

Cruz, Astros Start Shadow Boxing

By HARRY SHATTUCK

HOUSTON—The Astros contend outfielder Jose Cruz is legally bound to them through the 1984 season.

Cruz contends he is legally finished with the Astros. Thus, a possible court battle looms to determine the contractual status of Cruz, who has declared free agency and his intention to participate in the reentry draft.

Astro General Manager Tal Smith isn't sure Cruz has any right to offer his services to other clubs.

"We felt we had an agreement (with Cruz) in principle, even if we didn't have a document," said Smith, who has consulted a Houston law firm on what has turned out to be a complex—and unexpected—situation.

On October 24, a state district judge granted the Astros' request for a court order restraining Cruz from negotiating with other clubs.

A spokesman for the Astros said the 10-day temporary restraining order issued by Judge T. M. Gup-ton "prohibits Jose Cruz from holding himself out to other baseball clubs as a free agent and prohibits him from denying that he has a contractual agreement with the Astros."

All seemed settled in July when the outfielder, on Jose Cruz Day in Houston, told a cheering Astrodome audience he was happy to announce he would remain with the Astros through 1984.

Cruz and his agent, Jack Childers, signed documents detailing a five-year agreement (estimated at \$1.8 million), according to the Astros. It was not a standard player contract, however. It was a letter of intent. Smith said he understood Cruz' signature would be only a formality once the actual contract was drawn up.

Not so. Cruz was dissatisfied with certain deferred payment procedures. The signing was postponed. Perhaps canceled forever.

"Jose would like to stay in Houston," Childers said from his Chicago office. "He loves the Astrodome and the fans. He's never been happier."

But obviously all is not well. Smith said he has tried without success to get Cruz and Childers to discuss the situation. Cruz is now at his winter home in Puerto Rico.

"I've tried for several weeks to get them to come to Houston," Smith said. "The increase in benefits they have been talking about would virtually double the contract. The situation on the guarantee is very complex."

As for the letter of intent, Smith said, "It wasn't a final closing thing, but it was an agreement."

Childers countered, "We did enter into a letter after a highly pressurized meeting with Tal Smith." But Childers added that the June letter was valid for only 30 days.

"There were also guarantees involved," Childers said. "Even within the 30 days, the letter would have been null and void if the guarantees hadn't been met."

Childers said he was "taken aback" by the Astro intention to file suit.

"We have fulfilled our obligation morally, ethically and legally," Childers said.

If Cruz does leave Houston via the reentry draft, he would become the first Astro regular to choose that option. Player-coach Jesus Alou also has filed for free agency.

Cruz, 32, has been among the Astros' most consistent hitters for four years, batting .303, .299, .315 and .289. He hit only nine homers

