

BASEBALL

Franco's a Hit — and Then Some

Rangers' RBI Leader Also Contributes to Fast Start as Mentor for Sierra

By PHIL ROGERS

ARLINGTON—Tom Grieve will tell you he's no gambler, but don't believe him. The general manager of the Texas Rangers put his reputation on the line when he traded for **Julio Franco** last December, and so far the Rangers have reaped a windfall in that three-for-one deal.

Franco not only drove in 23 runs to lead the American League in April, but the second baseman who was acquired in a trade with Cleveland also became the mentor that talented young outfielder Ruben Sierra had lacked during his first three seasons in Texas.

For the first time in his career, Sierra got off to a good start as he and his new friend, **Franco**, helped lead the Rangers to the best month in the club's history.

Talk about hitting the jackpot...

Grieve knew only one thing for sure about **Franco**—that he could hit—when he made the trade with the Indians at the winter meetings last December 6 in Atlanta. **Franco** had a .295 career batting average and had hit a combined .309 for Cleveland over the last three years. Trouble was, he carried a reputation as a bad boy and malcontent.

Grieve and Manager Bobby Valentine were willing to take a chance, and they gave up three players who had started on opening day in 1987 and '88—center fielder Oddibe McDowell, second baseman Jerry (Guv'nor) Browne and popular first baseman Pete O'Brien.

"We went into the deal with Cleveland prepared to overpay for **Julio Franco**," Grieve said. "In return, we got a player who will be a good player for us. The worst people can say is that we overpaid to get a good player."

Grieve shrugged off talk about the so-called dark side of **Franco's** personality. "If there is something to his reputation," Grieve said in Atlanta, "it's the job of the manager to handle it. That was not a concern for us."

Thus far, **Franco**, 27, has been a model citizen in Texas. "If **Julio Franco's** a troublemaker," Valentine said, "then Tommy Lasorda's a librarian."

Franco's image was largely shaped by three incidents during his six years with the Indians. Twice he took unexcused leaves of absence from the club, disappearing once in New York and once in Cleveland, when he bolted from the clubhouse after a disagreement. **Franco** also spent time in jail in his native Dominican Republic for carrying a handgun in his automobile.

"Early in my career, I wasn't grown up," **Franco** said. "I made mistakes. People who go to college make mistakes. People in business make mistakes. You've got to learn to live with it and react in a different way."

Rangers coach Toby Harrah says he sees a different **Franco** now than in **Julio's** rookie season of 1983, when both Harrah and **Fran-**



Julio Franco (right) is just the voice of experience that Ruben Sierra needed. The talented twosome helped lead the Rangers to the best month in their history.

co played for the Indians. "He was a boy then," Harrah said. "He's a man now."

Franco harbors some bitterness about his years in Cleveland. He believes that he became a whipping boy for Manager Doc Edwards and as a result was unfairly branded as damaged goods.

"They never forget," **Franco** said of the Indians' management. "They never give me a chance to do what I do best, play ball. They don't remember the good things I did. They only remember the bad things. They don't remember when guys get hurt, **Julio** plays second base. Guys get hurt, **Julio** bats lead-off."

"They don't remember that I put up numbers there that nobody did for six years. They don't remember that **Julio** plays hurt. I almost ended my career once. I got a hyperextended elbow and I kept playing. But they don't remember that. They only remember that I yelled at somebody in the clubhouse."

Franco directs much of his resentment toward Edwards. He says there was a time last year when other players broke the club's dress code without being reprimanded, but that he was embarrassed in front of his teammates when he showed up one day wearing a sweater instead of a sport coat.

"I was always the guy who was the example," **Franco** said. "They just wanted to see the bad things. They always said I was a trouble-

maker. I'm not that way. I want to be respected."

Edwards said nothing about **Franco's** demeanor in explaining Cleveland's side of the deal. "He is one of the best hitters in either league," Edwards said. "We just needed help at a lot of positions, and this was a way we could get it."

Franco had to fight an urge to strut when he returned to Cleveland for a two-game series April 25-26. Batting fifth in the Texas lineup, he was leading the A.L. in RBIs for a team that had the best record in the majors.

"I had played for winners all my life," **Franco** said. "Always in the minor leagues, my team was in first place, second place, and I was winning MVPs and player of the month, things like that. Then I got to Cleveland and all we did was lose. I had to get out of there. I'm too young to lose all the time."

Franco's return to Cleveland was not a big draw at the gate, but the 12,042 fans who attended the two games at Cleveland Stadium spent much of their time booing **Franco**.

"They're great," **Franco** said after an 11-7 victory by the Rangers. "I love them, they love me. All that counts is who wins the game, and we did."

Texas won a lot of games in April. The Rangers' 17-5 record was the fifth-best April record in the major leagues during the 1980s and the .773 winning percentage was the highest for any month in

the Rangers' 18-year history.

While **Franco** batted .309 with four homers and 23 RBIs in the 22 games, Sierra also came out hot. He hit .313 with four homers and 19 RBIs during April.

With help from **Franco**, the slugger from Puerto Rico seemed to lose some of his distaste for cold weather, which had provided an excuse for Sierra's slow starts in the past. He hit .167 in April 1987 and .214 in the first month last year.

"**Julio** has been talking to me a lot," said Sierra. "He's been saying I've got to hit in cold weather if I'm going to hit .300. I've been swinging the bat good, so I don't worry about cold weather. I just worry about swinging the bat good."

Franco had a simple message for Sierra. "He told me he was scared to hit the ball hard when it's cold," **Franco** said. "I said, 'If you'll get that out of your mind, you'll swing the bat hard. Try to hit the ball on the fat part of the bat, then it won't hurt.' That problem is all mental."

Franco had posted .300 averages in each of his last three years in Cleveland. He hit .306 in 1986, .319 in '87 and .303 last year. He drove in 90 runs and scored 97 for the Tribe in 1985, when he hit .288.

Before the Rangers acquired **Franco** and Rafael Palmeiro, a naturalized citizen who was born in Cuba, Sierra had been the only Spanish-speaking player in the Texas lineup. While Sierra has im-

proved his English since being promoted to the majors at the age of 20 in 1986, he often had to communicate with teammates non-verbally.

He could leave 'em laughing with his imitations of other players' swings and public address announcers around the league, but he seemed almost incapable of carrying on a serious conversation.

"There's a time to joke and there's a time to be serious," Rangers pitcher Jose Guzman said. "He's a funny guy, and everybody knows it and likes him for it. He can imitate everybody on the team. But there's a time when you have to sit down and talk baseball and get serious."

That's where Palmeiro and **Franco** figure in with Sierra. They hit 3-4-5 in the Rangers' batting order and often huddle to talk in Spanish about opposing pitchers and strategies.

"It's always the three of us together," said Sierra, 23. "Always talking about what we're going to do in the next inning, what we're going to try."

Hitting behind Sierra, **Franco** has helped make Sierra a more disciplined batter. A failure to be selective at the plate had contributed to Sierra's .260 career average entering this season. But if he chases a bad pitch now, chances are he will hear about it from **Franco**.

