

## BASEBALL

# Is Dawson at the End of the Line?

By DAVE van DYCK

MESA, Ariz.—Fans remember only the mental agony that Andre Dawson must have felt when he batted only .105 as the Chicago Cubs lost to San Francisco in last year's National League Championship Series.

They may never know the physical agony.

Days after the Cubs were eliminated, Dawson underwent a second operation on his right knee, which had bothered him so much that it affected his batting stance. And the October surgery was not minor.

For six weeks, Dawson's right leg was immobilized. When rehabilitation began in December, it was to regain strength, not to mend the joint. And Dawson's future was very much in question.

Dawson will turn 36 July 10, and his surgically repaired legs don't move as fast as they once did. His body aches more in the mornings.

And, although his contract expires after this season, the Cubs have not offered to extend it.

Even Dawson doesn't know if he wants to extend his career. As late as last summer, Dawson had talked of playing two or three more years, perhaps even four. The latest operation has changed that.

"I want to take it a year at a time from here on out," he said. "At the outset of my career, I said I wanted to play 15 years. As it got closer, I felt I could play longer. But last season opened my eyes a little. There are a few more things to put in perspective, like my family and my health after baseball."

Dawson has said many times that he wants to walk away from the game. Now, he wants to be able to walk after he leaves the game. His arthritic knees may not allow that if he continues to play.

And there is the question of whether he is physically able to keep playing.

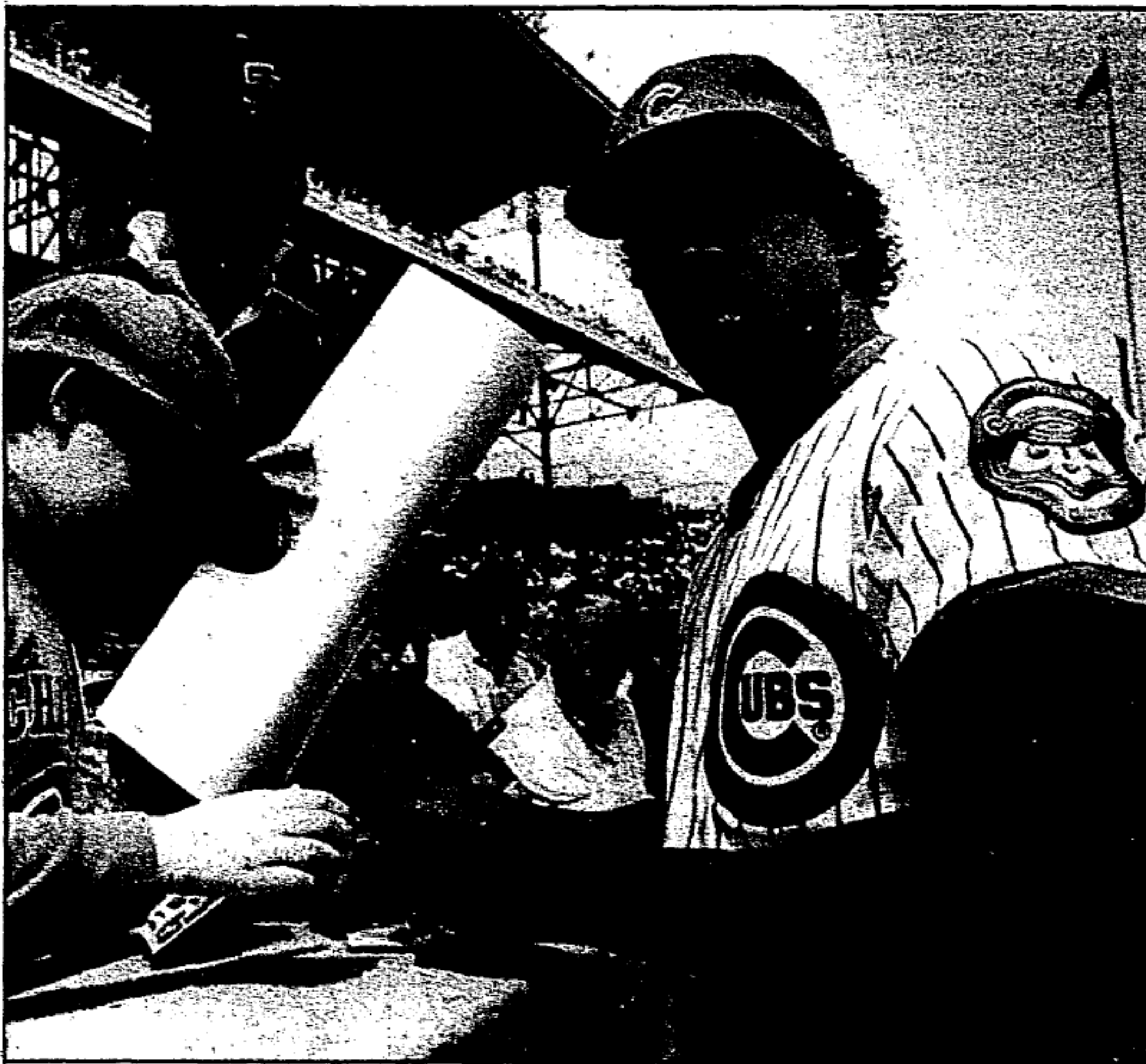
No one will know for sure until he returns to the lineup. Manager Don Zimmer said he will use Dawson only as Dawson dictates. There will be no pushing him into shape.