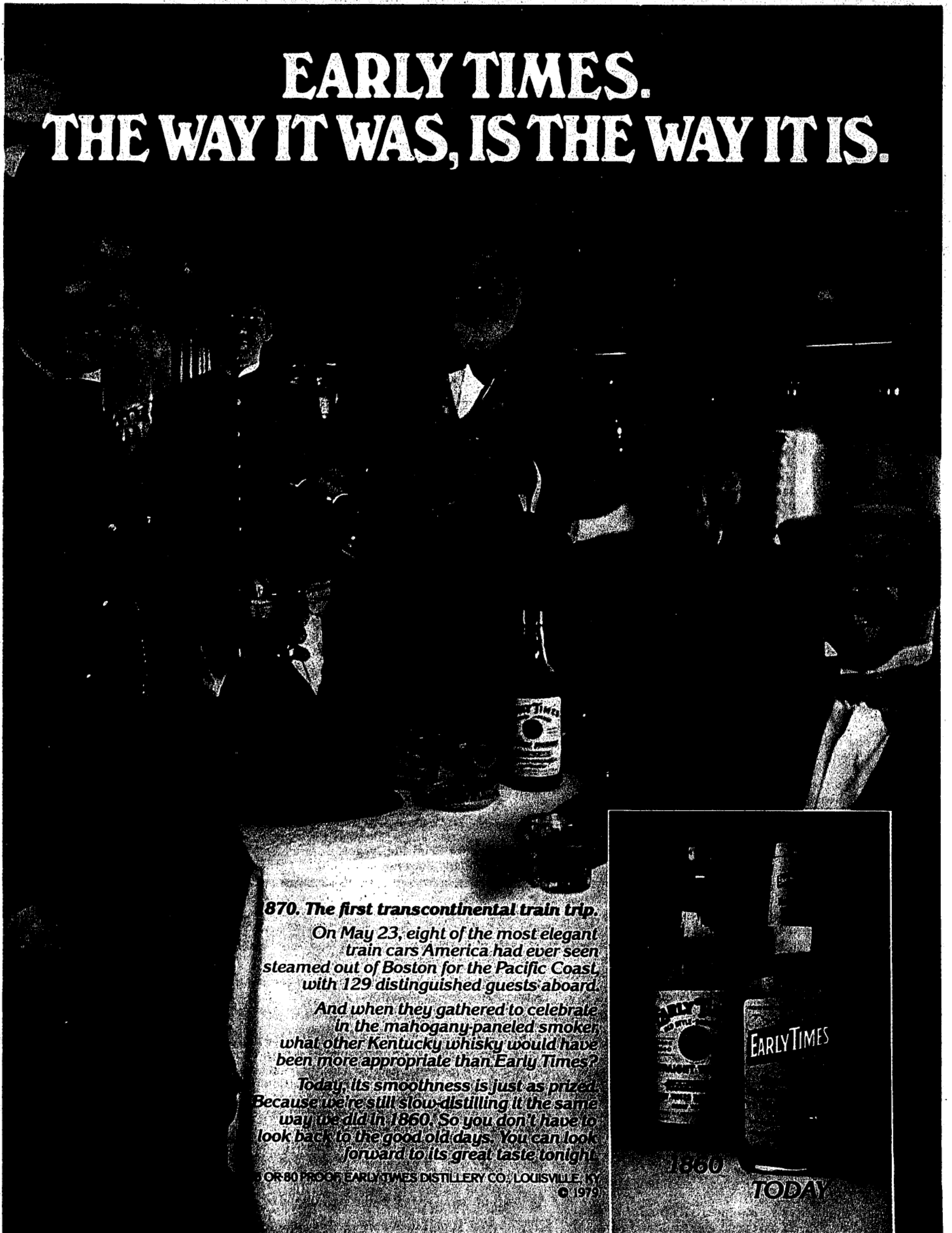
this year, but that led the power-shy Astros. He drove in 72 runs, slightly below his recent norm.

His fielding mistakes and base-running errors, however, led to criticism by some segments of the public and press. More than once, Cruz lashed out at his critics, suggesting that not enough people realize how good a player he is.

Fortunately for the Astros, outfield depth is among their prime assets. But if Cruz is lost, the team's opportunity to make a trade for a needed power hitter is hindered. This doesn't mean Cruz would be traded, but his availability

would make it easier to deal someone else.

Astros Notes: Don Leppert has been named a new Astro coach replacing Jesus Alou. Leppert coached at Toronto the last three years and previously coached under and played with Houston Manager Bill Virdon when Virdon was at Pittsburgh. . . . The Astros have sent lefthanded pitcher Frank Riccelli to Tucson (Pacific Coast) outright. Riccelli had elbow trouble and missed most of this past season.



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1860 TODAY

Bedraggled Redbirds Spot A Ray of Hope in Cruz' Bat

By NEAL RUSSO

ST. LOUIS—Red Schoendienst's present of a couple of bats to Jose Cruz probably accounted for some of the center fielder's progress in the early weeks of the season.

The manager's gift bats were two inches shorter than Cruz' model, 32 inches instead of 34, and they were a couple of ounces lighter. But there were other changes as the eldest of the three Cruz brothers in the Cardinals' chain turned out to be the club's power man in April. After 14 games, Jose had seven extra-base hits, including half of the team's four home runs.

