

All Washed Up? Last Chance for Groat

Phils Betting Vet Will Rise To Challenge

By RAY KELLY
CLEARWATER, Fla.

For Dick Groat, the pattern never changes. It started when he was a collegian at Duke University and has continued unabated through 14 seasons of baseball in the National League.

"Can't run . . . can't throw . . . lacks bat power . . . doesn't cover enough ground . . ." the whole bit.

Now something new has been added. They're wondering if Groat, the shortstop who has moulded a remarkable career in spite of so many shortcomings, is all washed up. Has he lost that extra step?

And, at 35 years of age, Dick can't help wondering himself.

It is well to remember, however, that nobody ever accused Groat of not being a competitor. And here he is, wearing the familiar No. 24 with a new team, the Phillies, and facing up to the biggest challenge of his athletic life.

Don't bet he won't make it!

Gene Mauch, manager of the Phillies, knows more than a little bit about the game and the people in it and he's gambling a chance for the pennant on Groat's ability to rise to an occasion. It's a calculated risk, but Mauch is confident a change of scenery will pump new adrenalin into Dick's aging veins.

Light-Hitting Shortstops

Yet the irony of it all is that ever since Abner Doubleday invented baseball, managers have always been willing to settle for shortstops who can make the routine play and hit .250.

There are exceptions. Groat hit .254 for the Cardinals last season and immediately was labeled finished by those who pretend to know about such things.

The veteran infielder refuses to kid himself. He knows it was his worst season. He knows he's with the Phillies on a one-shot deal, that at best he can expect another season or two, provided "I do the job—and I might say, quickly."

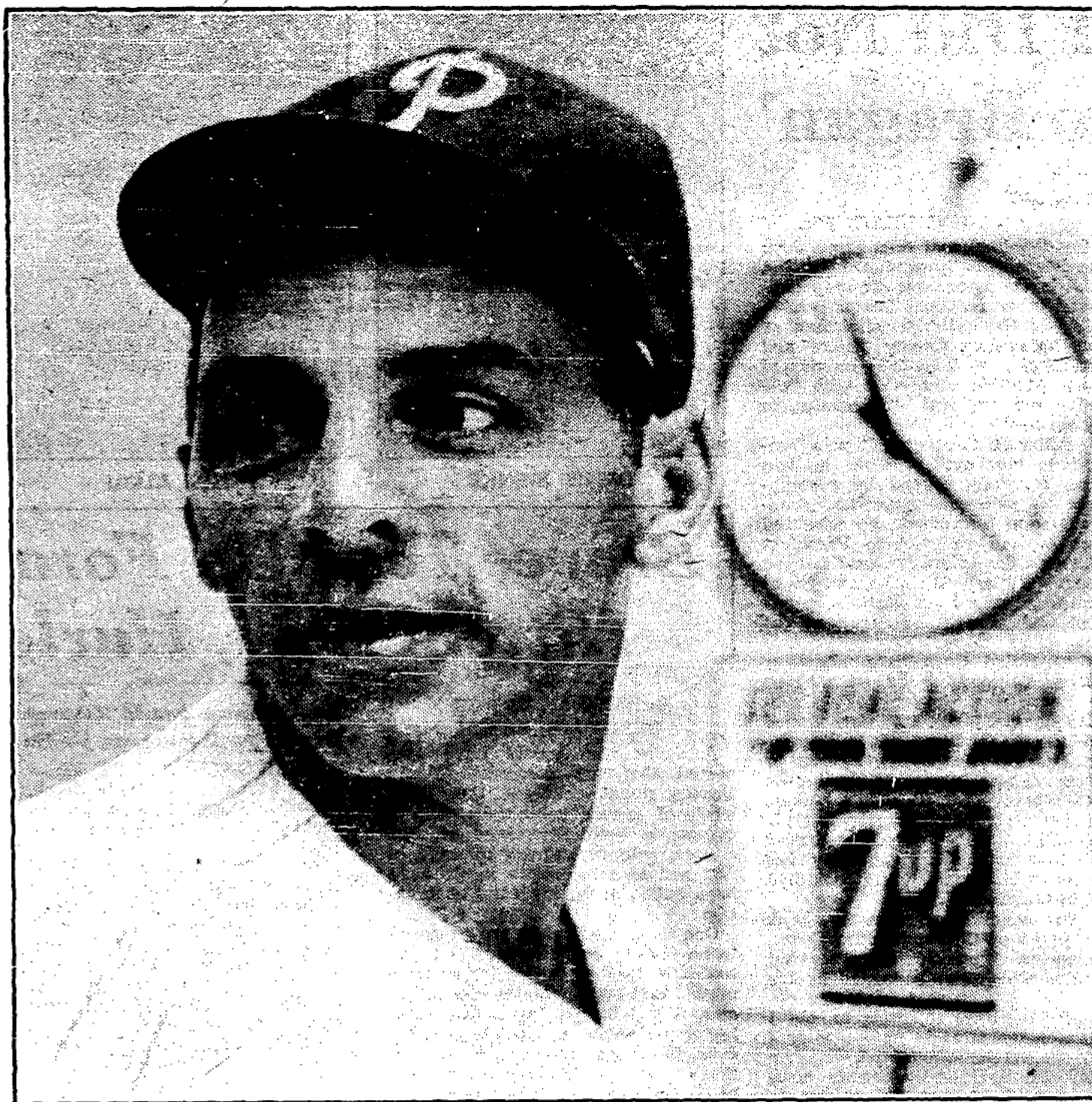
Take it from Groat, his predicament could have been a lot less favorable. "There are two places for a veteran to go when he's traded—up or down. I got a break going with the Phillies. It's a good ball club with a chance to win the money. I could have gone the other way (he must have passed a thought about Ken Boyer with the Mets)."