Sierra drove in 109 runs for the Rangers in 1987, but his total fell to 91 last year—and he needed a late surge to reach that figure.

"Ruben was a problem last year because he swung at bad pitches," Valentine said. "With men on base, he felt like he had to be the one to drive them in, and that pressure and desire to do that had him swinging at things he couldn't hit. The first couple of times that happened in spring training, **Julio** stepped in and said, 'Hey, if you swing at bad pitches that's all you're going to see. If you walk, then we're both going to get better pitches and I'm going to drive in some runs.'"

Franco's advice to Sierra hasn't been limited to the demand that he lay off nasty curveballs. He once jumped Sierra as he was heading out of the clubhouse without lifting weights and has talked to him about shaping an image.

"He pushes Ruben, and Ruben needs to be pushed," Harrah said. "He talks to Ruben when he's not working quite as much as he thinks he is. I think he makes Ruben a better player, and Ruben, like most ball players, likes that."

Franco hopes he can steer Sierra around mistakes like the ones that got **Julio** branded as bad news in Cleveland.

"I was wild when I was younger and I had to learn the hard way," **Franco** said. "You have stages. You don't listen to anybody. You think anything you do is OK because you have talent. You think other people are picking on you when they tell you you're doing something wrong."

It's hard not to listen to the voice of experience.

COVER STORY

Just Call Texas Trio th

Palmeiro, Sierra and Franco a Potent Combo

By PHIL ROGERS

ARLINGTON—In the old days, Roger Clemens loved his twice-a-year trips back to Texas with the Boston Red Sox. It was a midsummer vacation, courtesy of the gracious hosts in the white uniforms.

Clemens' family came up from Houston, along with friends from the University of Texas. The Rocket Man's only problem was getting enough tickets for all to see him once again execute the lowly Texas Rangers. Heck, in Clemens' first five years with the Boston Red Sox, he had come closer to a no-hitter than a defeat at Arlington Stadium.

Times have changed.

Clemens' first hint came in a duel with Nolan Ryan on April 30. He cruised into the eighth inning with a 1-0 lead, ready to raise his career record against the Rangers to 5-0. But then something happened. With a man on first base in the eighth inning, Rafael Palmeiro pulled a 2-and-2 fastball off the right-field foul pole to give Texas a 2-1 victory.

Back at Fenway Park on June 21, Clemens took a 3-0 lead into the fourth inning, never imagining that the game would end up as a crushing 10-4 loss for him and the Red Sox. Six of the 12 hits Clemens allowed in 5½ innings that night, including a pair of doubles by Ruben Sierra, were from the middle three hitters in the Rangers' order.

Clemens fared no better a month later in Texas, this time giving up all of the runs in an 8-1 loss July 18. **Julio Franco** was the primary tormenter this time, driving in three runs with a double and triple.

Even in Clemens' lone victory over Texas this season, a 7-6 decision May 5 at Fenway, the Rangers reminded him that he's no longer bulletproof. Palmeiro and Sierra had doubles in that game.

Hard as it is to believe, the Nos. 3-4-5 hitters in the Rangers' batting order were sorry to be finished with Clemens for the year. The trio of Palmeiro, Sierra and Franco hit .325 against him, with a slugging percentage of .600.

Rocket Man? More like rocket fuel.

"The hitters we had in the past were good hitters, but Julio and Rafael, those are two guys who can hit the fastball," Rangers Manager Bobby Valentine said. "That was missing around here."

Clemens is hardly the only American League pitcher who has felt the wrath of Palmeiro, Sierra and Franco, the Rangers' "Artilleria Pesada," or heavy artillery. That's Edwin Correa's name for the most productive 3-4-5 combination in the majors.

Palmeiro, Sierra and Franco answer to other names, most notably "The Three Amigos." While that Steve Martin movie title has been used before, most recently by the Denver Broncos' receiving corps, plans were under way to market a poster of the Rangers' trio under

that name.

The trio has also been called "Young Guns," a reference to the 27-year-old Franco's standing as elder member. Palmeiro won't turn 25 until September, and Sierra, at 23, was the youngest player in this year's All-Star Game. Then there's "The Islanders," which refers to their roots in different parts of the Caribbean.

Franco grew up in a real baseball hotbed, San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, while Sierra was schooled in the art of hitting a curveball at the Roberto Clemente Sports City in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Palmeiro left Cuba with his family at the age of 6 and was denied a spot on the 1984 United States Olympic team because he

was not a U.S. citizen. He went through naturalization proceedings last year.

All three speak both Spanish and English, although only Franco among them appears truly comfortable speaking with more than his bat. He has become the unofficial spokesman for the group. It was Franco who predicted in spring training that Sierra could have an MVP year—"if he just does what he's supposed to"—hitting between Palmeiro and Franco. Franco also has conducted informal seminars in the mentality of hitting, setting the tone for a relationship that benefits all three.

"We talk all the time, discussing what pitchers are going to try to do in situations, and we help each

other out," Sierra said. "If we see something wrong, we don't let it pass. We let each other know and make an adjustment. We push each other."

The talents of the three complement one another. Palmeiro, a left-handed hitter, sprays the ball to all fields, seldom strikes out and will take a walk. Sierra, a switch-hitter, has power from both sides of the plate to go along with sheer speed and an uncanny balance that enables him to recover even when he's been fooled by a pitch. Franco, a righthanded hitter, puts the ball into play with stinging line drives and had shown power with 10 home runs in his first 61 games.

"Raffy's more of a line-drive hitter, and a better contact hitter," hitting instructor Tom Robson said of Palmeiro. "Ruben and Julio are

similar. It looks like Julio is more disciplined but he's pretty free-swinging, too. He takes pitches early in the count, and Ruben doesn't. Ruben swings more for power, while Julio will go with pitches."

Palmeiro, Sierra and Franco each has led the American League in hitting at one time this season. Palmeiro was hitting .361 on May 29, but had skidded to .299 on July 19.

Franco and Sierra, both in the starting lineup at the All-Star Game, have battled for the league RBI lead since May, with Franco's three-RBI night against Clemens giving him the latest edge, 69-66.

Through that game July 18, both Sierra and Franco were listed among the A.L. leaders in eight offensive categories, including batting average, RBIs, hits, doubles, total bases and slugging percentage. Sierra was listed in 10 categories overall. His 51 extra-base hits (including 14 homers) were second only to San Francisco's Kevin Mitchell in the majors.

"They would all be hitting .330 with a little luck for Raffy," Robson said. "Raffy's hit the ball real hard with a lot of outs. It seems like every night he gets one hit and has two ropes that are caught. If you just looked at the films from the last month, I bet there are 30 to 40 balls he's hit right on the screws. If 10 or 12 of those fall, he's hitting what the others are hitting."

Before Rangers General Manager Tom Grieve marched through Atlanta last December, Sierra, Franco and Palmeiro were not playing in the same division, let alone for the same team.