Cruz began to hold his bat much lower than he did last year when he skidded to .235 and went without a run batted in for six weeks.

"I see the ball much better now," said 25-year-old Cruz. "And I don't swing too hard like I did last year."

CRUZ HAS A much better idea of the strike zone now. He is laying off the bad pitches most of the time. And he's become a smarter hitter with two strikes on him.

Of course, it must be remembered that the lefthanded swinger, who is satisfied to make hard contact against southpaws, still is learning the game on the big league level. He has only one full major league season under his belt.

At 6-0 and 175 pounds, Jose is strong, as are younger brothers Cirilo (Tommy) and Hector. And Jose has speed, an item the Birds are a bit short on nowadays.

Jose had an especially outstanding fall-winter. Besides getting married, he starred in the Puerto Rican Winter League, making the all-star team.

CRUZ GOOD work carried over into spring training in which he

batted .308 and collected nine RBIs. And then he was at or above the .300 mark most of April.

Jose doesn't care to be reminded about last season. It took a .294 September to boost his average 20 points to a final .235. But at least he was the club's top pinch-hitter with .385 (5-for-13) and he stole nine bases in 12 attempts.

Jose rather would be reminded about his .274 performance with the Redbirds in 1971. He hit .341 in the last month of that season and he finished with nine home runs. That's seven more than he hit all of last year.

Signed by scout Chase Riddle, as were his two brothers, Jose got rolling at Modesto (California) in 1968. He batted .286 and had 47 extra-base hits, including 13 homers. At one point that season, he had 11 hits in a row. He also broke his right ankle sliding into a base.

JOSE HIT .273 at Arkansas (Texas) in 1969 and .300 for the same club in '70 as he collected 90 RBIs and numbered 21 homers among his 57 long hits. He got his first taste of big league competition late in '70 and cashed in with .353 on six hits in 17 at-bats.

Before being promoted to the majors for good in 1971, Jose hit .327 at Tulsa (American Association) and had 15 homers and 49 RBIs.

Chances are one of Jose's brothers, Tommy or Hector, or both, might join him with the varsity before the season is over. Tommy and Hector are outstanding outfielders. Hector, just turned 20, smacked a total of 50 homers in his first two full years of pro ball.

JOSE HASN'T displayed that much sock with the Cardinals, but any long-ball contribution is wel-

come on a club definitely short of power.

Jose received a \$5,000 bonus. Tommy got \$7,000 and Hector collected 12 grand.

Jose had a big hand in the first two Cardinal victories this season. He smashed a two-run homer (plus a double) in a 6-3 win April 13 that followed the Cards' 0-5 start. And he singled home the first run in a 2-0 triumph April 24 that snapped a seven-game losing streak.

The victor each time was Rick Wise.

The Cardinals had a special thing going for them in that April 24 win. A woman fan had presented the club with 50 good-luck charms, pennies imbedded in the cork side of a soda bottle cap.

