

# Met Thin Man Casts Huge Shadow at Shortstop

By JACK LANG

NEW YORK, N. Y.—It's that time of the year again when people with the Mets begin checking Bud Harrelson's weight chart more closely than his batting average. There isn't too much difference between either, but the weight figure is of much more concern. They're interested in keeping the weight up and don't seem to mind if the batting average goes down, down, down.

For, you see, Derrel McKinley Harrelson, age 26 and closer to meeting the weight of a top-flight jockey rather than that of a major league ballplayer, is "Mister Shortstop" in New York. It's a fact Met fans have known for a couple of years, but which the baseball world is suddenly being made aware of, now that Bud finally has made the record books.

Around the rest of the National League, Don Kessinger of the Cubs may be regarded as the No. 1 shortstop, but Harrelson almost pushed the Chicago shortstop right out of the record books and that's no easy task, considering the skills of Mr. Kessinger.

But, on August 19, Harrelson tied Kessinger's all-time major league record by playing his 54th consecutive errorless game at shortstop. Two nights later, with a chance to push Kessinger right out of the books and own the mark all by himself, Harrelson booted the second pitch of the game when he failed to come up with Pete Rose's grounder one step to his right.

"I said bleep," Harrelson admitted afterward. "I had my chance and I blew it."

Later he made his second error of the game on a wobbly throw to first base.

## Favorite of Mets' Fans

That gave him 19 for the season and equaled his entire total for the 1969 campaign. Still, you won't find anyone at Shea who will complain about it because Buddy not only is one of the more popular Mets, but also one of the more reliable.

"When I reached 50 games, the writers began talking to me about it. They asked if I knew I was close to a record. I knew they weren't talking about home runs," said the delightfully candid Harrelson, "so I knew it had to be fielding."

There are some times in one's life when all the nice things that happen can't compensate for one or two ugly things. To a major league baseball player, there is no more ugly expression than "oh-for-four" and when people begin writing or saying things like "oh-for-27," it's enough to make a man lose his cool.

That's the feeling Harrelson was experiencing during the latter stages of his record-breaking fielding streak. The better he fielded and the closer he came to the record, the fewer were the hits. And on the day when he tied the Kessinger record, Buddy was 0-for-27 before he drove a single to left to end the week-long frustration.

"It's a lot easier to field when you're tired than it is to hit," said the spidery infielder from Hayward, Calif. "In hitting, you have to be quick. Right now, I'm so tired I find I can't concentrate all the time. Sometimes when



TRAINER TOM McKENNA checks the weight of lean Met shortstop Bud Harrelson.

I'm hitting I try to be quick, and then I'm too quick."

You can't really believe how tired Harrelson is unless you see him after a long two-night doubleheader such as the Mets played in Atlanta recently. Bud played 17 innings in the field that night and, as the midnight-hour approached, he sat naked in front of his locker, his head bowed low and the energy completely sapped from him. He didn't have the strength to make it over to the table in the middle of the room where his teammates were gobbling up the cold cuts and the baked beans.

Gil Hodges, the manager, looked over at Harrelson and shook his head in admiration.

"He's tired," Gil said. "Oh yes, he's tired. But he doesn't appreciate what he's contributed to this club as much as I do."

As tired as Harrelson is and as his average continues to dip closer to his lifetime .238, Harrelson continues to play because he knows and Hodges knows that unless he does play, the Mets cannot repeat in the National League East.

## Weight His Big Problem

Bud's average isn't nearly as much a problem as his weight. One of these days, he's just going to melt away and the Mets may need a sponge to pick him up.

"My weight is a problem," he admitted, "but there's not much I can do about it. I keep taking B-12 shots and I eat a lot of ice cream. In fact, I eat so much ice cream I ought to be doing a commercial for some ice cream company. My favorite is butterscotch."

No matter how hard Harrelson tries to build his weight up, he still manages to shrivel away once the season starts.

Take this year. He reported for spring training at 158 pounds after concentrating all winter in putting on weight. It was his heaviest ever as a Met. But eventually the pounds disappeared. Today, Harrelson's weight fluctuates between 140 and 145.

