

# Big Test for DeCinces' Ailing Back

By KEN NIGRO

MIAMI—He will bend for a ground ball. He will run the bases. He will slide. He will swing the bat.

Doug DeCinces will do all of those things just like everyone else in the first few loosening-up days at the Orioles' spring training camp. But there is a difference. DeCinces will step gingerly and hope that a sharp pain does not strike.

The third baseman with the ailing back must do more than just get in shape this spring. He must prove to himself and the club that he made the right decision last fall by saying "no" to back surgery.

"Sure, I look back and wonder sometimes whether I've done the right thing," DeCinces said. "But you must go with your feeling at the time and I think I made the right decision. Right now, I'm doing okay. I've had some discomfort once in awhile, but nothing like last season. Of course, I haven't done any running and sliding yet. We'll just have to see how it goes."

Physically, it has not gone well for DeCinces the last couple of years. He missed almost six weeks early in the '79 campaign when he suffered a torn muscle in his lower back and he was sidelined twice last season.

In fact, it looked like DeCinces would consent to a bone fusion operation last August when the pain increased. But the pain let up during the final month of the season, so after consulting with several doctors, Doug decided against surgery.

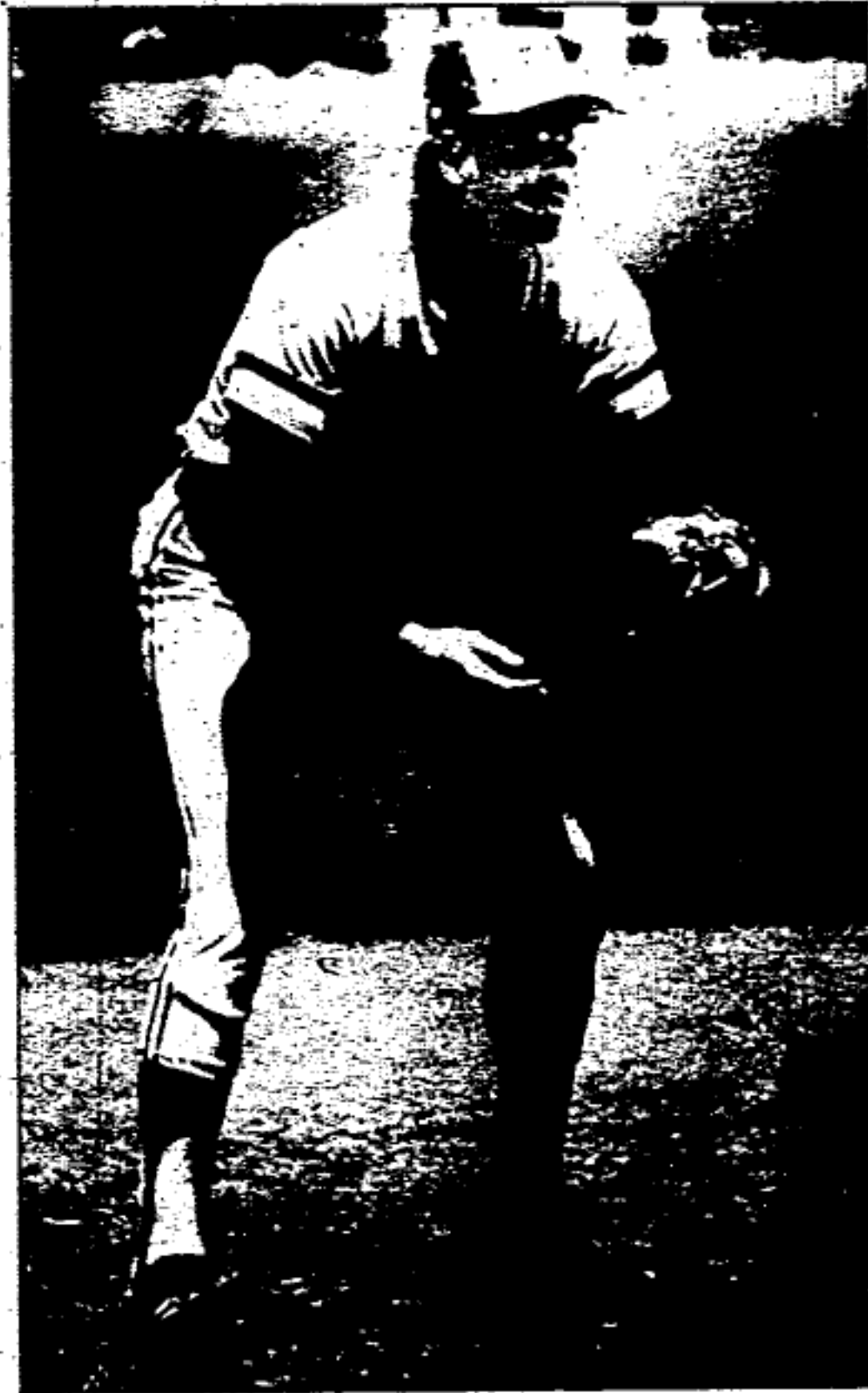
"I felt strong again at the end of the year," he said. "Besides, the doctors couldn't guarantee anything if I had gone ahead with the operation."

