

Rookie Brown Ignites Angels

ANAHEIM—This season opened with a familiar theme for the California Angels. "They'd better win this year, because they're getting too old," sums it up.

Then the plot turned strange. Even as California maintained its American League West lead, a transition set in. Though hardly phasing out the old altogether, Manager John McNamara began a youth movement.

The latest rookie to fill a vital role and offer hope for the future was outfielder Mike Brown. A 24-year-old disciple of weight lifting, Brown sat on the bench for a month following his recall from Edmonton (Pacific Coast). He got a start on May 27. They couldn't get him out of the lineup.

"As long as he's hitting, he's playing," McNamara said as Brown took off on an eight-game hitting streak that lifted his average into the mid-.300s.

Brown took Brian Downing's place in the lineup, but with solid play, he may be taking Fred Lynn's place in the team's plans.

Lynn is playing out his option and, with the club refusing to renegotiate his expiring contract, is apparently ticketed for free agency. There's a misconception that Lynn came to the Angels as a free agent. Actually, he was acquired in trade (along with Steve Renko) in 1981, then was given a four-year, \$5.2 million contract.

If Brown continues to perform well as a right fielder, the Angels wouldn't be eager to heap more millions on the 32-year-old Lynn. Not with Gary Pettis in center and Downing, who last winter signed a three-year pact, in left.

"Brown's play could affect our plans for next year," said McNamara. "We felt he had the potential to be a good player, and he's taking advantage of the opportunity."

Even as McNamara went to a platoon system, Brown was a fixture in right field. Against righthanders, Lynn returned to center. Against southpaws, he sat on the bench, usually keeping company with Rod Carew and Reggie Jackson.

Being platooned certainly depressed Lynn's numbers, which included only 15 RBIs entering June, and figured to hurt his free agency leverage.

"The platooning seems to be getting serious," he said, "but I just go along with the program. I like to play and I want to play every day. But I'm not concerned about the contract. The idea is to win and we've been winning with the moves."

Brown was an integral part of an early-June thrust which enabled the Angels to forge their widest lead of the season. Growing more comfortable with playing time, Brown began to flash the talent which had dazzled Edmonton for two years.

In 1983, he hit .354, with 22 homers and 106 RBIs, for the Trappers. He was on pace to repeat those numbers when the Angels beckoned him to their bench on May 3.

"Sitting on the bench was difficult," he said. "I'm used to being the kind of player who never has to look at the lineup. In the minors, I knew I'd always be in right field and No. 4 in the lineup. I have to remind myself I'm still the same guy."

Brown became one of the Angels' most spirited cheerleaders, enlivening the dugout with clapping and encouragement. Such behavior reflected his glee at reaching a pinnacle he never expected.

Mike figured his baseball days ended with a San Jose prep career as a lightweight catcher. He enrolled at San Jose State, where he ran into a former high school teammate who talked him into trying out for the college team. It was a deflating experience. He was dwarfed by developed upper classmen.

Brown spent most of the next six months in the weight room, and next spring, his new physique earned him a scholarship. By 1980, he had progressed enough for California to take him in the seventh round of the draft.

Continuing to hit the weights religiously, Brown has filled his 6-2 frame with a build even Downing, baseball's leading body-builder, would envy.

Angels Angles: Geoff Zahn held the Chicago White Sox to four hits for eight innings in his comeback outing after missing over two weeks and three starts with a strained groin muscle.

The Angels' 20-10 road record ranked second in the league to Detroit's 19-4. Ten pitchers had started games, due partly to McNamara's juggling act to compensate for the lack of a regular fifth starter.

Luis Sanchez set a club record with five straight relief wins. Mark Clear ran off two four-game streaks in 1979. The changing emphasis of the Angels' attack was illustrated by the fact they hit only five homers during a 6-2 stretch.

Two weeks after being signed as a free agent, righthander Craig Swan went on the 15-day disabled list on June 6 with a recurrence of the triceps problem that had led to his release by the Mets. In another surprise, the Angels filled his spot by activating Bruce Kison, out since September because of disc surgery. Don Aase, totally recovered from 1982 elbow surgery, seemed next in line for a roster spot, but the club felt Kison better fit its immediate needs.

TOM SINGER



Things are clicking for Phillips in '84.



Phillips Cashes In On Third Chance

OAKLAND—Baseball fans aren't likely to stuff All-Star ballot boxes with cards bearing Tony Phillips' name as a write-in at shortstop, but the Oakland A's are happy to have Phillips anchoring their infield these days.

Life is treating Phillips just fine. He's a starter, he's toying with a .300 batting average and, best of all, his home life is happy again.

"From day one of spring training he had a good attitude," said third base coach Clete Boyer. "He's a hard worker. He feels like he can handle it. I think he has changed a lot of people's minds, and not just on our club."

Before Donnie Hill was blacked out of the picture with an eye injury on May 2, Phillips was a backup at short and second. Since Hill's injury, Phillips has started all but one game at short. On a recent 1-8 trip to Baltimore, New York and Detroit, Phillips played so well that the A's gave Hill a plane ticket back to Tacoma, home of their Triple-A club.

Phillips isn't likely to ever win a Rawlings Gold Glove, but he's solid and is learning something new every day. Not bad for a guy Billy Martin banished to the minors after a 40-game trial in 1982.

"If I could get through that," Phillips said, "I can get through anything."

Last year wasn't much easier. Phillips played in 148 games for the A's, but his home life wasn't right. He was separated from his 2-year-old daughter and his girlfriend. The three are reunited now, and Phillips says his life is "more settled."