He's undoubtedly the lightest man in the league, but Bud still has some to go. The story is that when the World

Series was all over last October, Harrelson got on a scale and weighed all of 137 pounds.

"Some people might think I'm embarrassed by my weight and my size," said Harrelson. "I'm not. In fact, I rather enjoy the image. It helps me when I go around making speeches for the club."

"I'll go to a dinner in the winter and the kids down in the audience will look up at me and say, 'That's Bud Harrelson? It can't be, he's too small.' But then I get up and I talk to the kids and I tell them that if I could make the majors at my size, they can do things they want to, too."

Bud is listed at 5-11 in the Mets' roster and, maybe he is, but it's the most deceiving 5-11 ever. Maybe that's why he never stands too close to Freddie Patek, the Pirates' 5-4 midget shortstop. It could prove embarrassing.

"I've been embarrassed once or twice taking pictures with kids," Harrelson confessed. "I'll whisper to them, 'Hey, bend down a little. You're showing me up.'"

Bud should be an inspiration to any aspiring major leaguer . . . big or small. When you consider the handicaps he has overcome to make the big leagues, he stands as tall as Frank Howard or any other big man that ever played.

## Played Football and Basketball

At Sunset High School in Hayward, Calif., he was a 130-pound halfback, a 5-7 basketball player and a shortstop on the baseball team. Despite his size, he was captain of all three teams in his senior year. There weren't too many baseball scouts interested in him because of his size. But there was one, and he signed him for the Mets. He was Roy Partee, former major league catcher.

A few years later, when Harrelson had made it with the Mets, it was a constant source of annoyance to the Giants that they had let such a fine gloveman like Bud slip right out from under them in their own area.

"How'd we let him get away?" Giant Owner Horace Stoneham would ask one of his aides, after every fine play Buddy made in Candlestick Park. Annoyance was dripping from every word of his query.

Harrelson had the good glove right from the start, but the bat was always the question. His minor league averages for three years were .221, .231, .251. Then he became a switch-hitter in 1967, after experimenting in spring training and being urged to continue by Solly Hemus and Bob Scheffing, who were then employed in the farm system.

You can hardly say the switch was a success . . . at least not from the start. Bud hit .221 that year.

But it was also the year he got his big break. In late August, Roy McMillan, the Mets' regular shortstop, suffered a fractured collarbone and Harrelson was called up as a replacement.

Bud did not impress immediately, except on the basepaths. He stole seven bases in 33 games and suddenly it seemed as though the Mets had added some speed.

The following year, he suddenly inherited the job full-time, when McMillan could not come back. At first, the job seemed too big for him. Jittery and uncertain, Harrelson made all kinds of errors the first month and almost ran himself off the team.

## Talk With McMillan Helps

That's when McMillan had a heart-to-heart talk with Harrelson and got him to relax and stop pressing. Within days, the change was obvious. Before the season was over, Harrelson established himself as one of the league's better-fielding shortstops, a fine base runner (12 steals) and a far cry from an All-America out. He hit .254.

Harrelson also hit his first major league home run and he did not live that down until this year. His first one was an inside-the-park blooper down the right field line that was not too well pursued by the Pittsburgh right fielder, who thought the ball was foul.

The second Harrelson homer came this year and was legit. He connected off Grant Jackson of the Phillies and socked it out of the park. It was the Mets' first 1970 homer and it came on the 11th day of the season, when everyone was beginning to think the Mets might never hit one.

"Do you think I ought to take a saliva test?" Harrelson asked.

As the Mets' leading home-run hitter for one day, the shortstop came in for a lot of kidding.

"I'm not a home-run hitter," he answered the kibitzers. "I don't drive a Cadillac."

"He's our little Baby Ruth," chided coach Joe Pignatano. "He wears No. 3 on his back . . . he plays for a New York team . . . and he wears pinstripes. What more do you want?"