So DeCinces spent the winter working out and exercising. He even spent time with a strength coach at the Baltimore Colts' camp. All the while, the pain stayed away.

"My back has to be in the best possible shape and I'm trying to do everything I can," DeCinces said. "I've talked to doctors but I haven't had to have any injections. I'm feeling good now and when I'm feeling good, I know I can play."

In 1978, when he was completely healthy, he established career highs in batting average (.286), home runs (28) and runs batted in (80). In his last 85 games, he knocked in 67 runs and hit 21 homers. He had finally emerged from the shadow of Brooks Robinson.

But then came the back problem early in '79 and DeCinces managed to play in only 120 games. His statistics tailed off to a .230 average, 16 homers and 61 RBIs. Doug's production was about the same last year—.249, 16, 64—and so was his back. Even though he played more games (145).



Doug DeCinces . . . Something to prove.

he really wasn't physically fit until perhaps at the end of the year.

"I don't think my stats were all that terrible for having all those problems," DeCinces said. "But I don't think they were me. My goal is to be healthy and if I can do that, the stats will take care of themselves."

There is little question the Orioles need an injury-free year from DeCinces if they are going to wrest the American League East crown from the New York Yankees. DeCinces not only adds another solid bat to the lineup, he would also be one of the most difficult men to replace.

Manager Earl Weaver could insert Rich Dauer at third, a move he has made in the past. But that weakens second base, where Dauer is superb defensively. Besides, Dauer doesn't hit with the power one needs from a third baseman.

Floyd Rayford is a possible replacement should DeCinces falter, but Rayford came up short last year after an impressive spring and wound up playing most of the season at Rochester (International).

There is also Cal Ripken Jr., the Orioles' much bally-hooped star of the future. Ripken seems at least a year away, however, and the Orioles prefer that he spend the summer in Rochester (International).

The most likely prospect to take over at third if DeCinces should reinjure his back is Dan Graham. Graham is the lefthanded hitting catcher who was stolen away from Minnesota last year and combined with Rick Dempsey to give the Birds a potent combination behind the plate. Weaver would hate to break up this pair, but Graham played some third base early in his career and he probably will see some action there this spring.

Right now, though, Weaver is counting on DeCinces. "We know what the guy can do when he isn't hurting," the manager said. "He showed it a couple of years back and he showed it down the stretch again last season."

**Bird Seed:** Ripken and outfielder Dallas Williams agreed to terms, meaning the Orioles had signed 33 of the 39 players on the roster. Pitcher Dave Ford was the only unsigned player from the 25-man roster of last year.

A funny thing happened to Owaer Edward Bennett Williams when he was in New York working at his other job (a trial lawyer). He received a phone call from his son, who informed Williams that he was getting a big splash in *Oui* magazine. "I didn't know what he was talking about," Williams said with a laugh. "I didn't know what *Oui* was. I thought he meant 'We.' He told me I had to buy this magazine and I didn't realize it had all those flaked women plastered all over the place. It cost \$2.50, too." Sure enough, hidden between those pictures was a story entitled, "The New Lords of Baseball." It referred to Williams, George Steinbrenner of the Yankees, John McMullen of Houston and Ted Turner of Atlanta. All four were fully clothed.

Eddie Murray and Ken Singleton have purchased blocks of tickets to be used throughout the season by youngsters from the inner city and senior citizens.