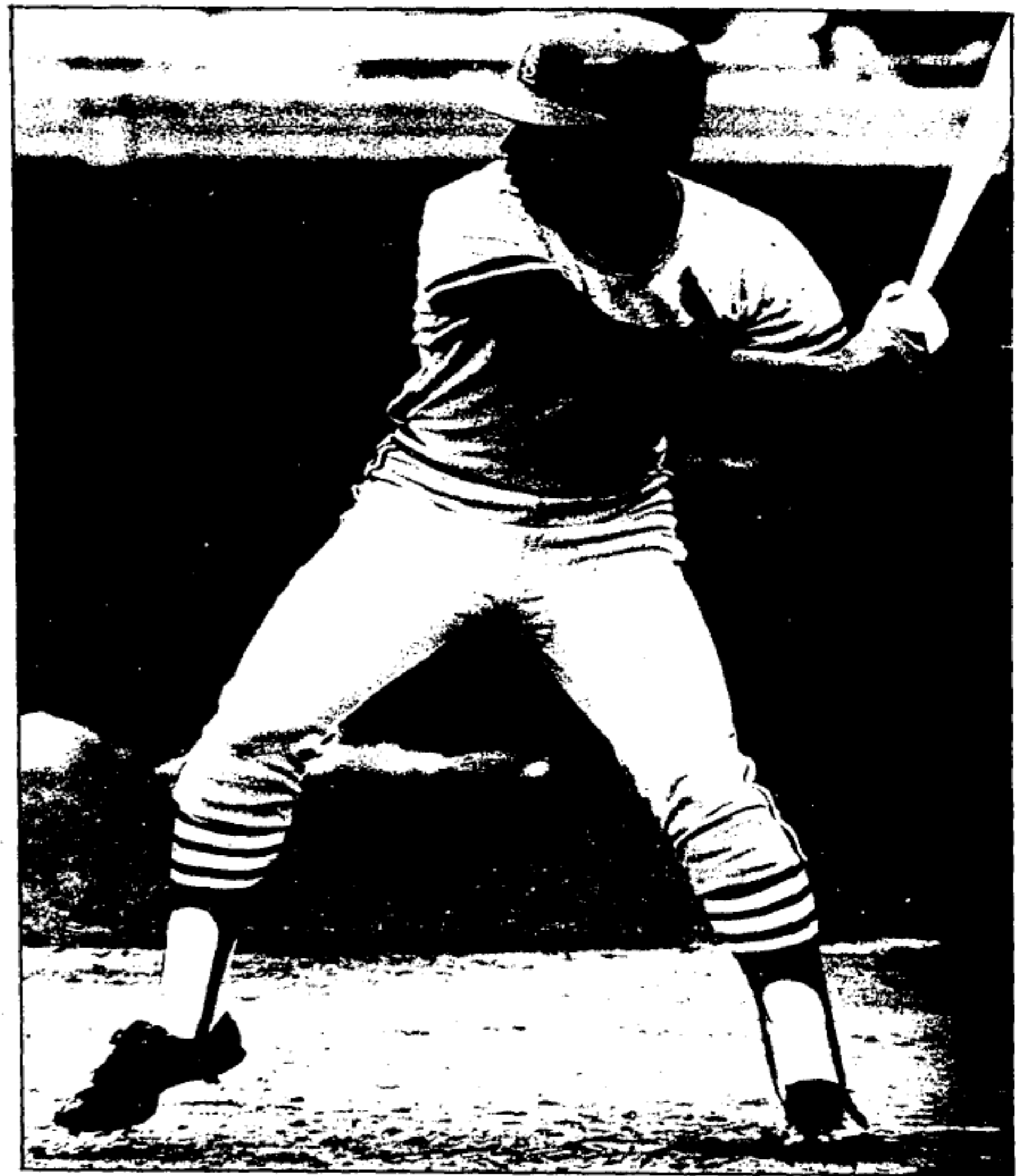
Also in that April 24 slump-ender, catcher Ted Simmons made his major league debut as an outfielder.

"WHEN YOU'RE going like we are, you have to try something," Schoendienst said at the time of the switch to permit Tim McCarver to open behind the plate.

The Cardinals' 1-12 getaway was reminiscent of the 1920 Tigers' 0-13 start, the Mets' 1-12 beginning in 1962 and the Indians' 1-15 start in 1959.

Simmons, who saw some action at first base for the Birds last year, played the outfield in 37 games at Cedar Rapids (Midwest) in 1967 and in nine games with Tulsa in 1969.

Redbird Chirps: Schoendienst was especially disgusted after the Cardinals dropped an Easter doubleheader in Philadelphia. Reggie Cleveland was nailed for the opener loss. Said Red, referring to a pitch that Bill Robinson socked for a key double: "That's why he's a .500 pitcher." . . . Just a few days



Jose Cruz . . . Welcome Contributions.

apart, Lou Brock was ejected from a game by Andy Olsen and Ed Crosby got the heave-ho from Harry Wendelstedt. Both were tossed out following disputes about pitches.

