

# Tenace Qualifying As Good Receiver With Furious Bat

By RON BERGMAN

OAKLAND, Calif.—Everyone worried what would happen to the high-riding Athletics when catcher Dave Duncan went away for two weeks of Marine Reserve duty this summer.

But Fury Gene Tenace didn't let anyone worry for long.

On one 13-game trip, the catcher they call Gene went 17-for-34 with 11 RBIs.

The runaway A's increased their American League West Division lead from 10 to 14½ games during that span.

No A's pitcher complained about how he was being handled.

"A good handler of pitchers," Joe Garagiola once said, "is a catcher who hits .300."

Tenace came off the road batting .322. Nosy reporters began to ask Manager Dick Williams what would happen when Duncan and his .245 average came back. Williams replied that it would take Duncan a little time to get back in shape.

When spring training opened this season under new Manager Williams, he said he considered the catching spot a defensive position.

## Started in Bullpen

"Even if I had done the job during spring training," Tenace recalled, "I wouldn't have been the catcher this year. Williams said he wasn't concerned about hitting, that he just wanted a guy to handle pitchers. That kind of put Geno off in the bullpen."

"I feel I can handle pitchers. I always felt I could handle them. All I needed was the opportunity to prove it."

It was Tenace who took the catcher's job away from Duncan last year. Frank Fernandez, who started off the 1970 season as the A's No. 1 man behind the plate, gave way to Tenace, who proceeded to bat .305. But Duncan began this season as No. 1 and caught the games that shot the A's into first place in the West Division.

Tenace's defensive qualifications were questioned because he was converted to catcher from the out-



Gene Tenace

field only three years ago.

"The A's already had Reggie Jackson and Rick Monday and a lot of good outfielders, so I didn't see much future out there," Tenace said. "I signed as a shortstop. I once played all nine positions in one game in the minors. But if I didn't want to be a utilityman, I had to learn one position."

## Dandy Double Play

An indication of how much Tenace has learned came August 3 when he helped turn a single into a double play. The Royals' Lou Piniella tried to score from second on a single by Chuck Harrison. Tenace took the throw from left fielder Angel Mangual just as Piniella reached the plate. Tenace was spun completely around when Piniella hit him with a double-forearm blow. But Gene held the ball and recovered in time to throw Harrison out trying for second.

On that same trip, Tenace opened in left field against the Orioles in an effort to get more hitting into the lineup.

"I feel I can hit in the majors," the 24-year-old Tenace said. "I feel I can play here as far as defense as a catcher goes. It's just a matter of getting confidence."

"I feel I could play in the outfield and catch up here right now."

By the way, Tenace caught Vida Blue quite often in the minors the past two years and was behind the plate when Blue hurled a no-hitter against the Twins last September.

The problem of what to do with Gene when Duncan returned from reserve duty was a happy one for Williams. Tenace frankly saw Duncan's tour of duty as a golden opportunity.

## Waited for Chance

"I just was lying in the weeds," said Tenace, who'd caught only 12 games before Duncan departed. "I had to go out and do a good job. I feel fortunate that the opportunity came up and I could do the catching and come through."

"It's not up to me to decide who'll play. That's No. 23's (Williams') decision. But if I do my job and he takes me out, then I think he'll be making a mistake. But it's his decision."

A's Acorns: Catfish Hunter has developed into the No. 1 hitting pitcher in the majors as his .350-plus batting average attests. . . . The A's plan giving season ticket purchasers options to buy five playoff and World Series tickets for both this year and next was widely misunderstood. Many fans thought the only way to get tickets to the post-season series was to buy season tickets, which isn't the case because the plan is limited to 5,000 participants. . . . Outfielder Angel Mangual was shaken up sliding into second base in one of those everyday force plays and stayed home during the first two games of a following trip. . . . A press conference was called in Boston to tell the world that, contrary to certain newspaper accounts, Vida Blue does own his gift-Cadillac and Owner Charlie Finley doesn't. Williams and Blue were at the unusual conference in person; Finley in spirit. . . . Mudcat Grant was bought back from the Pirates for the wavier price and earned his first save for the A's this year his first day on the job with 3½ innings of excellent relief against the Red Sox. Infielder Tony LaRussa, who was sent to Iowa to make room for Grant, was sold to Braves. . . . Catcher Frank Fernandez passed his four-year mark in the majors while on the disabled list with a dislocated finger.

