

Buckner Sticks in Dodgers' Final Shuffle

By BOB HUNTER

LOS ANGELES, Calif.—Bill Buckner and Dick Allen were almost the last and first, respectively, to figure in the major juggling that went on in the Dodger outfield ranks before Walter Alston certified a traveling squad for the opener in Houston.

The 21-year-old Buckner was the fifth and last outfielder to be added to the 25-man roster while Allen was almost the first to be scratched from the opening-day lineup when he challenged a 50-foot high palm tree while chasing a fly ball in Florida.

Although knocked unconscious and hospitalized briefly with a mild concussion, abrasions on the right side of his face and a badly bruised right shoulder and ankle, the new big bopper of the Dodgers was told he would be able to open the season by Dr. Frank Jobe.

Stunned by Bad "News"

It would have been a severe blow to lose the hustling, dedicated Allen for the getaway of the season, but Buckner thought he had suffered an equally stunning wallop when he read in a morning Los Angeles newspaper that he was not going to make the team. Billy Buck almost had tears in his eyes as he sought out management and was told no decision had been made. Then, the day before the Dodgers broke camp in Vero Beach, his name was included on the 25-man roster.

Buckner, who hit .335 last season at Spokane, had been on a springtime binge that lifted his average to .432 and gave him a club-leading total of 10 runs batted in.

Billy Passes the Test!

He went even further with a bid to start in right field in the opener against Larry Dierker when he got two crisp singles, one of which knocked in a run off Houston's ace right-hander to contribute to a 3-1 victory. Dierker tested the youngster, too, spinning him on his numbers pretty good and hanging the first strikeout on Buckner in two springs in a total of 145 trips to the plate—which must be a record.

"I'll say this Buckner really was flattened out," observed Alston. "But it didn't faze him a bit, although it might have made him so mad he struck out."

The lefthanded-hitting outfielder admitted he came with a built-in temper, but didn't throw a helmet all spring and insists his tantrums are a thing of the past. He claims he makes up for them by worrying and hustling twice as much.

"I was so concerned when I read I wasn't going to make the club that I couldn't sleep and went down from my playing weight of 185 to 173," related a now-smiling Buckner. "Even before the article appeared, I was depressed because I wanted so much a

decent chance to make the team and didn't think I was getting a good shot at it."

But then he pinch-hit a homer off Montreal southpaw Dan McGinn, and three games later ripped a pinch-single off Boston's Sonny Siebert. He stayed in the game to single off Vicente Romo and doubled off Bob Bolin.

From then on, Buckner, who also can play first base and run and throw fairly well, kept stinging the ball at a steady clip.