Diego Segui had to lay off a few days because of a sore left side and Luis Melendez was bothered by a minor leg injury. . . . Although Bob Gibson was winless in his first four starts—he was 0-2—he led the starters in earned-run average with 2.12. . . . Schoendienst ran out of non-pitchers in the 14-inning loss to

the Pirates April 17. If the Cards had tied the score, the Birds' left fielder would have been righthander Jim Bibby.

The Cardinal pitchers' hitting also got caught up in the general slump. By late April, the hurlers were 1-for-29 at bat, and the lone hit, by Cleveland, resulted when Steve Carlton neglected to cover first base. . . . Schoendienst and some of his players protested strongly against accusations that they were "not ready mentally or physically" when they left Florida.

Catcher Ferguson's Sizzling Bat Earns Dodger Raves

By BOB HUNTER

LOS ANGELES—After the Dodgers opened the season with 17 consecutive days of activity, Walter Alston pared his starting rotation from five to four. With open spots in the schedule ahead, Alston transferred Tommy John to the bullpen, though he was the club's first two-game winner.

That left Don Sutton, Andy Messersmith, Claude Osteen and Al Downing as the big four. But it was the other end of the battery which commanded attention as the Dodgers launched their second trip.

Catcher Joe Ferguson, who had

caught every inning in that string of 17 games, was drawing commendations, even from the conservative Alston.

"I'm going to have to give him a rest before long," declared the skipper.

BUT WHEN the husky, 210-pound catcher does get his day off, his bat won't.

"I'll play him in the outfield for his rest period," said Alston, giving his new cleanup batter a backhanded salute.

The righthanded-hitting catcher was batting .290 after 17 games. In

nine of the last 10, he connected safely for a .342 figure. He was among the league leaders with 11 RBIs, four homers and six doubles.

When Fergie does go to the outfield, the Dodgers will have a great arm out there, and his play will be compared with that of Johnny Bench and Manny Sanguillen, two top N. L. catchers who also perform in the outfield.

In four games against the Giants, his boyhood idols, Ferguson had seven hits, although the Dodgers won only once.

"I HAD A GOOD series," con-

ceded the catcher, "but it's not the same as winning. You play to win."

The Dodgers split the 12 games in their first home stand, a mild reversal of the last two years, where they fared better on the road. In their first trip this season, they won only two of five.

John, who said he didn't think he deserved to be sent into the bullpen, made his relief debut in the 17th game of 1973, a 4-2 loss to the Giants that dropped the Dodgers three games below .500 with a 7-10 log.

But the veteran lefty was impressive in a 2½-inning stint in which he allowed two hits, no runs and struck out two.

Messersmith, who looked impressive in spring training, should be helped by the four-man rotation.

"It seemed like an eternity between starts, especially when I wasn't pitching well," stated the ex-Angel.

"THE STUFF YOU saw him bring up there in the spring just hasn't been there," concluded Ferguson. "Andy is pressing a lot because he wants to do so well. He feels he has to prove himself on this team and in the league. All he has to do is his job, and that will be good enough."

Red Adams, the pitching coach, emphasized that Messersmith had been pressing.

"I have told Messersmith he is a tremendous addition to the club, that we recognize he is a winner, that he has nothing to prove," said Adams. "But with a pitcher as intense as he is, it's something he'll

just have to work out of his system."

Steve Garvey was sent in to bat for Tommy John and singled in the Dodgers' 17th game. It was just about the only good thing that happened to the former Michigan State halfback in a week.

His new auto was delivered, supposedly shipped from Detroit. When Steve complained it had been driven instead, he was asked what difference it made.

"WELL, IT'S LESS than 2,000 miles from Detroit to L. A., but the speedometer read 3,100 miles," he answered.

Next, an expensive camera was delivered to his apartment. It arrived in pieces.

He had been at bat a dozen times without a hit when he took the field for pre-game drills Easter Sunday. A bad hop struck him in the left eye, necessitating two stitches.