# Brewers Pack Wallop, But They Won't Loaf

By TOM FLAHERTY

SUN CITY, Ariz.—The Milwaukee Brewers' lineup will be stocked with power from top to bottom this season, but don't expect to see everybody standing around waiting for someone to sock one into the bleachers.

"I don't want this to be a home run hitting contest," Manager Buck Rodgers said. "I don't want them to go out there and try to out-dinger each other. We have to execute, too."

"We're going to have to go from first to third, get the man in from third. Things like that. That's what's going to win 25-odd games. Those are going to be the big ones. Those are the 2-1 and 3-2 games."

"Execute" just may be Rodgers' favorite word. When he was named to replace George Bamberger last September, Rodgers warned everybody they were going to hear that word a lot.

When the new Brewers manager was in Milwaukee for the winter promotional tour, he mentioned execution at least twice in every speech or press conference.

In spring training, Rodgers will follow closely the tight schedule that Bamberger maintained. Things will look about the same except for one thing. Right, execution.

"The only thing I'm going to do differently," Rodgers said, "is that we're going to have an execution day once a week, maybe in place of batting practice."

"We'll put a team on the field and a man on third. Get him in from there."

Meanwhile, Rodgers has a task that would delight any manager—deciding on which batting order to unleash on the rest of the American League. As Rodgers sees it, the No. 2 spot will be the key. That's the spot reserved for shortstop Robin Yount, who will be responsible for getting Paul Molitor into scoring position.

"I would like very much to hit Paul and Robin one and two," Rodgers said. "Second is going to be a big spot. He's really going to have to execute. Hit to the opposite field, take a few pitches. He's going to have to stop swinging at the first pitch, something he did a lot last year."

"We'd like to have Paul on second at worst after Robin

comes up. Have him there for our power barrage to take over."

The barrage is likely to follow in this order: Cecil Cooper (.352 average last year with 25 home runs and 122 RBIs), Ben Oglivie (.304, 41, 118), Ted Simmons (.303, 21, 98), Larry Hisle, Gorman Thomas (38 homers, 105 RBIs), Don Money or Roy Howell and Jim Gantner.

"I don't really know about the fourth spot yet," Rodgers said. "I'm leaning toward Cooper and Oglivie back-to-back. That's two lefthanded hitters, but they both hit lefthanders so well. I think the fourth position is still a speed position. If you put a slow guy up there or a strikeout guy, you take away a shot at getting a run in."

"Oglivie's not going to hit into many double plays. That way you don't lose a chance to score a run."

"From fourth on down will be determined by Hisle's shoulder condition and also on Money's condition. Hisle could bat fifth. Money could bat fifth. Simmons could bat fifth. Or Gorman could bat fifth. There are a lot of ways we can go."

Money, who is scheduled to platoon with Howell at third base, is coming back from knee surgery. Hisle had rotator cuff surgery last summer, and his recovery has been good. He has played very little the last two seasons, and that worries the Brewers.

"From what I hear, Larry is close to 100 percent," Rodgers said. "But Larry has gone two years without many at-bats. We have to keep an eye on that, too."

Looking over that potential lineup card, even with a couple of question marks, is an enjoyable task, Rodgers admits.

"We're going to score some runs," he said, "but we have to win the 2-1 and 3-2 games if we're going to go anywhere. To do that, we're going to have to execute."

There's that word again.

**Foaming Over:** The Brewers' biggest need is a lefthander to complement Rollie Fingers in the bullpen. If they are unable to swing a trade, they will be doing some hard looking during spring training, and rookie Frank DiPino will get a close look. "I don't know a lot about him," Rodgers said. "All I know is what I've been told. He's a young left-

hander who's coming fast. I'm going to give him a good solid look." DiPino pitched a no-hitter last season for Holyoke (Eastern).

Mail orders for 6,000 bleacher seats for the home opener were oversubscribed the first day they went on sale. The Brewers' season ticket sales passed the 4,000 mark, and Vice-President Dick Hackett expected season ticket sales to be close to 5,000. Last year, the Brewers sold about 4,400 season tickets. . . . The infant son of outfielder Mark Brouhard died February 9 of complications following heart surgery. The baby was born in January.

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