# Ross Newhan



## Peter O'Malley Waiting

LOS ANGELES, Calif.—"Laugh-In" Artie Johnson could say it more emphatically. The situation in the National League West Division is very interesting.

It goes beyond the struggle between Los Angeles and San Francisco, the mere fact that the Dodgers have rallied from a deficit that once was 10½ games.

The Dodgers have problems that several weeks ago Peter O'Malley felt he knew how to cope with.

He knew he would have to make a winter trade for one of his most celebrated players, that he would have to contemplate a change in front-office personnel.

A division title might change all that, might obscure the divisions within.

The player suddenly would be a winner, the front-office man an executive of the year for acquiring the player over the objections of the field manager.

Very interesting, indeed.

Gene Autry seems determined to make Jim Fregosi the next manager of the Angels.

It was late last season that Autry said he would like to see Fregosi become the team's player-manager.

Now, it has been learned, Fregosi has been told the job is his if he wants it in 1972.

## Jim Seems Willing

The offer was not definitive, but Autry and Fregosi huddled during the latter's recent tenure on the disabled list, the shortstop being told that all he has to do is call.

Fregosi has said previously that he is not interested in being a player-manager, that each job is tough enough on its own, that he wants to manage only when his playing career is over.

He still holds those sentiments, but they are not stated with the conviction of other summers.

One gathers that Fregosi, 30, might now be willing to take on the assignment provided he is given the final say on his coaches and a hand in making trades.

That, of course, might force the ouster of General Manager Dick Walsh, who is believed to have four years left on his contract.

During a recent radio interview with Buddy Blattner in Kansas City, Fregosi rapped Walsh for failing to support Manager Lefty Phillips in what were almost daily confrontations with Alex Johnson.

## Walsh in the Middle

Walsh does not forget easily and it is doubtful he could work with Fregosi. It is also doubtful that Autry would fire a man who would have to be paid for another four years.

Meanwhile, they play the waiting game with Phillips, who undoubtedly will be rehired if the Angels overcome the turmoil to finish second.

Johnny Sain was talking about Vida Blue.

"The book of baseball is full of 21-year-old pitchers who won a flock of games," said the pitching coach of the White Sox, the man who is acknowledged as baseball's premier pitching coach.

"Now," continued Sain, "it becomes a matter of how Vida handles pressure, tension, consistency."

"The men I think of who handled pressure are Sandy Koufax, Warren Spahn, Bob Gibson and Whitey Ford. If Vida can handle all that goes on surrounding the game, then he has the stuff to rank with the people I mentioned."

Bill Grabarkewitz, the Dodger infielder who has been disabled for much of 1971 because of a sore arm, believes he is entitled to a raise.

"I was told," said Grabby, smiling, "that if I cut down on my strikeouts, I'd get a big raise. You can't strike out when you don't play."



Jim Fregosi

Angels' President Robert Reynolds now believes that baseball definitely will realign by 1973.

"We finally seem ready to make something happen," said Reynolds, returning from the August owners' meeting.

The realignment, he said, would be on a geographical basis, saving every club in baseball "at least \$100,000 a year."

## Divisional Arrangement

"The Angels," said Reynolds, "have been looking forward to this for some time."

Naturally, they will be in a league or division that includes the Dodgers, Giants, A's, Padres and Astros.

Harmon Killebrew never would say it publicly, but he is quite embarrassed by the childish dialogue quoted ridiculously by the author of the book, "Harmon Killebrew, Baseball's Superstar."

I must split my vote in the American League Manager of the Year balloting, supporting both Bob Lemon of the Royals and Chuck Tanner of the White Sox, each of whom has brought a measure of excitement to the nondescript American League West.