Garvey refused to press his luck by driving home on the freeway.

Dodger Dope: When the Dodgers departed on their second trip, Ken McMullen, who had not started the last 11 games and had batted only 19 times, was left behind to rest his back, which bothered him in spring training. The ex-Angel had been off to his fastest start with a .364 average. . . . Rookie Ron Cey, who had 55 homers in two seasons at Albuquerque (Pacific Coast), was Ken's replacement. . . . Lee Lacy struck out 17 times in 62 at-bats, so Davey Lopes took over at second base. "We'll keep him in there a while," declared Alston. "We won't keep moving them in and out. We got some complaints about that last year."

Oakland's Holtzman — 'I Hate Those Walks'

(Continued From Page 9)

breaking ball.

"The batters know that I'm throwing more than 90 percent fast balls," Holtzman said. "But it hasn't bothered me so far."

"The batter is at a disadvantage, anyhow. It's hard for him to hit a pitch just right, even if it's his pitch."

"I'VE BEEN out there under some bad conditions," Holtzman said. "There was that wind in Minnesota. It took me a while to figure out what I had to do to get it over the plate. If I hadn't done that, I would have walked everyone in the park."

"I don't care if they hit it. I'd rather be knocked out of the box—that's going to happen to anyone every now and then—but I hate

those walks. You walk one guy, then another, and before you know it, you've got to come in with some fat pitch."

"Sometimes it takes a while to figure out how to get the ball over the plate. Usually, it's just a matter of taking something off the ball, throwing it at a different speed. Pitching is adjustment."

A's Acorns: Program printers in other cities will be interested to know of three uniform number changes on the A's. Vida Blue is now wearing No. 14 instead of 35, Gene Tenace has gone from 38 to 18 and Jay Johnstone now wears No. 3 instead of 24. . . . Angel Mangual pulled a muscle in his upper right chest and couldn't play in the field for at least three weeks. He could act as the designated hitter, however. . . . Ray Fosse explained why

he wasn't driving in runs: "This is something new to me the way there are always runners on base over here. I don't want this to sound like a knock against the Indians, but I've seen more runners here in 13 games than in half a season with the Indians." Actually, Fosse wasn't doing that bad with the bat and his average hovered around .300. . . . The A's sold about 1,400 season tickets, about 300 more than last year. . . . When Johnstone reported to the A's in Kansas City, he received a phone call at 7:45 p.m. in the dugout from Owner Charlie Finley asking whether his shoes fit and if everything else was okay. Johnstone thought the call was a trifle unusual and told the owner the game was going on. "Migawd!" said Finley. "I thought they were 8 o'clock games in Kansas City."

Cruz Gets His Due In a 'Grand' Fashion

By HARRY SHATTUCK

HOUSTON—Funny, but on a night when the most consistent Houston Astros hitter went 1-for-7, he was given probably the warmest reception ever accorded a Houston player.

That one hit was **Jose Cruz**' first major league grand slam that clinched a doubleheader sweep over St. Louis on September 6.

Ovation piled on ovation for **Cruz**. "It made me feel very good," the veteran outfielder said. "Maybe in the past, I've been booed sometimes. But the fans have been good to me this year."

He would hear an even louder ovation four nights later when his dramatic 12th inning home run completed a two-game Astrodome sweep over the Dodgers.

"It was the most exciting hit of my career," said **Cruz**, who improved his season RBI total to 83. He also was in the league's top five in hitting and had an outside chance at 200 hits.

If it took two dramatic homers for **Cruz** to be fully appreciated, so be it. But there were those who had been aware of his contribution.

"**Cruz** has been our most consistent player all season, both offensively and defensively," said Manager Bill Virdon.

His defensive achievements have made **Cruz** the complete player. There never had been any question about his ability to hit (he's had a .300 average since 1976) and his speed (147 stolen bases in four seasons).

