quarters. How else could a player have spent all those seasons with the New York Yankees and harvested only a few lines in the book, "The Best Team Money Can Buy?" And those mostly for being on the front end of a squeeze play, hitting a big home run that won the American League pennant—you'd think it's the only big play he ever made, and he rankles at that—and seldom making an error, routine stuff like that.

Chambliss is a quiet man, (and I promised myself I would not add . . . "who carries a big stick"). He managed to isolate himself in the turmoil of the Yankees. This managed to gain the admiration of George Steinbrenner, who owns that circus.

He played his first base, drove in his 90 runs, hit his 17 home runs and rose above it all. He has developed a marvelously effective immunity to pettiness and bickering and stands out amidst it all like a statue in a swirling storm.

Of course he has his own version of it, and the authors of Manhattan don't fare too well. "The controversy was created by the press," he said, or is so quoted in Steve Jacobson's book. And Jacobson continues with an interpolation of his own: "What conflict? What chain of events? What animosity? Are you going to believe me, or your lying eyes?"

The second thought that arose at the height of the Ted Turner-Bob Horner-Gary Matthews crisis was of Chambliss. Here was this perfectly nice 31-year-old man who had been traded out of that nuthouse, and while this was last place and that's out of the money in the pennant race, think of all the peace he could look forward to. The furor began to attract opinions from television editorial voices to politicians, investigative reporters and free-lance advocates of liberty and justice swarmed in like varmints at the city dump. Strike a match in the clubhouse and it would explode. All of a sudden it's Yankee Clubhouse Revisited.

You imagined Carroll Christopher Chambliss moaning internally, "Oh, no, not again."

It was imagination misplaced, if you could read the interior by checking the exterior. "I wasn't involved," he said, reflecting that lovely capacity for shutting out the disruptive.

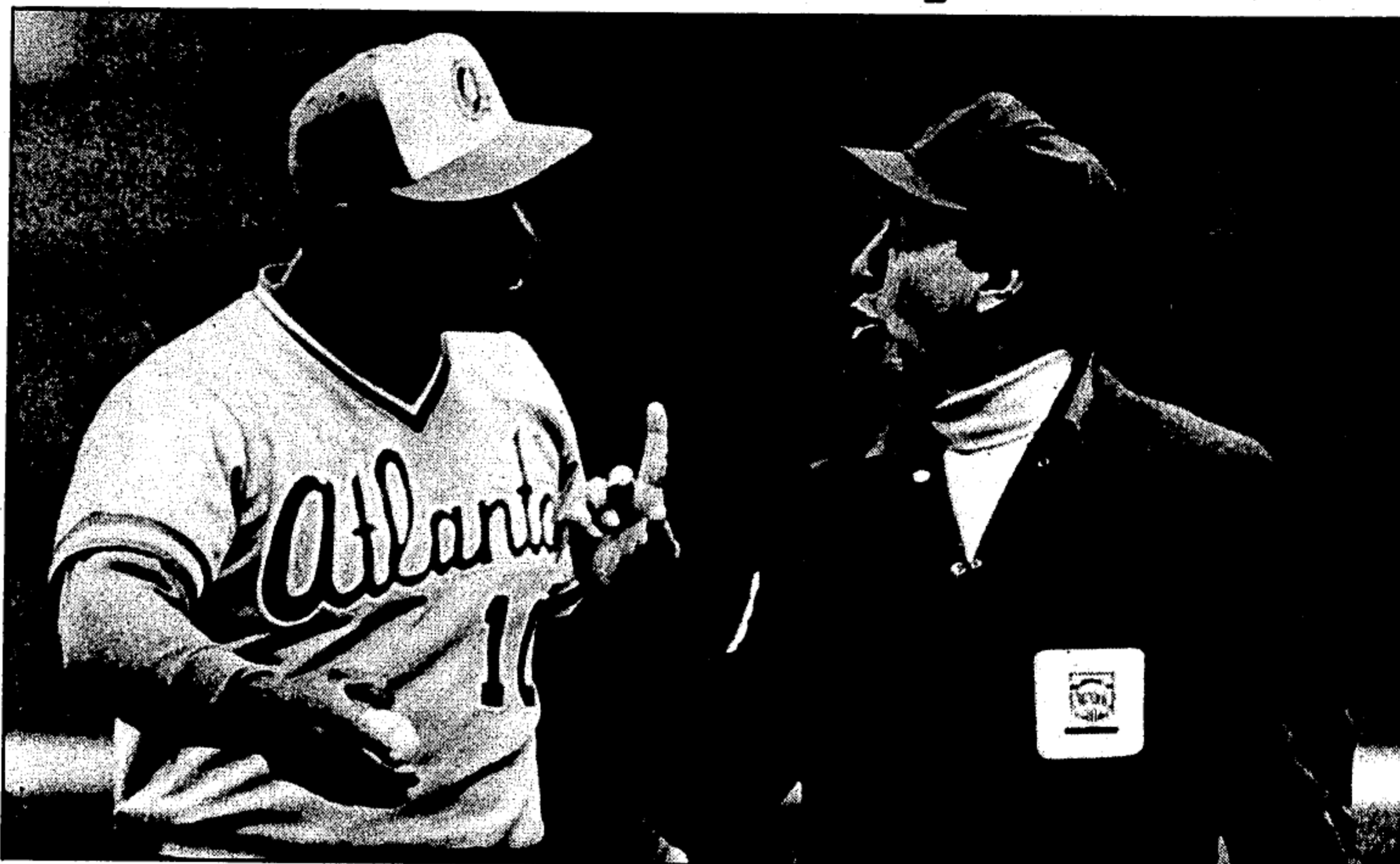
You find that a discussion with Chambliss doesn't take very long. He'll talk about the game, but don't bring up religion, politics, personal life, or what's up with the guy in the next stall. He believes in preserving the English language by careful use of it. The answer is soft.