Grieve went to the winter meetings looking for a legitimate hitter as the Rangers' run production fell from 823 in 1987 to 637 last year.

Grieve came back with two hitters. He landed Palmeiro in a nine-play-

er deal that sent lefthanders Mitch Williams, Paul Kilgus and Steve Wilson to the Chicago Cubs and picked up Franco in a three-for-one swap with the Cleveland Indians.

It didn't take Valentine long to picture the effect those two could have as bookends for Sierra, the organization's prodigy. Sierra joined the Rangers in 1986 at the age of 20. In each of his first two full seasons in Texas, he was voted the club's player of the year.

Sierra hit 69 homers before his 23rd birthday. Only 13 others have had so many homers in the majors at such a young age, including Hall of Fame sluggers Ted Williams, Mel Ott, Mickey Mantle, Jimmie Foxx and Joe DiMaggio.

But even with such success, there was a feeling that Sierra had shown only a fraction of his potential. Those who have known him the longest have always seen a special player. They also saw a survivor who rose above the crime-ridden Jardines Selles housing projects in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, where he grew up.

When the Rangers visited Puerto Rico to play in the Roberto Clemente Series this spring, Sierra would only drive through his old neighborhood. He did not stop. He told of how his mother was away visiting a brother imprisoned on drug charges. Sierra called himself lucky.

Baseball was his ticket away from those troubles. He began playing sandlot games with two of the late Roberto Clemente's sons at the age of 10 and was steered into the newly established Roberto Clemente Sports City program. His talent and well-being were a concern of many people, including Vera Clemente, Roberto's widow.

During a visit to the All-Star Game, Mrs. Clemente said that Sierra was "like a son." He has become more than that to the people of Puerto Rico, who expect him to follow the Clemente legend both on and off the field.

"In Puerto Rico, more than anywhere else, the reference point in baseball is Clemente," said Luis Mayoral, a San Juan sports journalist and coordinator of the annual Clemente Series. "Emotionally speaking, Ruben is the first product of the Roberto Clemente Sports City to play in the major leagues."

"He has a striking facial resemblance to Clemente. He plays right field. And he wears No. 21. Even for people who know nothing about baseball, that makes Ruben special to them. The people identify with him because he is from a poor family. What he does, he does for Puerto Rico, not just Ruben Sierra."

Sierra seems torn between emulating Clemente and wanting to be his own person. He says the comparison is an honor, but originally chose to wear No. 3 in the major leagues because he thought Clemente's 21 would place too much pressure on him. It took intervention by Valentine to get him to make the change.



JULIO FRANCO

Franco shed the bad news label he picked up in Cleveland to become a good influence on Ruben Sierra.

COVER STORY

e 3-4-5 Amigos

"People say it (that he's like Clemente), and it is an honor," Sierra said. "But I want to be Ruben Sierra. I want people to say I play like Ruben."

No one has ever complained about that. When Sierra's production dropped from 30 homers and 109 RBIs in 1987 to 23 homers and 91 RBIs last year, he told Valentine he planned to spend the winter in a San Juan gym, lifting weights to become stronger. He reported to spring training weighing 16 pounds more than in '88, and it seemed to be all muscle.

Sierra also has benefited from his relationship with Franco, who assumed a tutor's role. They are inseparable in the gym and on the bench. Franco, labeled as bad news during his six years in Cleveland, vowed early that he wanted to help Sierra avoid the mistakes he had made.

"Ruben was an outstanding player when Julio got here," Valentine said, "but Julio has provided a real steadying influence."

Sierra agreed. "Everything he says," said Sierra, pointing to his head, "I put right up here."

Sierra hit .244 before the All-Star break last year, but this year was batting .330. He would have hit for the cycle April 12 in Milwaukee if not for a questionable scoring call.

Tony LaRussa, the Oakland A's manager who was in charge of the A.L. All-Stars, said it was an easy choice to pick Sierra as the replacement in right field for Jose Canseco, who was voted into the

game by fans but was unable to play because he was not recovered from a wrist injury.

"Sierra has been a premier player all year in all facets of the game," LaRussa said. "He drives in runs, hits for average and plays well in right field. That was an easy call."

But a midseason election to pick the Rangers' top player would not have been easy to call. Catcher Jim Sundberg believes Franco was the biggest key to Texas' finishing the first half 47-39, its best first-half record since 1983.

"Franco is really our MVP," Sundberg said. "He hits behind Ruben and doesn't see as many good pitches as Ruben does. And Franco deserves even more credit for being such a great influence on Ruben."

Franco was called a lot of things during his days in Cleveland, but "a good influence" was not among them. His new standing in the clubhouse must come as a shock to former Indians G.M. Joe Klein and the others who hunted Franco down when he twice was AWOL from games.

"I'm a new guy," Franco said. "I learned that God gives you talent, but you still have to be on time and do what the manager says. You can't let your ego control you. Spanish ball players have reputations for egos that go too far. In Cleveland, I never used to shut up. The mouth always gets Latinos in trouble. Julio is not going to break rules in Texas."

Grieve had heard his share of Franco stories before he traded Pete O'Brien, Jerry Browne and Oddibe McDowell to the Indians for Franco. Grieve figured that even if there were some potential headaches, Franco still was bringing along a career .295 batting average.

"I made a point that I was not going to judge Julio Franco based on the stories of the past, and what I see is a young player who has matured quite a bit," Grieve said. "He's a great influence on Ruben. He's talking baseball with him all the time. He's serious about playing the game, but he shows that you can have fun, too. It's exactly what we needed."

Red Sox Manager Joe Morgan paid Franco a compliment after Julio had tripled and doubled against Clemens on July 18.

"That Franco's dynamite," Morgan said. "God, he's a tough out. I'd have to say he's the toughest out in the league right now. Tougher than (Kirby) Puckett, anybody else."

While both Franco and Sierra signed professional contracts when they were 16, Palmeiro chose a different route to the major leagues. After playing at Miami's Jackson High School, he elected to go to Mississippi State.

He formed a potent 1-2 combination with Will Clark there, flashing the potential that had caused his father, Jose Palmeiro, to push him toward a baseball career from almost the time he arrived in the United States. Palmeiro's family left Cuba in 1970, when Rafael was 6 years old. While people talk now about his natural swing from the left side, it was actually the product of years spent by Palmeiro trying to please his father.