"Your guess is as good as mine about Hawk," Zimmer said of what to expect this season. "We'll just have to see how it goes. I don't even know if he knows what to expect."

Dawson doesn't. He isn't even sure whether the delay in the start of spring training ultimately will be good or bad for him.

"That's a tough question," he said. "At home, I probably allow myself to rest more. The question is whether I can do enough things to get the strength necessary. That's the most important thing on my mind, because my strength (in the right leg) is only 60 percent. Most of the discomfort is in the form of weakness. There's just a question of how durable the leg is going to be."

The question is not a new one. The Expos wondered how long Dawson's legs would hold up as



This season could be a swan song for Andre Dawson at Wrigley Field.

far back as the early '80s. The Cubs have wondered the same thing since Dawson walked in as a free agent in 1987.

His magical 1987 campaign, in which he became the only player from a last-place team ever to win the Most Valuable Player award, only postponed an answer to the nagging question. After last season, in which Dawson batted .252 with 21 homers and 77 runs batted in, the question is front and center again.

General Manager Jim Frey knows Dawson can't play forever. Last summer, he started shopping for a young outfielder with speed and power. He couldn't find one worth the price.

The Cubs have tried to patch the outfield, acquiring Marvell Wynne from San Diego last fall and trading Mitch Webster to Cleveland for Dave Clark, a left-handed power hitter.

"I'm not going to rush Hawk along," Zimmer said. "So what if he doesn't play in the opener? What good is it if he hits a double and then blows out the knee? I've got all kinds of outfielders. Outfield is not one of our problems."

Zimmer's outfielders include 1989 N.L. Rookie of the Year Jerome Walton in center and Dwight Smith, runner-up to Walton in the Rookie of the Year voting, in left. Right field belongs to Dawson—when he is ready.

But will he be ready? Can he again be productive? Will he steal 16 more bases and join Willie Mays, the only player to accumulate 2,000 hits, 300 home runs and 300 stolen bases? Or was his mis-

erable performance in last year's N.L. playoffs a portent of things to come?

Not even Dawson is sure. He knows that when he left spring training a year ago, both his legs and his batting stroke were fine. Before undergoing surgery last May, Dawson batted .305 with five homers, four triples, five doubles and 19 RBIs—in 27 games.

It was all downhill after that. By the end of the season, before the bothersome cyst was removed from his knee in October, Dawson could barely go into his familiar coil in the batter's box.

"Mentally, (the pain) wears you down, and you're always thinking about it, especially when you can't do the things you want to do," Dawson said. "When you have a problem and you don't give it time, it's not going to respond positively."

Dawson spent most of spring training rehabilitating his knee and serving as a pinch-hitter and designated hitter.