Sees Flag for Dodgers

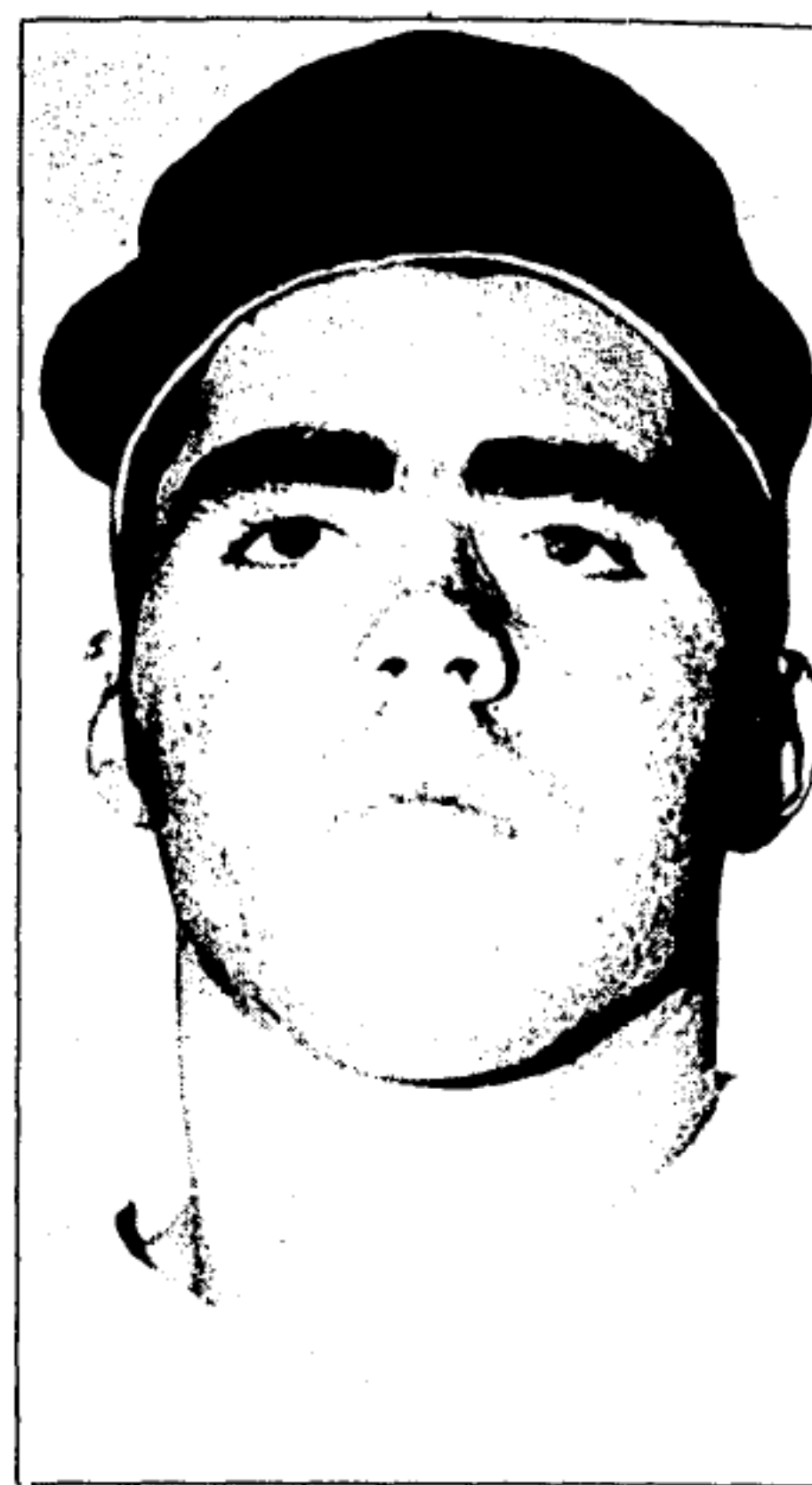
"I know I can play in the big leagues and hit .300," stated Bill, "and I hope it's with the Dodgers because this club has a good chance to win, and that means a lot of money. In fact, it means more than my entire season's salary. This club gives you something to shoot for."

So as the opener neared, it appeared as though Willie Davis would be the only returnee in the outfield, flanked by two who came close to being scratched—Allen in left and Buckner in right.

Dodger Dope: Along with Bob Dar-

win, Alston says rookie Lee Lacy, making the switch from the outfield to infield, has impressed him the most. . . . In a special links match, Jackie Pung and Maury Wills defeated Jim Gilliam and Willie Davis, one up. . . . Alice Hartsfield, wife of the veteran coach, joined the casualty list of the spring when she fractured her foot on a fishing trip, falling from a tree as she tried to discharge a hook. That's her story, anyway. . . . Bobby Valentine, baseball's most celebrated non-playing rookie, received the thrill of all his 20 years when he was penciled at shortstop March 21 after an amazing recovery, with almost 24-hour-a-day therapy. But his joy turned to tears when it was decided to postpone his big league debut until an examination of his knee by the man who performed the operation, Dr. Frank Jobe.

Jim Lefebvre is swinging his fastest bat since his Rookie of the Year honors. . . . Darwin was voted the Player of the Week by Alston and his coaches. . . . National League President Chub Feeney and his predecessor, Warren Giles, were Walter



Bill Buckner

O'Malley's guests at Dodgertown. Richie Allen was hospitalized briefly after suffering a mild concussion and severe contusions of the head, right shoulder and wrist when he crashed into a palm tree while shagging fly balls March 25. X-rays showed no fractures.

Go-Go Garr Busts Braves' Buttons

By WAYNE MINSHEW

ATLANTA, Ga. — It was three years ago, in spring training.

Ralph Garr was in his first Braves' camp and he was keeping pretty good company . . . with a fellow named Hank Aaron.

"People would see us knocking around together and I liked that," said Garr, smiling. "But that man means a lot to me. He has really helped me a lot."

Garr and Aaron roomed together during the spring of 1968, and the young graduate of Grambling College found it difficult to believe when he learned who his roomie was to be.

"We always got along, though, right from the start," said Garr. "I've always been the type to kid around and make friends if the other fellow wants to. I like people, and Hank and I hit it off very well from the start."

Garr found super star Aaron to be a quiet, unassuming person who took a liking to young, eager players. One spring down here, it was outfielder Clarence Gaston, since drafted by the Padres.