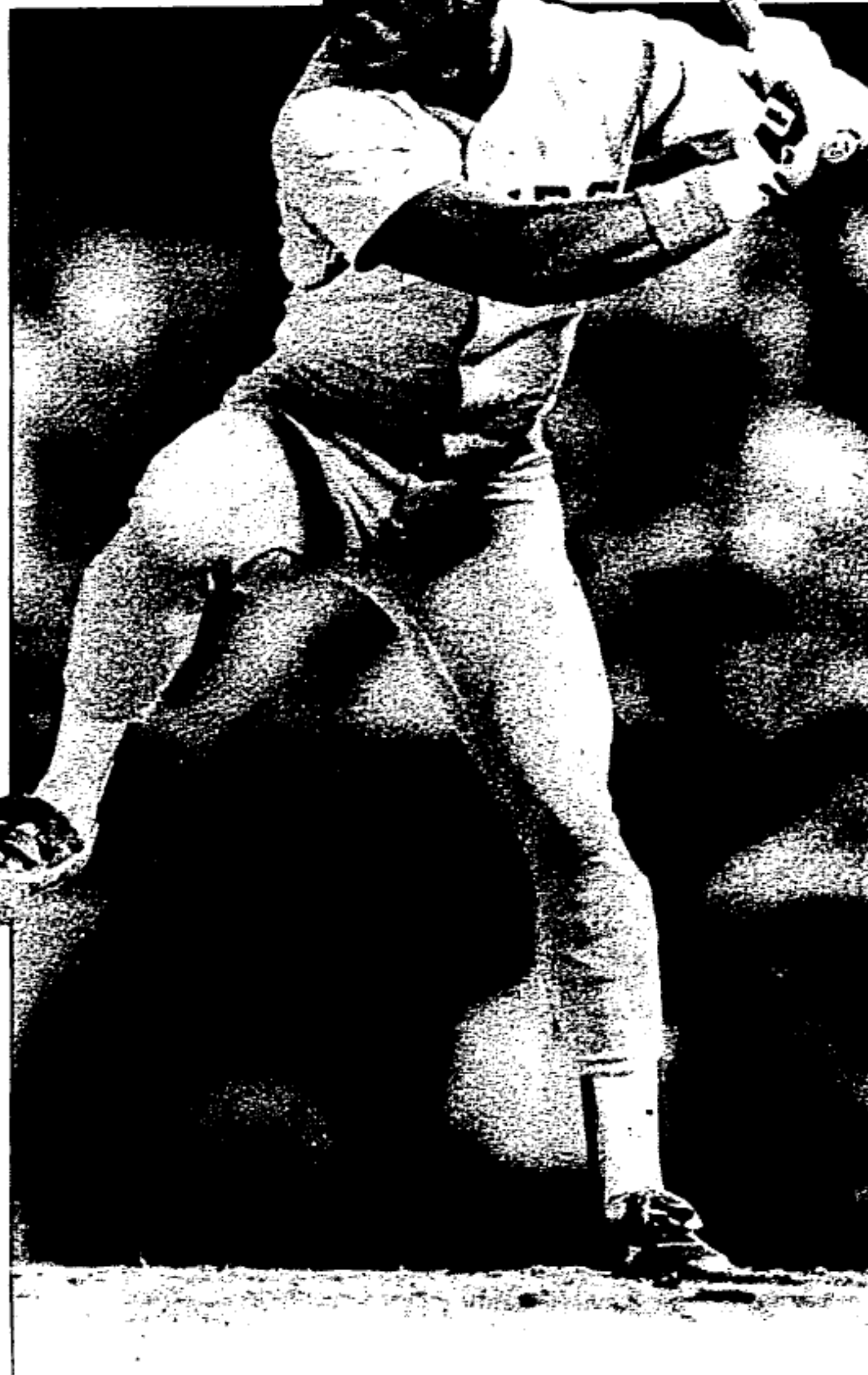
"People say my swing hasn't changed a bit since I was 14 or 15," Palmeiro said. "If my swing was that good then, I was taught pretty well."

Palmeiro finished second in the NCAA with 29 home runs in 1984, and last year finished second in the National League to Tony Gwynn with a .307 batting average. He still hopes to deliver more power (he had five homers and 48 RBIs through 93 games with the Rangers), but he has the look of a complete hitter.

While Palmeiro says he no longer burns over the trade that sent him from the Cubs to the Rangers last winter, he can still be ruffled by news dispatches from Wrigley Field. He was incensed by a quote attributed to Cubs pitching coach Dick Pole in June. At the time, Mitch Williams, the ex-Ranger, had 12 saves in a Chicago uniform.

Pole was quoted as saying, "I'll trade zero game-winning RBIs (Palmeiro had none in 1988) for 12 saves at this point anytime. Rafael was cute. The female fans were upset with the trade because he was cute, but cute doesn't win ball games."

Palmeiro called it "a very stupid comment from a very stupid man," before later cooling off. "I had con-



RUBEN SIERRA

Sierra began to live up to his potential when the other two Amigos joined him in the lineup.

sidered him one of my close friends in the game," Palmeiro said of Pole. "Obviously, I was wrong."

Even the normally cautious Grieve joined the fray over the Pole quote. "We didn't get Rafael because he was cute," Grieve told the Dallas Times Herald's Frank Luksa. "We got him because he can hit. Dick Pole will never be mistaken for a scout. The only thing he knows about hitters is that they were tough to get out when he was a pitcher."

Palmeiro says he's driven by two motivations—to help the Rangers win, and develop his potential to its fullest.

"I'm not playing to show people I can play," he said. "I'm playing the game to help this team out. That's my only concern."

Palmeiro's biggest series came May 26-28, when he was 8 for 14 at the Metrodome. Minnesota Manager Tom Kelly was impressed. "Mr. Boggs had better watch out," Kelly said, alluding to Boston's Wade Boggs, the American League batting champion the last four years.

Left-handed pitcher Jamie Moyer, who accompanied Pal-

meiro in the trade from Chicago to Texas, believes Palmeiro has improved. That would be normal, as this is only Palmeiro's second full season in the majors. He appeared in 22 games with the Cubs in 1986 and 84 in '87, when he displayed his power with 14 homers.

"He's a better hitter now," Moyer said. "Last year (with the Cubs), he used the whole park but went to left a lot. This year, he's using the whole park but going to right field with authority more often. I don't think there's been a team so far that's found a way to pitch to him."

Although Palmeiro hit only .200 in a 46-game stretch through July 18, he was getting on base and was on a pace to score 97 runs for the season. Both Palmeiro and Sierra, who was second to Rickey Henderson in the A.L. with 61 runs scored through July 20, could challenge McDowell's club record of 105 runs, set in '86.

"When I get on base, I'm going to score," Palmeiro said. "These guys are going to drive me in. Ruben and Julio are going to do it."

You don't believe it? Just ask Roger Clemens.



Palmeiro says he is no longer angry over the trade that sent him from Chicago to Texas.



Franco: Worthy Candidate Finally Should Get Chance

By PHIL ROGERS

ARLINGTON—When the 1988 All-Star Game rolled around, Julio Franco was in the process of hitting .300 for the third season in a row. Like the years before, he returned to his home in Boca Raton, Fla., during the three-day break with nothing better to do than watch the game on television.

Franco gritted his teeth when Milwaukee's Paul Molitor was introduced as the starting second baseman for the American League.

"The guy's played one game (at second)," Franco said, "and he deserves to go more than me?"

Franco doesn't hold it against Molitor that he was elected by baseball fans to start at second base in one of the greatest quirks ever in All-Star voting. Molitor spent most of the first month of the '88 season as the Brewers' designated hitter before moving to third base, his primary position since 1982. But it probably delayed Franco's arrival as an All-Star for one more year. He was so frustrated that he could barely watch the game on television.