"But he'll cost you in the field," said detractors. It was an unfair rap even though **Cruz** did bobble an occasional grounder and make an occasional errant throw, because he also covered more ground than other left fielders and made numerous big plays.

In 1980, **Cruz** has been an exceptional defensive player. He has saved as many games with his glove and range as he has won with his bat.

A recent home stand that ended August 24 with the Astros winning all six games provides an example. **Cruz**' contribution included six singles, three doubles, one home

run, five walks, six RBIs, five runs, three game-winning hits, another game-tying hit to create extra innings, one assist, half-a-dozen good defensive plays, no errors and no feature stories locally or nationally.

Not that anyone shies away from **Jose**. He is popular and cooperative. But he has been so steady for so long offensively that it seems only routine for him to drive in winning runs, just as he did 14 times in 1979 and 14 times this season.

On August 26, **Cruz** was in St. Louis, ripping three more hits. Afterward, he could hardly reach his locker for the score of reporters competing for interviews. Not interviews with **Cruz**. Rather, with Cesar Cedeno who had gone 1-for-5, with that one hit a grand slam.

Cruz watched, listened, then walked away. Nobody would approach him until after he showered. The hurt showed in his eyes.

Can you win the batting title? "I don't even think about it," said **Cruz**, who then was 10 points from the top. "I just hit the ball. I don't worry about anything else."

Astronotes: When Don Sanders, a Houstonian who is among limited partners in the Astro ownership, challenged second baseman Joe Morgan to a tennis match (won by Sanders), it was bound to be a festive occasion what with the competitiveness, a Mexican buffet and most Astros players on hand. The most rewarding part of the day, though, was the appearance of a special guest, pitcher J. R. Richard, who visited with teammates for the first time since suffering a stroke July 30. Richard was in good spirits and health. He has been permitted to leave Methodist Hospital for brief periods and may be dismissed soon, according to doctors. He has already told teammates he plans to watch them play in the World Series. . . . Gary Woods was a welcome addition from the farm system. The former Toronto player, who spent this year at Tucson (Pacific Coast), hit safely in five of his first six games against lefthanded pitchers. . . . Nolan Ryan's first start in a week after suffering a back strain drew mixed reviews. Ryan was hit hard by the Cardinals in a no-decision. But he said, "My back didn't hurt at all. I'm encouraged now about being able to do my part in the pennant race."



Jose Cruz . . . Consistent contributions.

Russell Out—Thomas Vital to Dodger Bid

By GORDON VERRELL

LOS ANGELES—When the Los Angeles Dodgers stormed to 17 wins in 20 games between August 19 and September 7, to regain first place in the National League West, a significant factor was their defense.

Now that comes as a stunner to all who recall the 1978 World Series, when the Dodgers stumbled through the six games with the New York Yankees, committing seven errors, or even more recently when Los Angeles was guilty of six errors September 9 in a nationally-televised 5-4 loss in Houston.

But yes, defense played a major role in the Dodgers' turnaround.

Second baseman Dave Lopes had an errorless streak of 42 games before committing two of the Dodgers' six miscues against the Astros. And shortstop Bill Russell, who made three of the seven world Series errors, had not made an error in 47 games and only one in 49 games. Then Russell was knocked out for the season September 12 in Cincinnati when he suffered a multiple fracture of the index finger on his right hand.

Russell suffered the injury when he was struck by a pitch from the Reds' Mike LaCoss, and it came at a critical point in the season, with the Dodgers and Astros tied for first in the N. L. West.

"I thought when we lost Reggie Smith (in mid-July) it would kill us," remarked Manager Tom Lasorda. "But Jay Johnstone and Rick Monday have come through so very well."

"This is the same kind of situation. It's a tough loss. Russell had done a super job, he's played so brilliantly at shortstop."

Coach Monty Basgall said, "To me, he was having his best year, except for that one stretch (10 errors in 16 games between June 27 and July 16) when he needed a rest but he had to play because Derrel was hurt."