"I don't have any time for all the garbage I was doing last year," he said. "I'm not saying I was doing anything wrong, but I wasn't getting any rest."

"It's lonely up here, you know. In the minors I had somebody to share my success with. Last year I was lonely and I didn't have anyone to share my success with."

Obviously, Phillips, 25, has matured.

"Once you get to the big leagues you have the talent," he said. "The only thing that can take you away is yourself. You can be your own worst enemy. I'm just glad Oakland gave me the opportunity to adjust."

By the end of last year Hill had won the starting job at short. During the winter the A's signed veteran Joe Morgan to play second base. That left Phillips a utilityman.

Besides, the A's weren't sure Phillips had the arm to be an everyday shortstop. There was little else for him to do but work hard and hope for another opportunity.

"Almost from day one he has been more serious about the game than he was last year," Steve Boros said before he was canned as manager. Boros added that a Houston scout had raved about Phillips' arm. "He's choking up when he hits," Boros said approvingly. "He goes into the hole well, and he makes a point of throwing over the top."

Boros first saw Phillips in 1980, when both were in the Montreal organization. "He had a tendency to get excited and was a little hot-tempered," Boros recalled.

Phillips has worked hard on his defense, concentrating on making the routine play, something he admits he often hasn't done in the majors. At the plate, he finally has realized that power isn't his ticket to success.

The coaching staff emphasized all these things to Phillips last year, but they "just didn't click." A lot of things didn't click for Phillips last year.

"I guess because of my surroundings," he said. "The big leagues, wanting to do well and not really thinking about my mechanics. You get in kind of a daze busting your behind trying to impress people, and you forget what got you here."

A's Acoras: Morgan hit his 264th home run as a second baseman on June 2, in Chicago off Al Jones. The blast tied him with Rogers Hornsby, the previous all-time home run leader among second basemen. The homer was the 266th of Morgan's career. He hit two while playing as an outfielder. . . . Reliever Tom Burgmeier, due to come off the disabled list early in June, remained on the list with soreness behind his left shoulder. . . . Dave Kingman, who suffered damage to ligaments in his left knee, did not accompany the A's on a trip to Chicago, Cleveland and Texas, but was expected to rejoin the team in mid-June after undergoing therapy with Dr. Richard Steadman, the man responsible for keeping the U.S. Ski Team schussing down the mountains of the world. A brace was being prepared for Kingman.

Lary Sorensen lost eighth decisions in succession, the most consecutive defeats suffered by an A's starter since Matt Keough lost 14 in a row in 1979. . . . Reliever Bill Caudill earned his 12th save June 4 at Cleveland, the most saves by an A's reliever since Elias Sosa recorded 14 in 1978. . . . When the A's won two in a row in Cleveland it was the first time they'd won two straight away from home since their first two road games of the season in Seattle on April 16-17.

KIT STIER



Eisenreich Again Says He Is Retiring

TWIN CITIES—Jim Eisenreich's third attempt at a comeback with the Minnesota Twins ended officially on June 4, although it had seemed inevitable for weeks that Eisenreich was not going to be able to overcome a nervous disorder and resume a major-league career.

After several days of negotiations, Eisenreich announced his retirement and returned to his home in St. Cloud, Minn. Eisenreich had refused the Twins' request to return to the minor leagues on a 20-day rehabilitation program and had requested his release. A release would have obligated the Twins to pay Eisenreich for the remainder of the season and to surrender rights to him should he attempt a comeback in the future.

The Twins could have attempted to place Eisenreich on the disqualified list for refusing to accept assignment to the minor leagues. Instead, a compromise was reached: The Twins agreed to pay Eisenreich for the remainder of the season—if he was willing to request retirement.

"It is very much a long shot Jim will try professional baseball again," said Howard Fox, a Twins vice-president. "But this places him on the Twins' retired list."

For the Twins, the Eisenreich saga started in spring training of 1982, when he came in as a non-roster player from Class-A ball and won the job as Minnesota's center fielder. Eisenreich opened the season as one of the most promising rookies in the American League and was hitting above .300 when he first had to take himself out of a game on April 30 of that season because of the nervous disorder.

Before then, Eisenreich's disorder had manifested itself in twitches and other nervous habits. But he started suffering from hyperventilation during games and was forced out of the lineup in three consecutive games. That led to Eisenreich's first stay on the disabled list.

Eisenreich came back later that season, but the problem persisted, and he left the team on June 10. In 34 games that season, Eisenreich batted .303.

Eisenreich returned in spring training of 1983 and batted .400 in exhibition games. Again, he opened the season in center field for the Twins, but this time he lasted only two games before announcing he was retiring and returning to St. Cloud.

The retirement did not become official until the middle of June. Eisenreich had worked with several therapists and received various medications in an effort to beat the problem, and last August he started working with St. Paul hypnotist Harvey Misel. The sessions with Misel were interrupted when Misel suffered a heart attack and, after Misel's recovery, Eisenreich did not return. "You're always more hopeful about success when it is your idea to stop," Misel said.

Eisenreich made another comeback in Florida this spring, opening with eight consecutive hits. Manager Billy Gardner said, "Jim's one of those guys with a magic bat."

Twins President Calvin Griffith was even less restrained. "A natural ball player like this might come along only once in a lifetime," Griffith said.

Eisenreich started to struggle at the plate late in the exhibition schedule, however, and was the regular in center field for only the season's first two games before being replaced by Darrell Brown. Then, on April 27, Eisenreich again went on the disabled list, this time for the purpose of finding out if a different medication might permit him to play.

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