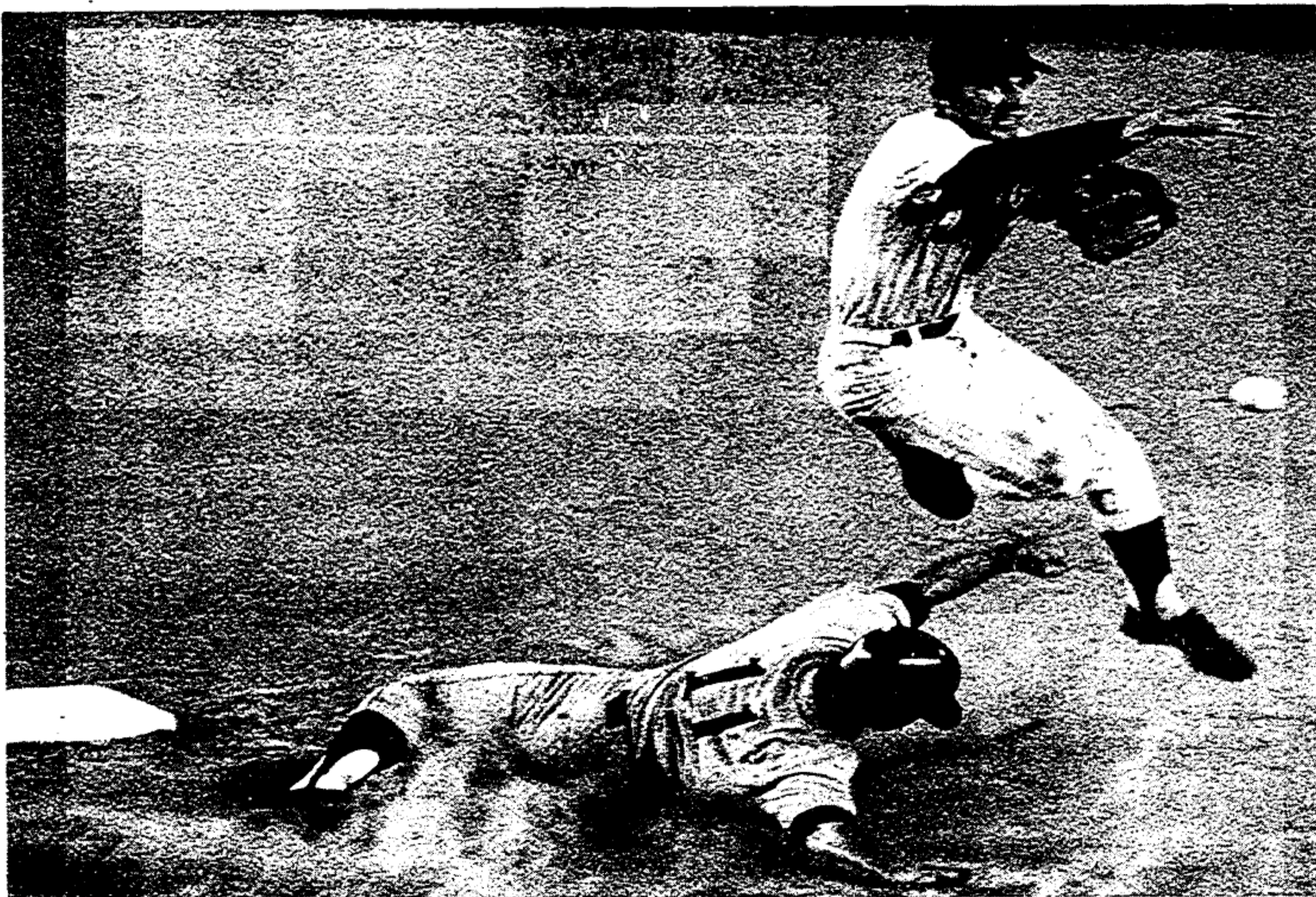
"I wasn't made for records," he said in a moment of reflection after tying, but failing to break, the Kessinger fielding record. "I can't cope with them. I've got to concentrate on the game before me."