Inspired by Trade

There is something else. The last time Groat was traded, it did him a world of good. He left the Pirates in 1962 with a .294 average and zoomed to .319 for the Cardinals the next season. That was when Mauch first called Dick "a hitting machine." In 1964, his .292 average was more robust than it appeared while the Redbirds were winning the National League pennant in a rip-roaring finish.

In spite of his success with the bat, nobody in baseball frets as much about hitting as Groat and it doesn't make any difference if he's averaging .350 or .220. Dick worries, which is probably part of the reason he's lost most of his hair. What he didn't pull out when somebody caught a line drive fell out from tossing through sleepless nights.

"I can't help it," he explained. It does seem a little silly, considering that Groat is a past National League batting champion, a winner of the coveted Most Valuable Play-



DICK GROAT . . . CROSSROADS FOR A TOP-NOTCH COMPETITOR.

er Award and owner of a lifetime average of .290. How can he become distressed?

It all goes back to his teens. "I never had real confidence in my baseball ability," he recalled. "It was different in basketball (he was All-America at Duke). I was quick and I knew I could put the ball in the hoop (1,783 points in 77 games).

"Nobody ever said I couldn't do this, that or the other thing on a basketball court. I didn't have the faults they emphasized in baseball—the slow-poke running, the scrambling in the field, the throwing."

Passed Up by Brown

It was something Groat had to live with. In fact, he was still in college when Mace Brown, a Red Sox scout, said publicly there were six players on the Duke baseball team he'd rather sign before Groat. He also mentioned that Groat could not run or throw or hit with power.

This certainly did not help Groat's confidence.

Happily, the Pirates and the late Branch Rickey had a better appreciation of the collegian's ability. In fact, it was Rickey who was involved in Groat's great temptation. Let Dick tell about it:

"It was June in 1951 when Mr. Rickey asked my father and me to drop into his office at Forbes Field (Pittsburgh). We got there in the afternoon and Mr. Rickey pulled out a document and said: 'If you sign this contract, you can play shortstop against the Phillies tonight.'"

Groat said it took him a full 60 seconds to catch his breath.

"My father never said a word. But I said: 'Mr. Rickey, it is almost unfair for you to do this to me. I've still got another year to go at Duke.'"

"Mr. Rickey said, 'You can com-

Dick, Partner Lynch Eager To Open Their Golf Course

CLEARWATER, Fla.—Nobody pays more attention to the eastern weather reports than Dick Groat, the veteran shortstop of the Phillies. With good reason.

Groat and Jerry Lynch of the Pirates are co-owners of a new golf course in Ligonier, Pa., and the sooner the weather breaks, the sooner they'll have the course ready for the golf season.

"It's really going to be beautiful," Groat said.

plete your education during the off season."

"I told him: 'Mr. Rickey, I'm down at Duke on a basketball scholarship. I feel obligated to play the full four years. But I'll tell you this much—if you make the same offer to me next June, I'll sign.'"