"It was tough to watch it," Franco said. "You know you should be there. It's like being on the disabled list, and there's nothing you can do. Your team is down one run, you want to help them out, but you can't. It's tough."

When he was acquired by the Texas Rangers last December, Franco, a career .295 hitter, said he had stopped thinking about the All-Star Game after not being selected in any of his six seasons with the Cleveland Indians. But after getting off to a great start this season, he started talking about it in early June.

No player who makes the trip to Anaheim for the July 11 All-Star Game should be more excited than Franco, whose statistics in the first half of the season left no doubt about his worthiness. He was close behind leader Steve Sax of the New York Yankees in the fan voting, but Franco had reserved his spot on the team with a .342 batting average and 59 runs batted in after 74 games.

"It will excite me," Franco said. "I think I've deserved to go the last few years."

There's a chip on Franco's shoulder that transcends the popular election of Molitor last year, when Franco batted .303 and drove in 30 runs in the first half of the season while hitting in the leadoff spot for the Indians.

"He didn't play second base. He played one game," Franco said. "But the system picked him. It's not Paul Molitor's fault. He didn't vote for himself. A lot of people blamed him, but what's the blame? It's the way it is. There's nothing you can do about it."

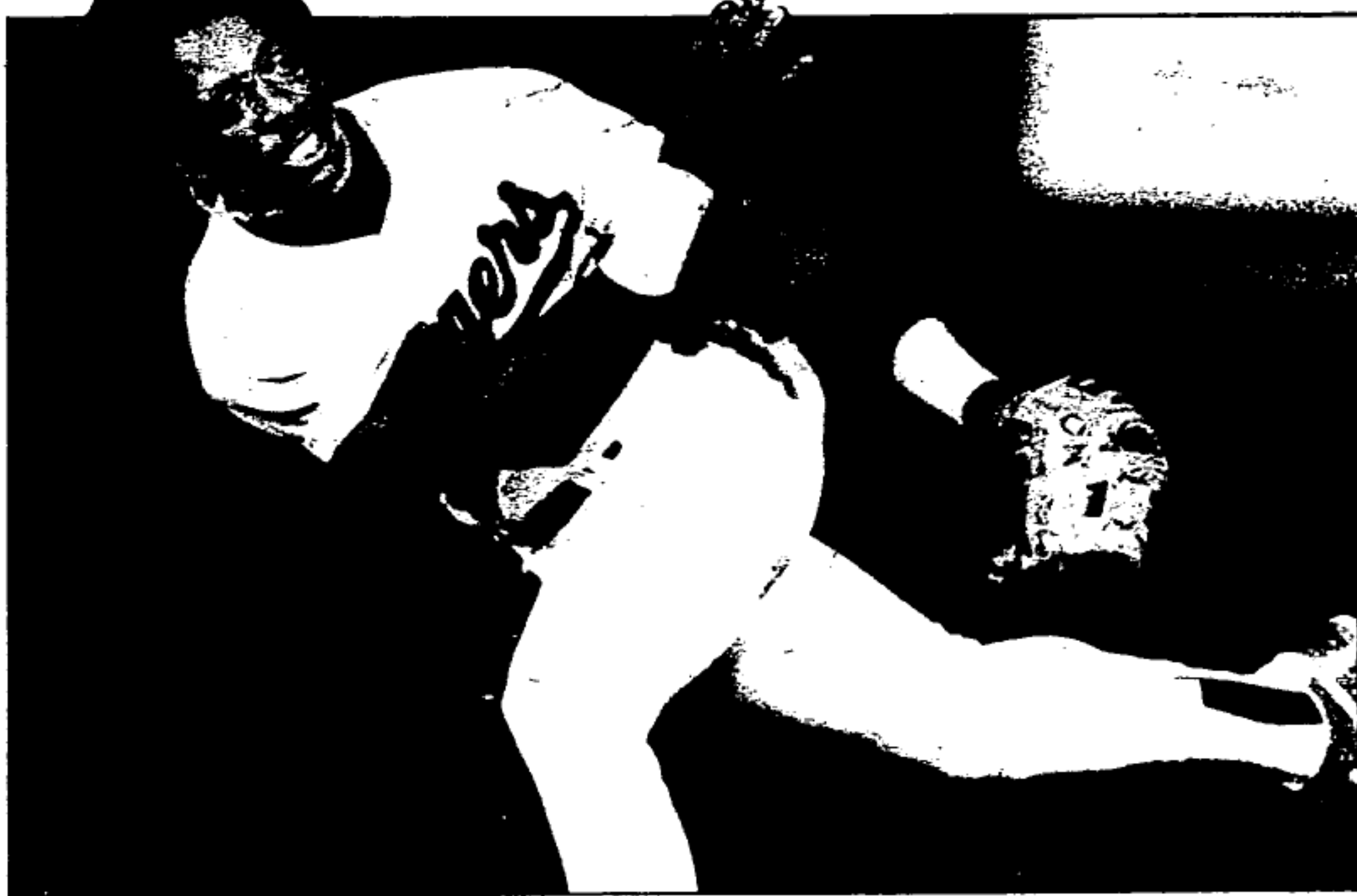
A thirst for recognition triggered Franco's willingness to shift from shortstop to second base in Cleveland before the 1988 season. He wondered if he would ever get to play in an All-Star Game as long as he was in the shadows of such shortstops as Baltimore's Cal Ripken Jr., Detroit's Alan Trammell and Toronto's Tony Fernandez.

"I wish I could have done it five years ago," Franco said about the switch to second base. "There's less competition than at shortstop. You're not going to be compared with somebody like Ripken or Trammell. (Detroit's) Lou Whitaker's a good hitter, but he's not the type of hitter guys like Cal Ripken and Fernandez are. Those guys can have MVP years."

Franco was fretting over the fan vote—through June 25, he trailed Sax by 7,052 votes—hoping for the opportunity to be introduced as a member of the starting-lineup. No Texas player has been elected to start since Richie Zisk in 1978.

"I think I should start," Franco said. "Not because I'm Julio Franco, but because you should take the top hitters and RBI men. It shouldn't just be the people voting no matter what you're hitting, if your team is in last place. It should be your performance on the field."

Julio Franco is excited just to make the trip to Anaheim, but thinks he deserves to start.



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AWOL Franco Pays the Price

CLEVELAND—Pat Corrales, manager of the Cleveland Indians, didn't realize how prophetic he was being when he said April 18, "Julio Franco is the kind of guy you want to kiss one time and kick the next."

Corrales was referring to the contrast between Franco's celestial offense and the shortstop's 40-watt defense. But two days later, when Franco failed to appear for a Saturday afternoon game at Yankee Stadium, Corrales' words took on another meaning.

The whereabouts of Franco, who at the time was leading the American League with a .516 batting average, were not known until Juan Todman, a childhood friend of Franco's in the Dominican Republic, was admitted to the Indians' clubhouse after the 5-2 loss and explained what had happened. He said that after the Friday night game, in which Franco hit a two-run homer to give the Indians a 2-1 victory over the Yankees, Julio had stayed overnight at the home of Marciano Todman, Juan's brother, who lives in the Bronx, only a mile or two from Yankee Stadium.