"People expect me to be a good fielder. That's what I'm paid for. They don't pay to see me hit. Defense can keep you in a ball game. It helped us win a championship last year."

A knee operation in September, 1968, proved a tremendous success and was a tribute to Harrelson's determination. He worked all winter with weights to strengthen it.

This season, he set out to steal 25 bases. At last look, he was only a few shy of his goal.

With a month to go in the season, the Mets only can hope that Harrelson remains strong enough to help them to another pennant. The determination's there. It's only a question of whether the pounds will be, too.



Defensive Whiz Harrelson Hurdles Jim Fairey, Expos, in Bid for Double Play.



# Harrelson Scrawny Despite Awesome Intake

By JACK LANG

NEW YORK, N. Y.—You've heard of players who ate themselves out of the major leagues. With **Bud Harrelson**, it's the other way around. There are times when he can't get enough to eat.

"We arrived in Philadelphia the other night from Montreal," the Met shortstop was saying. "I ate on the plane and then a bunch of us all went out to Bookbinders, the lobster house.

"I had a big plate of oysters, salad, a nice rich lobster thermidor and then it came to dessert. The other guys at the table all passed it up. I had a big helping of pie a la mode.

"We walked around the corner to our hotel and I stopped at the cigar counter and picked up three candy bars. I still was hungry."

That's the way it is with the Mets' All-Star shortstop. He can eat five or six times a day and never put on extra pounds.

In fact, retaining his weight is a major problem and one which **Bud** is concerned with at all times. He's one guy whose fears are in reverse when he steps on the scales. While others might worry they'll be fined for extra pounds at the periodic checkups, **Harrelson** frets that he might have lost another pound or two.

## Gil Warned of Fines

Last fall after the Mets had flopped, Gil Hodges ordered players to report this spring at certain weights and warned that \$100 per pound fines would be levied against those who reported overweight.

**Harrelson** reported at 147 pounds, the lightest man on the squad.

"I was afraid I'd be fined for being underweight," he said with a grin.

**Bud** ate all he wanted and never watched his calories. But because he had a busy schedule that took him on a USO tour of the Orient after the season as well as numerous trips for his computer business, he actually was underweight when he reported in Florida.

"The year before, I was 168 pounds because I consciously tried to put on weight," **Harrelson** revealed. "I had finished the 1969 season at 142 and that's the lowest I've ever been in the majors."

Since the season began, **Harrelson** actually has gained weight, which

is the reverse of his past pattern. It's because he is trying to put pounds on now, something few other major leaguers can admit to.

Trouble is, it isn't always easy because of the schedule players must keep.

## It's Rough in Pittsburgh

There was a recent series in Pittsburgh, a city **Harrelson** and other major leaguers rate low on the post-game eating scale. When the games were over, **Harrelson** didn't bother to wait for the team bus. He and his roomie, Tom Seaver, grabbed a cab or walked back to the Pittsburgh Hilton in hopes of finding the coffee shop open for a late-night repast. The main dining room closes at 10 o'clock.

"We were lucky," said the wiry little infielder. "There was a convention of Eastern Star women in the hotel and they kept the coffee shop open late for them. Otherwise, it would have been closed."

So **Bud** had a steak sandwich. That's one of his favorites. It holds him over. He can eat two or three a day. Also as many butterscotch sundaes as he can find.

"I'm not like Tom," he said of Seaver, his roomie. "He can eat a big breakfast and then a good meal around three o'clock and that carries him through the day until he can get a snack after the game."

**Harrelson** has to keep eating. Most of the time, it's not a great deal, but enough to fill him up. He is forever eating hot dogs, chocolate bars or whatever else is available in the clubhouse.

## Bud Stows It Away

There was a night recently in New York when the Seavers took the Harrelsons to a Chinese restaurant after a game to celebrate the Seavers' fifth wedding anniversary.

"They kept bringing food for an hour," said **Harrelson**. "They know Tom in this place and they'll keep the kitchen open late when he walks in. They brought out everything in the house and we ate it."

