

BASEBALL

Steinbrenner Begins Annual Ritual

NEW YORK—It had to happen. The only question was when.

New York Yankees Owner George Steinbrenner and Manager Dallas Green began butting heads over control of the team. Now the only question is when the two will part company.

In what has become an annual ritual, the volatile and impatient Steinbrenner has become disenchanted with his manager. The owner recently criticized Green's strategic decisions, saying he found some of Green's moves "hard to understand."

"When you've got the bases loaded and nobody out and you're the head guy, you've got to find a way to win the ballgame," Steinbrenner said after the Yankees dropped the second game of a doubleheader with Minnesota August 3. "That's when a manager's strategy takes over."

Steinbrenner also expressed unhappiness with the way Green had handled the Yankees' pitchers. In particular, the Yankee boss urged Green to use lefthander Greg Cadaret and righthander Eric Plunk, both obtained from Oakland in the Rickey Henderson



Dallas Green is hearing rumblings from the boss.

trade, in the starting rotation.

Cadaret had been used in spot start assignments and even flirted with a no-hitter for seven innings against the Cleveland Indians August 7. However, Green had adamantly refused to move Plunk out of the bullpen.

When informed of Steinbrenner's comments, which the boss insisted were not meant as interference, Green wasted no time in firing back a few salvos of his own.

"The statement that manager

George made about game situations is a very logical second guess," Green said. "And hindsight being 20-20, that's why managers get gray. It's always easier to do it from above."

"I shut it off and I guess I consider the source and take it as constructive criticism."

In addition to second-guessing the manager, Steinbrenner also criticized Green's coaches, prompting Green to vigorously defend his staff. And although Steinbrenner insisted that Green's job was safe for the rest of the season, it appears there could be a change on tap for next year.

According to various sources, Steinbrenner had been far more vocal in his displeasure with Green behind the scenes. Reportedly, the owner was leaning toward bringing back Lou Piniella for a third go-round as the Yankees' skipper.

However, Piniella, who has two years remaining on a special services contract with Steinbrenner, has said in the past that he wouldn't manage the club again.

BILL MADDEN

Jays' Cerutti Flourishes as Starter

TORONTO—Former Toronto Blue Jays manager Jimmy Williams has been blamed for a lot of the bad things that have happened to the club this season. However, Williams deserves full credit for at least one good move—putting lefthander John Cerutti in the starting rotation.

Through the beginning of August, Cerutti had been the Jays' most consistent pitcher. He had a 9-5 record through August 7, including four straight victories, and his 2.39 earned-run average placed him among the league leaders.

Cerutti, the Jays' first-round pick in the 1981 June free-agent draft, wasn't even a regular starter last season, when he posted a 6-7 record with a 3.13 ERA. But Williams announced in the off-season, even before the departure of Jim Clancy to Houston as a free agent, that Cerutti would start in '89. That move was made even though it meant the Jays'

rotation would have four left-handers.

Cerutti started slowly this year and didn't get his first victory until his eighth start, May 21 against Chicago. Typical of his luck early on was a game against California April 30, when Cerutti pitched 10 scoreless innings but didn't get a decision as the Blue Jays fell, 1-0.

But Cerutti said his personal misfortunes didn't bother him as long as the team did well.

"If I start and I give us a chance to win, I'm pleased," he said. "The team's win is the most important thing."

Cerutti came on strong in July, winning four of his five starts that month. In his first two starts in August, he registered a pair of complete game victories: An 8-0 shutout of Kansas City August 2 and a 2-1 nod over Texas five days later.

The 29-year-old Cerutti said he was grateful to Williams for put-

ting him in the starting rotation this season.

"I'm grateful for that commitment," said Cerutti. "It was kind of frustrating other years, because I like to work a lot."

Cerutti's versatility had hurt him in the past, when he was flipped between the bullpen and the rotation. But he said he always thought of himself as a starter.

"My first choice was always to start, and I wanted to be a starter in Toronto," he said. "I can't say I was content with that role (as a swingman)."

Cerutti, who broke into the majors in 1985, was the subject of trade rumors in the off-season because the Jays appeared overloaded with left-handers. But he stuck around and was on his way to his best season with the Jays.

"I'm in a good groove right now," he said. "I just want to keep it going."

NEIL MacCARTL



Streaky Jacoby Hot Again; Indians Hope It Lasts

CLEVELAND—Cleveland Indians third baseman Brook Jacoby always has been a streak hitter. Until last year, the good streaks outnumbered the bad.

But in 1988, Jacoby's batting average dived to .241. His runs batted in total dropped to 49, 20 fewer than in 1987, and he hit just nine home runs, a whopping 23 fewer than he had the previous year.

This season, Jacoby batted only .148 in Cleveland's first nine games. And rumblings from his critics got louder.

But as August began, Jacoby had pushed his average over the .250 mark and had emerged as the Indians' most prolific hitter, sporting a .377 batting average in

his last 16 games through August 7.

It was on that date that Jacoby broke up a no-hitter in the eighth inning for the second time this season, lashing a single off New York's Greg Cadaret to start off the inning. On June 25, Jacoby's double with two out in the eighth ended the no-hit bid of Texas Rangers ace Nolan Ryan.