Then, Garr. And Aaron has been passing along tips to the young speedster ever since.

Uses Hank's Old Gloves

"Hank even gives me his old glove at the start of every season," said Garr, who has had a nickname—Road Runner II—copyrighted for him by the Braves because of his blazing speed. "It has been good luck for me, too. I'm proud of those gloves."

Something has been lucky for Garr. He has won the batting title in the International League for the past two seasons with .329 and .386 averages and twice has led that Triple-A league in stolen bases.

Thus, Aaron sees something special in Garr's talent and his eagerness to play and learn.

"I think if Ralph keeps at it, he's gonna be a heckuva player," said Hammerin' Hank.

Meanwhile, Aaron passes along to Garr tips gained from 17 years in the big leagues . . . if the youngster comes to him.

"Hank will talk to you all day about baseball if you ask him about something," said Garr. "But he does not think it's his place to come to you. If you're interested, you go to him."

Garr thought for a moment. "It is really amazing," he said, "what that

man knows about the little things in the game."

The 25-year-old outfielder remembered an exhibition game last year in Columbus, Ga., between the Braves and their Triple-A Richmond club.

Gunned Down by Hank

Garr, a member of the Richmond team, was on at second base. Then, on a hit to right, Aaron charged the ball, came up throwing and nailed Garr at the plate.

"Man, you're not supposed to throw me out," said Garr. "How'd that happen?"

"I noticed," said Aaron, "that the pitcher bluffed you back a step just before he delivered, so you could not have gotten a good start. I knew I had a chance."

Garr learned a lot from that tidbit. First, keep your head in the game; second, take note of the "little" things.

How Could Jarvis Forget Banks in 500-HR Club?

ATLANTA, Ga.—The Braves' Pat Jarvis hustled around the park in West Palm Beach, Fla., the other day collecting special autographs.

The Senators were in town, and Jarvis saw a chance to get signatures on a baseball of three players who hit 500 or more homers: Ted Williams, the Senator manager; Braves' star Hank Aaron and coach Eddie Mathews.

That done, Jarvis said, "Now I need Willie Mays, and I'll have all the guys still living who hit 500 homers."

Jarvis scratched his head. "It seems like there is someone else," he said, "but I can't think who it is."

Later, after the day's game, Jarvis was grinning and looking a bit sheepish. "I finally remembered the other guy who hit 500 homers," he said. "It was Ernie Banks."

Banks, the fellow almost left out by Jarvis, hit his 500th last season. He hit it off a Braves' righthander by the name of Pat Jarvis.

P. S. Jarvis also forgot Mickey Mantle, who hit 539.

Meanwhile, Road Runner II has been impressive this spring. He has hit well and his defense has come along as he attempts to replace injured Rico Carty in left field.

Manager Luman Harris likens him to Lou Brock when the Cardinals' speedster first came to the big leagues.

"Ralph can run and bunt and beat out those topped balls," said Harris, "just the way Brock could. The only difference is that I think Garr makes better contact than Lou did."

Six Stolen Bases

At this writing, Garr had attempted seven stolen bases and was successful on six. The only time he was nailed, controversy resulted on the field because the play was mighty close.

"If he can catch a fly ball, and he has shown down here he can, I think Ralph Garr will be the most exciting player in baseball," said Harris emphatically.

Wigwam Wisps: Young pitcher Rick Kester absorbed a Don Buford liner off his right hand March 20 and was expected to be out for three weeks. . . . Outfielder Mike Lum sounded off because he thought the Braves picked their starting outfield even before spring training began, and pitcher Gary Neibauer did the same when he was cut from the mound staff. . . . Hank Aaron compares the Senators' Denny McLain's pitching stuff with the Cardinals' Bob Gibson's. . . . Bob Didier batted 21 times before he collected a hit in Grapefruit League play. . . . Manager Harris is encouraged by spring pitching performances, especially the hurling of Pat Jarvis, Phil Niekro and Cecil Upshaw.

Harris, incidentally, denied he will quit at the end of this season, as a couple of newspaper reports said. "I won't quit, and even if the worst happened and I got fired, I'd try to get another managing job," he said.

. . . Niekro recently pitched 11 straight scoreless innings while Pat Jarvis reached a skein of 14 before he was scored upon. Baltimore halted Niekro and the Twins got to Jarvis. . . . Coach Eddie Mathews has been putting in overtime with Didier, helping the youngster with his hitting.

. . . Harris, asked to pose with former great Ted Williams, now the Senators' manager, laughed and said, "Nope. I don't pose with Punch-and-Judy hitters."

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