"When I got to the game today, some fans asked me where Julio was," Todman related. "I was surprised that he wasn't here, so I called my mama because Marciano has no phone at his house."

"I asked my mother what happened to Julio and she asked my sister, who went to find out. My sister then gave me a message from Julio that he was not feeling good. She told me he had been at Marciano's house all day."

Franco refused to expand on Todman's story after being retrieved from the Bronx by second baseman Tony Bernazard and batting coach Bobby Bonds.

The following day, Franco said, "I talked to Pat (Corrales) and I apologized to my teammates. Anything else you want to know, you will have to ask Pat."

After assessing Franco what he called a "substantial" fine (believed to be one day's pay—about \$2,300), Corrales declared that the matter was closed so far as he was concerned.

"I believe that what Julio told me is the truth," the manager said. "He overslept and had no phone and evidently was sick. But I can't say that makes it all right."

Franco was not suspended, said Corrales, explaining, "I am not going to penalize the club, just Julio personally."

Through 12 games, Franco was batting .436 (17-for-39) with nine RBIs, 11 runs scored and a .511 on-base percentage. He had driven in or scored 38 percent of the Tribe's runs and had been credited with two game-winning RBIs.

Most of Franco's hitting is done from the No. 2 spot in the batting order, normally not considered a prime RBI position.

"Like Ryne Sandberg and Tony Gwynn, who also are No. 2 hitters, Julio has MVP qualities," said Brett Butler, the leadoff man.

On the negative side, Franco's defense has not been on a par with his offense. He committed 36 errors last season, the most by a major league shortstop, and he had five errors this spring despite making several acrobatic saves on difficult plays.

Smoke Signals: When the Indians took two of three games in Yankee Stadium, it marked the first time they had won a series in New York since 1982. The Tribe signed outfielder Benny Ayala to a Triple-A contract, but he isn't expected to become a fixture at Maine (International). The Indians will be keeping an eye on Ayala, with the idea of using him themselves as a right-handed pinch-hitter. Ayala was released last fall after spending six years with Baltimore.

SHELDON OCKER



Searage Is Content To Set Up Fingers

MILWAUKEE—It was nice while it lasted, but all good things must come to an end.

Milwaukee Brewers reliever Ray Searage, who had pitched a club-record 30 straight scoreless innings, gave up three runs in relief of Pete Vuckovich in a 4-1 loss to the Texas Rangers.

"I'd be a liar if I said I didn't have it on my mind," Searage said. "Yeah, it's been on my mind. You try not to, but sometimes it comes in and clutters it up. I haven't taken it out there with me when I've gone out there to pitch. I don't think about that on the mound. Now that it's over, I'm kind of glad in a way. Now I can take care of business."

Searage's streak had gotten to be a kind of albatross, but it had made things a lot easier for him this spring, too.

Searage, who turns 30 on May 1, had waited a long time for success before the Brewers signed him as a minor-league free agent before the 1984 season. In eight seasons in professional baseball, 26 games with the Mets in 1981 had been his only taste of the major leagues.

His first season with Milwaukee started out typically with a

bad spring training and an assignment with the Brewers' Vancouver (Pacific Coast) club. He got his break when the Brewers needed pitching help in the last two months of the season. In 21 games, Searage finished with six saves, a 2-1 record and an earned-run average of 0.70. He also ended the season sharing the team record of 28 scoreless innings with Moose Haas. He would add two more innings before the streak ended.

"It helped me relax in spring training," he said. "Not to the point where I could be a fat cat, but I could relax a little. Everything wasn't weighed on every pitch. This was the first spring training I felt I could work on stuff and try different things, different pitches. There wasn't a lot of worry about my job the way I had been in the past. I was worried, sure, but not at the max as I was in previous years."

Searage had a 3.38 ERA in 11 games this spring, one of the first good springs he has had.

"There was one spring when I was with the Mets as a non-roster player," he said. "I pitched 10 innings and didn't give up a run."

His big step was delayed, however, when the Mets couldn't make room on their roster for him. Except for 1981, when he spent half the season with New York, he was still waiting until he finally got a call from the Brewers.

With Rollie Fingers out for the rest of the season because of back surgery, Searage quickly established himself as the Brewers' bullpen stopper. This year, Fingers is back, and Searage will be in a different role.

"That's Rollie's job," he said. "He's the one who's had the previous years of success doing that. I knew that. If I can fill in with Peter Ladd and Bob Gibson and Bobby McClure, picking Rollie up on his day off or whatever they want, then fine."

"Rollie's going to be here at least two years. I still have a future. I feel, as a bullpen stopper. Right now, my role is a setup man for Rollie—get the left-handers out or hold the lead for a while. With the Mets, that's what I did. I was the setup man for Neil Allen. I'd come in and get the left-handers out. Then Neil would come in and finish up."

"I'll be patient. I'll wait. I know someday down the line I'll be the short man out of the bullpen, whether it's a couple of seasons or years. My time will come."

Foaming Over: Bill Schroeder bounced out of a slump with three homers in two games against the White Sox. Third baseman Paul Molitor's elbow continues to improve, but he still needs an occasional day off. "Four games seems to be my limit right now," he said. "After a day off, the first day back it feels pretty good. Each day after that it starts getting more tired."

Rookie Teddy Higuera made his debut with a starting assignment against the Chicago Cubs. He pitched well for 5½ innings but wasn't involved in the decision. "That poor Higuera," said Manager George Bamberger. "Everything happened to him."

Vuckovich recorded his first victory since September 20, 1982, pitching the first seven innings of a 3-2 win over Chicago. Searage got a save, his first.

TOM FLAHERTY



Griffey Is Finally Content In Left

NEW YORK—For the first eight years of his major-league career, Ken Griffey was a member of the Cincinnati Reds. During that period, he came to the ball park each day with a certain peace of mind. He knew when he'd be playing—nearly every day. He knew where he'd be playing—right field most of those years, center field occasionally in the last two.

Then, Griffey came to the New York Yankees before the 1982 season, approving a trade and bypassing a chance at becoming a free agent. In return, he received a six-year contract worth a guaranteed \$6.25 million. But he also gave up his peace of mind—at least until this season.

In the Yankees' scheme of things, as most players discover upon arriving, peace of mind is often difficult to find. With Owner George Steinbrenner in charge, confusion is more often the common denominator.

That's the way it was for Griffey the past three years. Sometimes he played first base. Other times he played the outfield, often alternating among the three outfield positions on a day-to-day basis. Sometimes, he didn't play at all.

Last year, the situation became even more bizarre. Griffey and Omar Moreno spent the first half of the season platooning in center field. Both are lefthanded hitters, and Griffey played against lefty pitchers. "It has to be the first time a platoon was arranged where a lefty hitter plays only against lefty pitching," said Griffey. Griffey wound up with a .293 batting average against lefties, one point higher than what he managed against righthanders.