**Bud** was hungry a half-hour later.

New York is never a problem, according to **Harrelson**. Nor any of the other big cities. You usually can find a late-night restaurant in a good many towns. It also helps when the clubs stays at a Marriott motel where they feature all-night restaurants.

But cities like Cincinnati and Pittsburgh do present a problem. In those places the best the players can hope for is a hamburger joint.

At home, **Bud** usually will eat a fairly good-sized meal before leaving for the park. When he gets home around midnight or later from a night game, his pretty wife, Yvonne, always is up and ready to prepare a steak or whatever he wants.

But **Bud** is forever conscious that he must preserve his energy. He has passed up pre-game infield practice many times and he doesn't always take as many turns in the batting cage as most players do.

He never has asked any quarter and he constantly is concerned whether his teammates understand he is not shirking the work. He reports as early as any of them. It's just that he takes it a little easier until the game begins. Then he

becomes a toy bulldog, and fans around the league have recognized his abilities.

## Bud Leading Vote-Getter

As the All-Star voting went into the final week, **Harrelson** was leading by a big margin for the shortstop job. The fans, like the Mets, realize that Buddy is worth his weight in gold. Considering what an ounce of gold is worth these days, 152 pounds is a small fortune.

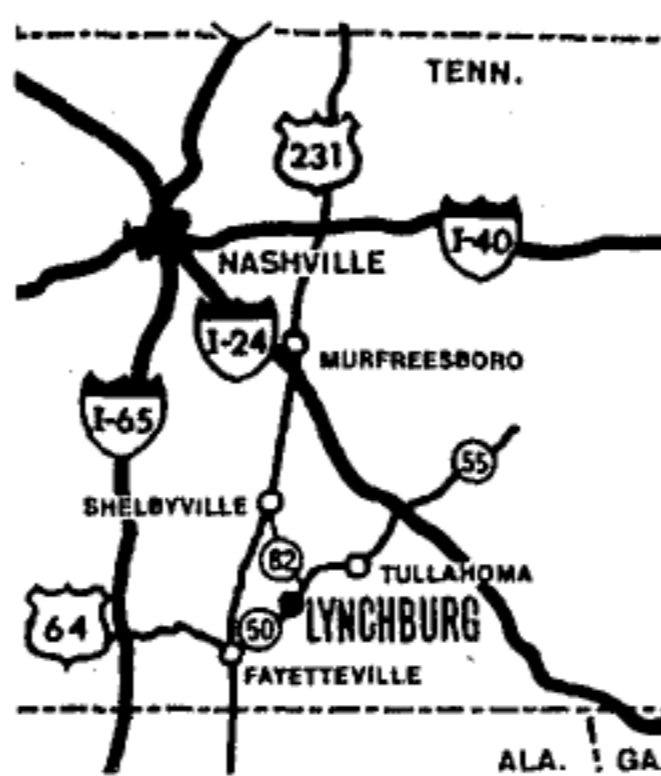
That describes **Bud Harrelson** pretty well.

**Met Musings:** The Mets have moved out of the Hotel Warwick during their trips to Philadelphia and are now billeted at the Bellevue Stratford. . . . Through his first 24 appearances, all in relief, Tug McGraw had not thrown up a home-run ball. He had accounted for 10 victories (five saves and five wins) in that

stretch and seemed a cinch to be picked as a relief pitcher on the All-Star staff. Funny thing, McGraw's "out" pitch is the screwball while his fellow reliever, Dan Frisella, depends on a forkball. When they're fooling around on the sidelines, McGraw throws a forkball and Frisella a scroogie. . . . The dozen runs the Expos scored off the Mets June 27 marked the first time all year the Met staff had allowed more than nine runs in a game. . . . Tim Foli went to bat 101 times before he got an extra-base hit June 27. Then he got two doubles back-to-back. . . . Tommie Agee, out three weeks with a bruised right knee, stole three bases in the first three games upon his return. "I'm running better now than before I got hurt," said the star center fielder. "I actually lost seven pounds while I was out."