He is always under control. He doesn't nose into anybody else's business and expects the same consideration in return. Presented a "Welcome to Atlanta" plaque before a recent game, he was asked what it was all about. "For being here," he said, which was no more nor less than what it was.

This is Chambliss' third station in the big leagues, starting at Cleveland. When Gabe Paul moved on to the Yankees and coveted Chambliss, he gave up four pitchers to get him, bringing down outrage upon his house. It later became known as "Gabe Paul's finest deal."

Chambliss spent six seasons with the Yankees, reflecting steadiness in every way. No candy bar was named for him. He bought no Rolls-Royces. He issued no proclamations in recognition of his IQ. He made no protestations when manufacturers of soap, dog food, detergents or male perfumery passed him over for endorsements or commercials. Nor when the Yankees traded him away to Toronto last winter because they needed Rick Cerone to catch. But a Chris Chambliss for a Rick Cerone, albeit a Tom Underwood accompanying Cerone for ballast?

The switch to Atlanta came later, and the Braves paid dearly with their finest young relief prospect, Joey McLaughlin, and Barry Bonnell. The pleasure of Chambliss' company is reflected most noticeably in his play at first base. It had been so long since Atlanta had seen first base played the way it was meant to be played that "The World's Next Great City" had forgotten there is an art to it. In the 14 seasons the Braves have been here fans had been sentenced to a parade of pretenders, except in the time of Orlando Cepeda, and his knees were on their last legs, you might say.



Take-charge Chris Chambliss argues with umpire Frank Pulli.

Through May 8, Chambliss was hitting .299, with four homers and 11 runs batted in for the Braves. He had delivered three game-winning RBIs.

This may not be his quitting place—as a Navy chaplain's son Chambliss grew up accustomed to being packed and ready to move—but it would seem as good as any, if he is aspiring to full appreciation.

I would assume absolutely no knowledge of the male rating scale, or baseball's specifications in that field. I think I know what they were getting at when Bo Derek came off a "10." Thus, translated to baseball, I think it might be significant to note the number on Chris Chambliss' back—"10."

## Red Sox' Grand Expansion Scheme Just Might Backfire

BOSTON—In the last few years, several changes—some cosmetic, some economical—have subtly altered the character of Fenway Park.

### RAY FITZGERALD



The composition of the left field wall was changed, so that baseballs no longer rattle crazily off the surface. Instead they hit with a dull establishment thud.

After Fred Lynn came close to serious injury by crashing into the center field wall in the 1975 World Series, protective padding was added—to the wall, not Fred.

Management then marched somewhat tardily into the electronic era by erecting an expensive message board above the center-field bleachers.

"Strictly baseball information," management said, but advertising messages gradually found their way onto the board. Must pay the freight, you know, so yesterday's Chew Bull Durham Tobacco sign on the left field wall is today's Magnavox display.

The hand-operated American League scoreboard remains, but the National League one is gone. To find out how the Phils did with the Reds, you must catch the score when it's flashed on the message board.

The back center-field bleacher wall on either side of the message board was heightened. Room for more ads. Bleacher seats went to two bucks, then three. Some bleacher seats were changed to reserved seats.

And in Section 4, out in right field, several rows of reserved grandstand seats were, by royal decree, transformed by magic into \$6.50 boxes.

Now comes the latest alteration, or at least the latest hotly-rumored alteration. The Red Sox are investigating ways of adding 27,000 seats to the park. Seven thousand customers would fit into new skyview boxes that would extend on the roof along each foul line.

And—get this—20,000 more zealots would root, root, root for the home team in bleachers built atop Ye Olde Greene Monster, above fabled Lansdowne Street.

The left-field screen, target of every righthanded hitter

from Hank Greenberg to Bucky Dent, would be dispatched to the junk heap or more likely cut into six-inch squares and sold for souvenirs at five bucks each.

Since 1973, Red Sox attendance has steadily climbed. Even with a seating capacity of 33,538, lowest in the league, the team has gone well over a million in each of the last 13 years, and has broken the two million mark in the last three.

So the logic says that 27,000 more seats could not help but increase attendance and profits. However, logic, in this instance, may be fooled by the sharp-breaking curve.

The fact is that a great part of the reason the Red Sox sell out so often is that they are a tough ticket because of the small park.

The fan knows that if he wants a ticket for a game on August 12, it would be wise for him to buy it January 9, or be shut out. The Red Sox' advance and preseason sale in recent years has been peachy-dandy.

If there were 60,000 seats, the urge to buy early would not be nearly so great, especially given the present plight of the economy and indications that the team itself has seen its best days and is in dire need of an oil change.

Consider, for a moment, Cleveland, with its 80,000-seat stadium. The place is often filled—when the Browns play. The Indians, however, are another matter. An attendance of 80,000 is sometimes reached, if the home stand is long enough. I've been to Indians games when the ushers and concessionaires outnumbered the customers.

Bigger is not necessarily better. More seats don't automatically guarantee more customers, and whoever said "let well enough alone" spoke volumes.

But if everything worked beautifully for LeRoux and Co., and customers stormed the gates to the tune of 55,000 every night, there would be one source of trouble, namely traffic jams and parking problems that would make the present ones seem like a day at the beach.

I suppose that running a major league team these days is no cinch, as long as owners play Santa Claus with ball-players who 20 seasons ago would have been lucky to be in Triple A.

If Red Sox management feels it is necessary to enlarge the seating capacity, I suggest it be done on a more modest scale.

Double-deck the dugouts.