But Griffey has been content this season, his fourth as a Yankee. At least temporarily, he has found that elusive peace of mind. The credit, Griffey realizes, goes to former manager Yogi Berra.

In the early days of spring training, before Berra was fired and replaced by Billy Martin, he called Griffey into his office at Fort Lauderdale Stadium. "You're going to be the regular left fielder," Berra told him. "No more moving around. You'll get a few days off against certain lefthanders, but you'll be in there

almost every day."

Those were the words Griffey had been waiting to hear. And during the early weeks of the season, while numerous Yankees were struggling, Griffey excelled.

Griffey was carrying his old confidence to the plate. He was batting in the .380 range, and his defense was outstanding. In consecutive games at Yankee Stadium, Griffey made game-saving catches against the Chicago White Sox.

First, he robbed Ron Kittle of a ninth-inning homer with a leaping grab, his glove extended significantly above the left-field wall. The catch preserved a tie, and the Yankees won, 5-4, on Don Baylor's homer in the bottom of the ninth.

The next game, Griffey raced to the left-field corner, spearheading Carlton Fisk's sixth-inning drive with two on and turning it into a double play.

Many observers, including Berra, compared the play to Sandy Amoros' famous catch of Berra's drive in the seventh game of the 1955 World Series, enabling the Brooklyn Dodgers to beat the Yankees. "That was an Amoros," said Berra.

"Who's Sandy Amoros?" asked Griffey.

But after three years of confusion, Griffey finally thinks he knows who Ken Griffey is: the regular left fielder for the Yankees.

Yankee Doodles: Shortly before Berra was fired, Steinbrenner, more involved in the daily operations of the team than ever, criticized his players and second-guessed Berra because of a poor turnout at an optional off-day workout. The workout, which followed two losses in three games to Cleveland, was attended by four players—Willie Randolph, Billy Sample, Juan Bonilla and Vic Mota. "I'm damn disappointed in the turnout," said Steinbrenner. "After a team loses two of three to the Cleveland Indians, who are not exactly the Detroit Tigers, I certainly think they would've shown Yogi more consideration. I thought they'd all be here out of necessity or embarrassment."

Meanwhile, Mota was optioned to Columbus (International) that day to make room for Rickey Henderson. "Maybe I should've stayed home," Mota said. Joe Cowley's streak as a good-luck charm ended when the Yankees lost to Boston, 5-4, in 11 innings on April 23, Cowley's first start of the season. Last year, the Yankees had an 11-0 record in Cowley's starts. Through the first 11 games, the Yankees hit five homers, none by lefthanded hitters.

Asked why he took reliever Bob Shirley out in the ninth inning in a game against Cleveland in favor of Dave Righetti after Shirley had retired nine batters in a row, Yogi said: "What's that saying—You don't look a good thing in the eye." Steinbrenner initiated a drug-abuse program for the Yankees' minor-league clubs, where random drug tests are allowed. "I want to get the message across that we won't tolerate drugs," Steinbrenner said. "It may cost us some top prospects along the way, but I'm willing to accept that." Yankees' minor-league players will be fined \$500 if they fail the drug tests. A second offense, Steinbrenner said, would require entrance into a rehabilitation program or immediate suspension. "If a player wants help, I'm willing to help him," Steinbrenner said. "If not, I'll keep him out of baseball as long as possible. And I'll fight it all the way to the Supreme Court."

MOSS KLEIN



Lack of Offense Is Plaguing Jays

TORONTO—As the Toronto Blue Jays struggled through the season's first two weeks, their big problem was a lack of offense.

Only three times had they scored more than five runs in a game, and twice the bullpen—bolstered by the additions of Bill Caudill and Gary Lavelle in the off-season—failed to do the job.

First, it happened in Baltimore, when Lavelle and Caudill failed to protect a five-run lead.

Then, it happened at home on April 23, when the Jays entered the ninth inning with a 4-2 lead over the Kansas City Royals. Caudill was victimized for five runs on a bases-loaded double by George Brett and a two-run homer by Jorge Orta.

The crowd of 18,491 booed Caudill as he left the game. "It hurts. The roof caved in," said Caudill. "Maybe I want too much. I'm trying too hard. I'm a better pitcher than that."

Manager Bobby Cox had Lavelle, a lefthander, warming up in case Brett came to the plate in the ninth. But his elbow tightened, and he was unavailable.

Prior to the game, first baseman Willie Upshaw and outfielders George Bell and Lloyd Moseby took extra batting practice. Upshaw entered the game with a .208 average. Moseby was hitting .213 and Bell .217. They had driven in a total of only 11 runs, and Bell had not driven in a run in eight games. They combined for eight hits in the game, but to no avail.

A year ago, all three were on fire in April. Bell hit .354, Upshaw .377 and Moseby had 18 RBIs.

The Jays also were getting no production from their designated hitters in the early stages of the '85 season.

Willie Aikens was hitting .167 with three RBIs. Jeff Burroughs was hitting .250, but he had only one extra-base hit and

(Continued on Page 15, Column 1)

Changes Send Franco On 21-Game Streak

CLEVELAND—For the past two seasons, Cleveland Indians slugger **Julio Franco** has finished among the American League's top batters. He ended 1986 with a .306 average and posted a .319 mark in 1987.

So why was he hitting .209, 84 points below his career average, after the first three weeks of this season?

It was a matter of bat position. In his stance, **Franco** carries the bat extremely high and pointed toward the pitcher. After watching his swing on videotape, **Franco** made a few adjustments and seemed to put his hitting troubles behind him.

Franco raised his average to .279 through May 30. He also enjoyed the longest hitting streak of his career with a 21-game run that ended June 4.

But **Franco** said he was trying not to put too much emphasis on the streak, the longest in the majors this season.

"I just want two or three hits a game to get my average back up there, drive in some runs and help my teammates," he said.

"Well, maybe not two or three hits every game.

"People were starting to talk about (the streak), and there was pressure. Of course, I would have liked to keep it going, though."

Franco, who hits in the leadoff spot for the Indians, was batting .388 (29 for 77) at one point during his hitting streak. But as much as he wants to hit .300—he said he promised his mother he would do so when he came to Cleveland in 1983—**Franco's** top priority is run production.

"I was leaving too many runners on base early in the season," he said.

In the first 19 games of the hitting streak, however, **Franco** drove in 13 runs, giving him 19 runs batted in for the season. On June 1, he led off the first inning with his fifth homer of the year to keep the streak alive and improve his RBI total to 20.

On defense, **Franco**, who made the switch from shortstop to second base this season, was beginning to adjust.

"The hardest thing was turning the double play," **Franco** said.

BASEBALL



Julio Franco

"But I'm not afraid of anybody coming into me. If I have a chance to make the double play, I'll stay on the base.

"But if I don't, I'm getting off. I'm not crazy."

SHELDON OCKER

No Merry May for Sox

BOSTON—The month of May was not a very merry one for the Boston Red Sox and Manager **John McNamara**.