The latest to voice a complaint to me that baseball is too slow was Bobby Fischer, the 28-year-old U. S. chess champion who was a prodigy of 14 when he won his first U. S. title.

Fischer seemed a little embarrassed when we reminded him that he often spends five hours playing one game of chess.

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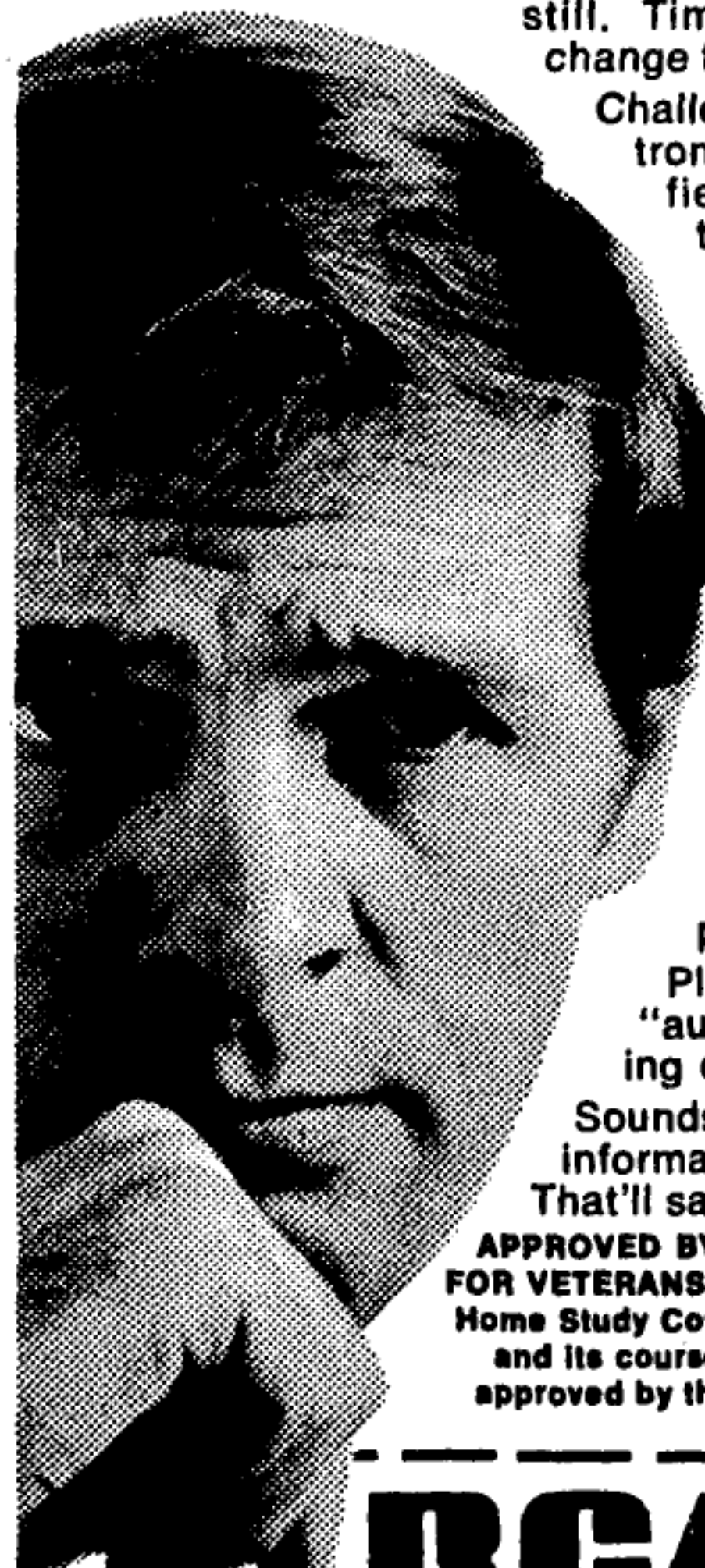
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