Dawson's rehabilitation of his right knee has been slowed by a new problem: loose cartilage. The problem could end his career after 14 seasons, 319 home runs, 2,037 hits and 1,131 RBIs.

"If I get cut by surgery again, (I'm) history," said Dawson, who indicated he would retire if doctors decide he needs another operation to continue his career. "I don't want to go through it again. I want to do what is in the best interest of myself and the club. I've had to come back from injuries before, but this is the toughest. It's taking longer to heal be-

cause of the wear and tear through the years."

Although Dawson doesn't say so publicly, many believe he returned too soon after undergoing surgery last May. From July 24 through August 15, his batting average dropped from .276 to .234. During that time, he had fluid drained from his right knee.

Perhaps Dawson will have to modify his approach this season. He hints at that.

"As you grow older, you learn you have to make a lot more adjustments," he said. "That's what I'm interested in—finding out if I can still make those adjustments for another few seasons."

History is on his side. Dawson knows he has overcome knee and leg problems in the past. He has had to endure five knee operations, two of them on the left knee, which doctors have told him is worse than his right.

After staying in Chicago until the cast was removed from his leg, Dawson returned home to Miami in December to work out every day with weights. On alternate days, he ran. He also began hitting in a batting cage and throwing in February.

"I've worked fairly hard, and one thing I'm pleased by is the strength I've developed in the (left) leg, supposedly the bad one," he said. "I really don't see any reason the right leg can't be even better than the left one. I don't know when."

"It puzzles me, because I've worked hard, and now the question is, 'Which leg is the bad one?' It's really hard to answer."

## 'Emotional Overload' Is Bothering Youmans



Floyd Youmans, who was absent without leave from the Philadelphia Phillies' camp April 1, found a sympathetic ear when he spoke with General Manager Lee Thomas a day later. A sore shoulder forced the righthander onto the 21-day disabled list March 30. But Youmans was expected to report to Jack Russell Stadium in Clearwater, Fla., for therapy. When the Phils finally found Youmans, he was suffering, in the words of his agent, Adam Katz, from "an emotional overload."

On April 2, Thomas issued the following statement: "I met with Dr. William O'Brien (the club's employees' counselor) this morning to review Floyd missing yesterday's rehab assignment here at Jack Russell Stadium. Dr. O'Brien visited Floyd (April 1). As we all know, Floyd has had some personal problems over the last few months. He was very despondent about these problems. There are no problems regarding baseball or drugs, and we will not take disciplinary action against Floyd."

"I spoke with Floyd this morning, and we, as an organization, want to help him. He has our understanding and support. He will resume his rehab treatment with (trainer) Jeff Cooper. Starting April 3, he will begin rehabbing with the Reading (Eastern) Phillies at the Carpenter Complex. When the Reading club breaks camp (April 8), Floyd will go with them and continue his rehab assignment in Reading. Neither I, Floyd, nor anyone else involved will have further comment at this time. Floyd has a problem. We want to help and prefer that it rests right there."

The mother of Youmans' three-year-old child was murdered by a mutual acquaintance in her Tampa, Fla., apartment in January, and Youmans' grandmother died in March. Although Youmans struggled in posting a 1-5 record last year, the Phils re-signed him to another \$175,000 contract after the season.

Youmans entered a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center during a 60-day suspension from baseball in 1988.

The Phils traded veteran backup shortstop Steve Jeltz to the Royals for righthander Jose DeJesus. "I have mixed emotions," said Jeltz, who spent 10 years in the Phils' organization. "The Phillies taught me how to play the game." In 1989, Jeltz was used in a utility role for the first time and lifted his batting average to .243 from .187 in 1988. DeJesus was optioned to Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (International) two days after he arrived. "I knew I wasn't going to get a chance to play in Kansas City," he said. "They have too many established pitchers there. Hopefully, I'll get a chance with the Phillies sometime this season." . . . The Phils purchased the contract of righthander Darrel Akerfelds from the Rangers. "He's got a good knuckle-curve, and he's got an idea of what he's doing on the mound," Thomas said. "I would expect he'll pitch for us at some point this season."