"You know," Groat remembered, "after I told Mr. Rickey about the basketball scholarship, he never mentioned money, either."

Long on Integrity

P. S.: In June, 1952, Groat signed his first professional contract with the Pirates on a Monday. Tuesday he joined the Pirates in New York.

Dick showed he had integrity. And he still has it.

Instead of resenting being traded off by the Cardinals, along with other established stars like first baseman Bill White (also with the Phillies) and Boyer, Groat shies away from controversy.

"I want you to know that I've never been treated better in my life than I was by the Cardinals."

Dick also brushed off the "high grass" hassie.

It was common knowledge around

the National League last season that the Cardinal players thought their general manager, Bob Howsam, did the team a dis-service by prettying up Busch Stadium and allowing the infield grass to become too lush.

The complaint stemmed from the fact that the Cardinals had won the world championship the previous season because they got a lot of hits and runs through a hard, grass-thin infield to compensate for the lack of power.

No Problem for Vet

"Let's face it," Groat said. "Wouldn't it be kind of stupid for a 14-year veteran to worry about an infield? And don't forget, Curt Flood and Lou Brock did some pretty good hitting in that park."

Those who know Groat claim it could have had an adverse effect on his hitting. Mental approach is a key factor in hitting in any league.

"I'll go along with that," Dick said. "I know my thinking can help or hinder my own hitting. And it all depends on how my mind is working."

He's also swinging a lot better than he did a season ago. He isn't getting many hits with the Phillies in the exhibition games, but the "old snap" is getting into the wrists. Dick is pulling the ball just to get in the habit of putting some sting at impact. Later on, he'll start moving the ball around and the hit-and-run in his accustomed style.

"Back in 1960, I think Groat got his first hit of the spring against us in Atlanta two days before the season opened," said Gene Mauch, "and that was the year he won the batting title."

Meanwhile, Dick Groat will keep right on worrying because he's that kind of a ball player.

Dick Expected to Be Busy As Master of Hit-and-Run

CLEARWATER, Fla. — Dick Groat ought to be right at home with the Phillies this season. They'll be doing a lot of hit-and-running.

Manager Gene Mauch points out that the Phillies are loaded with "guys who can handle the bat"—meaning, besides Groat, the slick Cookie Rojas, Bill White, Johnny Callison and Richie Allen.

The Phillies plan to be a team on the go this season and Groat will be in the thick of the hit-and-run doings.

Clemens Hopes To Muscle Into Phils' Outfield

By ALLEN LEWIS
CLEARWATER, Fla.

The Phillies may be a little short of pitching this season, but one thing they have in abundance is left fielders. They have so many that Manager Gene Mauch may still be trying to figure out which ones to play there well after the season starts.

One of the candidates is a newcomer to the Phillies, who made a favorable impression almost from the start of spring training. Doug Clemens would like to claim the left field job on a full-time basis, but he realizes his task is difficult. He also knows he flubbed such an opportunity last year when he was with the Cubs.

That failure hasn't lessened his determination to prove he has the ability, however, and he's hopeful he'll get a second chance with the Phillies. He tried to do something in the off season to prepare himself better if opportunity knocks again.

Doug Holds Master's Degree

The blond, handsome, 26-year-old Clemens is a rarity, for he's a ball player with a master's degree. He completed his work on it this winter in physical education at Syracuse University.

While there last fall and winter, Clemens did some special exercising in hopes of increasing his strength and possibly his power hitting, for one of his problems is the fact that he is not a long-ball slugger.

"I feel strong this spring," said Clemens, who has been hitting the ball hard in training, "and that may be because I used isometric and isotonic weights all winter."

Clemens worked out with another big leaguer from Syracuse, Astro pitcher Dave Giusti.

"We used what's called an exer-genie," Clemens explained. "It's a one-apparatus type of thing which employs the isometric and isotonic principles. The whole Syracuse basketball team uses it."

"I don't know how much it will increase my power, but it can't hurt me."

Hot Spring Last Year

When it was mentioned that he was hitting the ball well here in camp, Clemens recalled that he had a great spring with the Cubs last year.

"I hit .406 in the spring last year," said Clemens, who led the Bruins in batting during the exhibition season. "Then I played regularly for the first 50 games straight when the season began. On opening day, I hit the ball hard although I got only one hit—a double off Bob Gibson—and scored the first run of the season, but then we ran into Curt Simmons

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