Derrel Thomas replaced Russell and, said Don Sutton, "This will give us an opportunity to appreciate the play of Derrel Thomas. There will be a lot of people saying, 'I'm sure glad we have him.'"

One of those is Lasorda, who said, "Derrel Thomas has played well anywhere we asked him to play—and he's played everywhere. There is no doubt in my mind he is the finest utility player I have ever seen."

Thomas has played all three outfield positions, second,

third and shortstop on the infield and even caught.

"Shortstop is definitely a better position for me than catching," he said. "I'll just do the best I can and hope to contribute."

The night Russell was injured, Thomas took over and singled to launch a two-run rally. Then he tripled and scored a run on a wild pitch and also picked off a liner by slugger George Foster in the ninth inning with a leaping catch.

"It seems every time someone is going good, he gets hurt," Sutton said of the rash of injuries. "Reggie was going good—he was leading the league—and he gets hurt. Then Pete (rookie outfielder Pedro Guerrero). And now Russell. Billy was having a good year, offensively and defensively."

It has placed a strain on the Dodgers' bench, finding adequate replacements.

But, says Dusty Baker, that's one place the Dodgers are strong.

"I said from the start the team with the best bench will win," said Baker. "Everyone who's come off the bench has done a good job for us. To me, the bench is the name of the game."

Russell was not awarded first base on the play on which he was hurt. Plate umpire Dave Pallone ruled the ball struck the bat first.

"That's what really hurts," Lasorda said. "A guy gets a multiple fracture and he doesn't even get the base."

In the Dodgers' strong run, the infield, maligned—and rightly so—for its World Series exhibition, committed only one error, by Steve Garvey. Overall, the Dodgers made only three errors in winning 17 of 20 games to jump from third place to first.

But after losing two games in Houston, the Dodgers dropped into a tie with the Astros.

Pitching played a vital role, and that was particularly so in the bullpen.

Relievers appeared in 18 of the 20 games and registered six wins and nine saves. The staff's earned-run average for the 20 games was 2.41 (a mere 48 earned runs in 179 innings).

Steve Howe, a strong contender for Rookie of the Year honors, was 1-1 with six saves during the 20-game span. He allowed only one run in 14½ innings, a 0.41 ERA. Don Stanhouse had two wins and two saves during the run, and Bobby Castillo came up with three victories.

Dodger Dope: Howe tied the club record for saves by a rookie when he recorded No. 15 September 6. Joe Black had 15 in 1952. . . . The Dodgers concluded their play against the East with a 44-28 record. They were 11-1 vs. Montreal, 7-5 vs. Chicago, New York and St. Louis and 6-6 vs. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. They won their final 11 against the Expos. . . . When Reuss lost to the Phils September 4, it marked his first defeat against any of the N.L.'s contenders. He was 3-0 against the Reds, 3-0 against the Astros, 2-0 against the Pirates and 2-0 against the Expos. . . . Rookie catcher Mike Scioscia was 10-for-23 following his recall from Albuquerque (Pacific Coast). He had his first four-hit game September 6 against the Phils. . . . Dusty Baker had a 16-game hitting streak (his longest as a Dodger) snapped September 3 by the Mets, then he hit safely in his next four games. . . . Rookie Rudy Law, who had only one stolen base in the previous 22 games, stole his 34 and 35th bases September 7.

Sutton's Big Thrill: Trucks for Coaches

LOS ANGELES—Veteran pitcher Don Sutton has had a good many thrills in his long career with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"But I had one of my biggest thrills just the other day," he said. "I've been saying for a long time I wanted to do something for (coaches) Red Adams and Monty Basgall. Well, I finally did it."

What he did was purchase each of them a four-wheel-drive Datsun pickup truck.

"For one of the few times in my life, I was speechless," said Adams.

Sutton's friendship with Basgall goes back to his high school days, when Basgall was a scout with the Dodgers.

"He's the man who sold me on becoming a Dodger," said Sutton, who signed in the pre-draft era. "And Red, well, I can't say enough about what he has meant to my career."

GORDON VERRELL