After notching a club-record 14 victories in April, the Red Sox suffered a power outage in May and struggled to an 11-16 mark for the month. They dropped seven games behind the league-leading New York Yankees, and the wolves began sniping at **McNamara**.

The team hit just 15 home runs in May, five by **Mike Greenwell**, and had problems producing any kind of offense. The pitching staff, which had been outstanding through the first month of the season, also had its problems. And **McNamara** was on the spot.

During spring training, **John Harrington**, attorney for Red Sox Co-owner **Jean Yawkey**, had said **McNamara** could be in trouble if the Sox weren't close to first place by Memorial Day. The team was 25-22 when May ended and sitting in fourth place in the American League East.

But General Manager **Lou Gorman** wasn't faulting **McNamara**.

"Not by any stretch of the imagination is **McNamara** responsible for what has hap-

pened," **Gorman** said. "There's no way anyone can say **McNamara** mismanaged this club. He's done a good job with the club.

"John has done the job; the team hasn't," he said. "It hasn't hit with any power and has left too many men on base. You can't fault the manager.

"He's tried everything to get it going. He's juggled the lineup, he's moved people around. He's not to blame."

The general manager said **McNamara's** future had not been discussed by the Sox front office.

"His name has never come up at a meeting one way or another. His future has never been discussed."

While **Gorman** gave **McNamara** a vote of confidence, the final say belonged to co-owners **Yawkey** and **Haywood Sullivan**. But **McNamara**, in his third year as manager of the Sox and the final year of a two-year contract, said he wasn't worried about what would happen if the team couldn't get going.

"I can't worry about that because I have no control over it," he said. "All I have to worry about is the team."

JOE GIULIOTTI



Jeff Ballard

Nice Return for Ballard

BALTIMORE—There wasn't an evident difference, but **Jeff Ballard's** return to the big leagues was much more positive than his debut a year ago.

The lefthander finished with a 2-8 record and a 6.59 earned-run average in two stints with the Baltimore Orioles last season. He returned for spring training this year but was one of the first pitchers sent out.

After being recalled from Rochester (International) in May, **Ballard** was 1-2 in three starts. Considering that the Orioles had only 11 wins in their first 51 games, that almost made him a team leader.

He had a 3.74 ERA and averaged over seven innings per start in his first three appearances. He pitched into the ninth inning in his first start, a 3-1 victory over Seattle May 21.

"I'm more relaxed now," **Ballard** said. "I know what I'm doing, I'm throwing the ball over the plate. I feel like I belong here. I feel more like one of the guys."

"I never had a doubt that I

could play in the big leagues last year," he said. "And I have none now. I'm not disappointed with what I've done since I came up.

"Three starts doesn't mean I'm going to have a 10-year career. But I feel like I'll be around for a while."

In **Ballard's** third start, on June 1, he lost, 4-3, to Seattle after giving up a two-run homer to **Rey Quinones**.

"It wasn't a good pitch, but I didn't think he could hit it that far," **Ballard** said.

Orioles Manager **Frank Robinson** said **Ballard's** pitching had been "very good."

But **Robinson** lamented his club's continuing inability to produce on offense.

"It's a shame when you make one mistake and it costs you the game," said **Robinson**. "You get gun-shy out there. You feel if you make a mistake, give up a home run, it's going to cost the game. You can't pitch that way."

But for the most part, that's the way the Orioles had been pitching all year.

Bosio's Blue Moon Blues

MILWAUKEE—The guys in the Milwaukee Brewers' bullpen had settled down for a long rest. **Chris Bosio** was pitching. No work tonight.

Going into his start against Toronto May 31, **Bosio** led the American League with eight complete games. He had pitched 90 of a possible 95 innings in compiling a 6-5 record.

But against the Blue Jays, something went wrong. **Bosio** gave up six straight hits during a six-run second inning by the Jays. He lasted only 1½ innings in the Brewers' 9-0 loss.

"I don't know," **Bosio** said. "It must have been the blue moon everyone was talking about."

Indeed, a bad performance by **Bosio** this season had come once in a blue moon. But his 6-6 record through May 31 didn't reflect that fact. Although **Bosio** had pitched well in his first five losses, all

complete games, the Brewers scored a total of just seven runs.

"I just go out there every day and go as hard as I can as long as I can," he said. "Complete games are nice to have, but I'd rather have the wins.

"I'm a very poor sport when it comes to losing," **Bosio** said. "I hate losing."

Bosio said he also dislikes judging a pitcher solely on his record.

"One thing that's overrated is a starting pitcher's record," he said. "A good example is **Bill Wegman** on our staff (who was 12-11 in 33 starts last season). He had a lot of good starts. He just didn't get the breaks."

Bosio was having that kind of year. Besides leading the league in complete games, he was among the leaders with a 2.65 earned-run average through the end of May.

After moving into the Brewers'



Chris Bosio

starting rotation before the All-Star Game last year, **Bosio** was inconsistent. He finished the season with an 11-8 record and 5.24 ERA.

"Let's put it in perspective," said pitching coach **Chuck Hartenstein**. "He's a young guy who has come a very long way in a short time."

"The last half of last year to now, he's been one of the better pitchers in the league. He's worked hard and it's paying off."

But not in victories.

TOM FLAHERTY

Boggs Sued by 'Rejected Groupie'

BOSTON—Boston Red Sox third baseman **Wade Boggs** said he was optimistic about beating a \$6 million palimony suit filed against him by a California woman, who police said has a criminal record.

Margo Adams, 32, of Costa Mesa, Calif., filed suit June 3 in Orange County Superior Court, claiming **Boggs** broke promises he would support her during a four-year relationship. The suit charges **Boggs** with fraud and breach of oral contract.

Boggs' attorney, Jennifer King, called **Adams** "a groupie who feels somewhat rejected and in her obsession has tried to blackmail Mr. **Boggs**."

"Mr. **Boggs** is not going to

stand for that," said **King**.

Adams claimed she sacrificed her career to travel the country with the four-time American League batting champion during an affair that began in 1984 when she met him in a bar in Anaheim. The suit seeks \$500,000 in wages **Adams** said she lost in income and commissions as a mortgage broker while she accompanied the married **Boggs** on 65 road trips over the past four years.

Boggs, advised by his attorney not to comment on the situation, said he is "very confident we've got a sound case against her."

"She's really got nothing," he said. "We're not in a walk and see."

"I love my wife, and she loves me," **Boggs** added in reference to

his wife, **Debbie**.

Boggs said he contacted the FBI last month regarding **Adams**, who is listed in Costa Mesa police files. The Boston Herald reported **Adams** acknowledged that agents visited her once in early May and said they were "investigating an extortion attempt on a Mr. **Wade Boggs**," the newspaper reported.

California law bars police from disclosing details of an arrest record, but one police source was quoted by the Herald as saying **Adams' record** consists of "more than just a traffic citation."

"We have a few entries on her," another police source said. **Boggs** and his attorney have 30 days to respond to the suit.

JOE GIULIOTTI