

Pride Pushes Clemente: 'I Can Hit With Best'



Mr. Big of the Buccos, Roberto Clemente, Waiting His Turn to Take His Cuts, Warming Up With His Louisville Slugger and Defending His Right Field Territory

By LES BIEDERMAN

FT. MYERS, Fla.

There is no lack of confidence in Roberto Clemente, who firmly believes he is the best outfielder in the game and one of the best hitters. The only point he concedes is that Willie Mays and Hank Aaron and others of this caliber have more power.

The famous Pirate from Puerto Rico is a proud man and pride is his driving force. At age 30 come August, Clemente begins his tenth season with the Pirates.

"I can hit with anybody in baseball, but my only drawback is lack of power—home-run power," Clemente remarked in the Buc spring training camp, where he came fresh from a personal triumph in the Puerto Rico winter league.

He rested for a few weeks after he returned home, then was induced to play and found his team in last place. His bat, his glove and his arm enabled his team to rise from the cellar and win the pennant.

Buc Park Too Big for Homers

"I'm a better fielder than anybody you can name," he added with confidence, not boasting. "I can field better than Mays. I can go get a ball like Mays and I have a better arm. But as long as I play for the Pirates at Forbes Field, I can't become a home-run hitter.

"If I played in Wrigley Field in Chicago, then you could call me a power hitter. I could hit 35-40 home runs a year with my home games in that park."

This isn't boasting. Clemente has tremendous confidence

in his own ability and, just to prove that he knows what he's talking about when he mentions Wrigley Field, he averages close to .400 each summer against the Cubs in Chicago.

.318 Mark for 5-Year Span

Clemente takes great pride in his batting average over the last four or five years. He has a .318 average covering the last five years and a .324 mark for the last four years.

Only Hank Aaron is better. Aaron averages .324 for five years and matches Clemente the last four years.

General Manager Joe Brown insists Clemente's .320 batting mark last season wasn't up to Clemente's standards. "He's a better hitter than that," Brown claimed. "The way he hits, he should be batting .350."

Clemente smiled at the compliment and then commented on Brown's statement that he wanted the Puerto Rican to become the leader of the team.

"Just what is a leader?" Clemente asked. "I can't play any harder than I have.

"Even when I'm sick, I play as hard as I can, to the best of my ability."

Clemente owns the most gifted arm in baseball and he knows it. And so do the players on every other team. How did he learn to throw a baseball with such accuracy?

"I threw the javelin in high school, but that's only part of the reason I have a strong arm," Clemente said, laughing. "My mother has the same kind of an arm, even today

at 74. She could throw a ball from second base to home plate with something on it. I got my arm from my mother."

Clemente is probably the most popular Pirate at Forbes Field and there are fans there who never have heard him booed.

"Public relations," Clemente said as he grinned. "In 1955, when I was a rookie, I would stay behind at the park and sign autographs for two hours after a game. Other players would leave, but I stayed behind.

"Maybe the kids of ten years ago now are the paying fans and maybe they remember. I have found out people treat you like you treat them."

Roberto Got \$10,000 Bonus to Sign

The story of how the Pirates got Clemente is worth retelling. The Dodgers signed him for a \$10,000 bonus as a 20-year-old boy, mainly to keep the Giants from acquiring him. They didn't want the Giants to have a Mays and a Clemente in the same outfield.

They knew by sending him to the minors that they were in danger of losing him in the draft, but the Dodgers didn't care as long as the Giants didn't pick him up. And the Dodgers knew Clemente wouldn't be ready for a few years.

The Pirates, by virtue of finishing last in 1953, had first choice in the draft and they nabbed Clemente for \$4,000. Probably the all-time draft choice.

So you see, there is some merit in finishing last. That is if you can spot a Clemente.

Corsairs' Eyes and Ears Catch Staccato Swatting by Stargell

By LES BIEDERMAN

FT. MYERS, Fla.

Danny Murtaugh had no complaints as he sent the Pirates into their spring exhibition schedule following two weeks of perfect weather at Ft. Myers.

The Bucs worked long and hard every day and didn't miss a minute of activity because of weather.

The weather was just one of many features that pleased Murtaugh. He saw Willie Stargell hit the ball hard in the squad games and in batting drills.

"There's something about Stargell this spring that indicates he means business," Murtaugh said. "He came here 20 pounds lighter than when he left after the season and he's making everybody sit up and watch when he steps into the batting cage."

Stargell hit two triples in one squad game and a long home run in another, but the afternoon he hit three line-drive outs, Murtaugh blinked. "Stargell swings what I call a loud



Willie Stargell

bat," Murtaugh explained. "When he connects, you hear it all over the ball park."

Murtaugh plans to throw open the left field post for a free-for-all involving Stargell, Jerry Lynch, Ted Savage and Manny Mota.

The one who hits the best in the exhibitions will open the season. Murtaugh also will give Bill Virdon

and Roberto Clemente a rest from time to time in the exhibitions and enable the other outfielders to make good. Rex Johnston is being groomed as a center fielder and, if he hits anything at all this spring, he could go north with the Pirates.

Law Shows Smooth Motion

Murtaugh was also cheered by Vern Law's easy motion in one of the squad games. The Buc manager is trying to avoid getting excited about Law because of the history of his arm ailments, but he can't seem to hide his elation.

"What a lift he could give us if his arm came around," Murtaugh said of Law. "He tells me his arm is getting stronger each day and I notice other players buzz when they see him throw in batting practice or on the sidelines."

Bob Friend cut loose with a dazzling three-inning stint in his last time out before the exhibitions. He

Pirates' Scribes Take Charge as 'Managers'

FT. MYERS, Fla.



Les Biederman

Danny Murtaugh livened up the Pirates' camp on the eve of the opening of the exhibition season by turning over two squads to the Pittsburgh writers and allowing them to manage in a nine-inning game.

Murtaugh made out two lineups and then flipped a coin. Les Biederman of the Pittsburgh Press won the varsity and Jack Hernon of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette took the reserves, who beat the regulars, 5-3.

Murtaugh gave the writers full sway. They made out their own batting orders and used pinch-hitters or runners at will. He allowed each writer three pitchers, but insisted they call the strategy.

He sat between the journalists on the bench and when they asked for a certain bit of strategy, he relayed the signs to the coaches.

Bob Friend worked the first three innings against the reserves and blew down nine batters in a row with just one ball hit beyond the infield. Donn Clendenon drove in the first run off Joe Gibbon on a hard shot off the pitcher's glove and then homered over the right-center fence off Frank Bork.

Frank Kamfonik, a converted infielder-outfielder, had the fans on the edge of their seats when he fanned six in three innings and struck out Smoky Burgess and Willie Stargell with runners on second and third, then passed Jerry Lynch on purpose and fanned Gene Alley in one inning.



Jack Hernon

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