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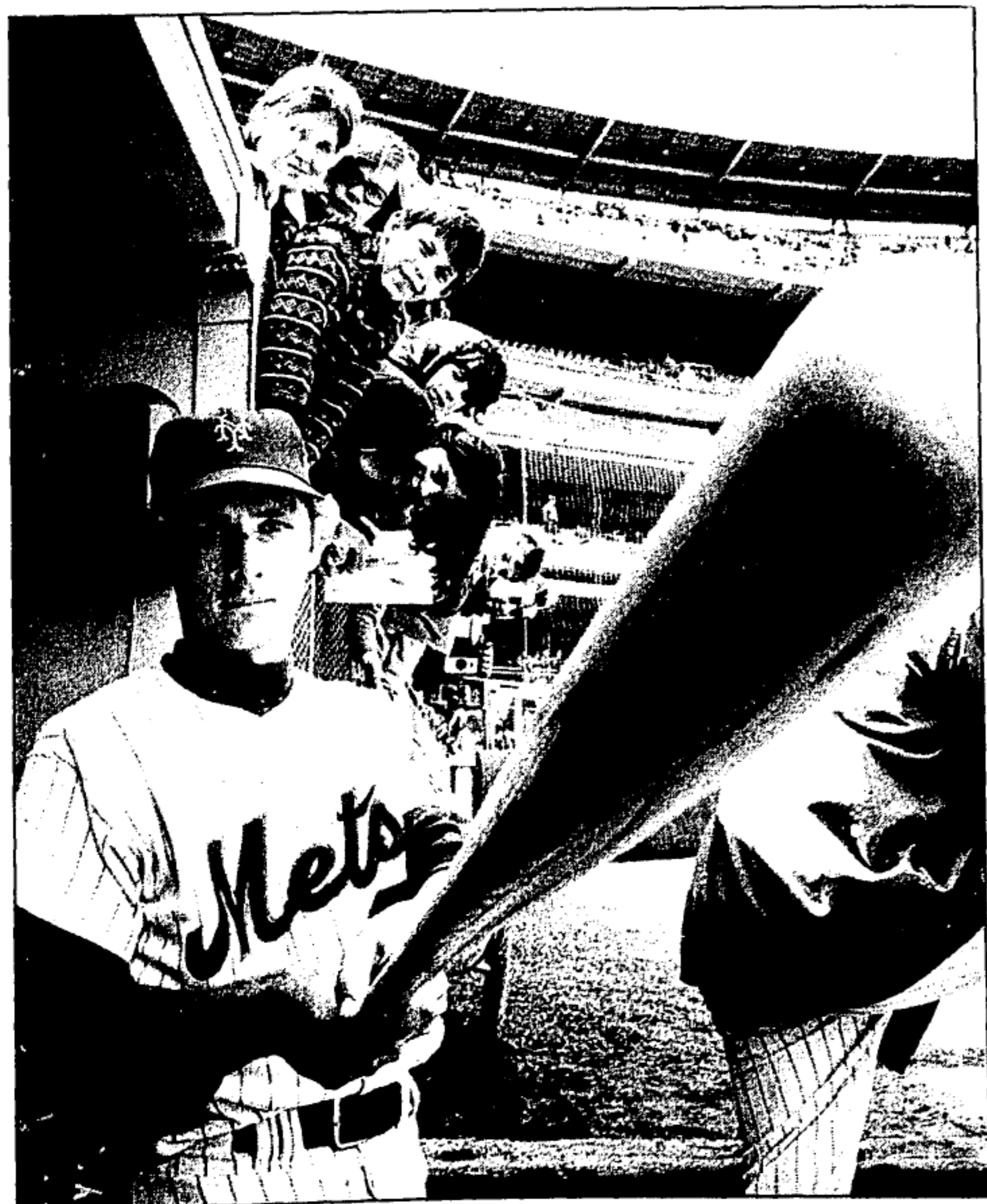


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**Bud Harrelson . . . A Weight Problem in Reverse.**

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