"We're a team-oriented club," said Jacoby after foiling Cadaret's no-hit try. "This is only a little personal thing, so it's not that important."

"I just tried to see the ball and hit the ball. That's all. There isn't just one guy you can stick up there when a no-hitter is on the line."

After he stroked 32 homers in 1987, Jacoby was labeled by some as a power hitter. He came under fire after his poor home run showing last season and again this year when it took him 48 games and 164 at-bats to go from nine home runs to 10. He finally did it in a 4-3 win over Boston August 4.

But Jacoby said the power-hitter label is misleading.

"When you have success hitting home runs one year, people expect it every year," he said. "I just happened to hit 32 in 1987. But I didn't come to the big leagues as a home-run hitter."

Not that Jacoby wasn't concerned about his home run drought.

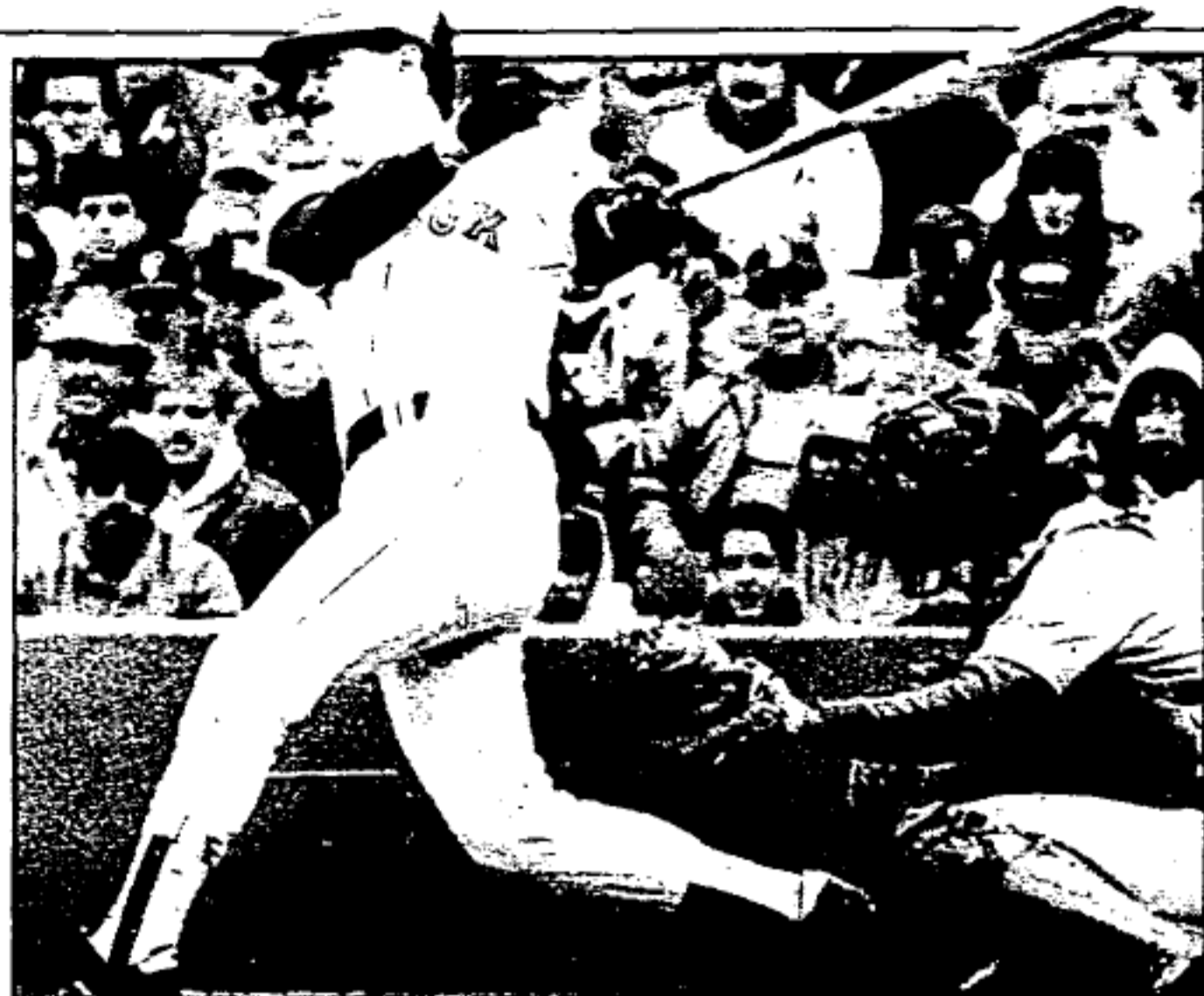
"I finally told myself to quit thinking about it," he said. "I thought about it too much last year. It was frustrating to get off to a fast start this season, then fall flat."

From April 16 to May 13, Jacoby batted .403 with 10 RBIs. But he posted a .243 average from May 14 through June 3 and had a .167 average from June 4 through June 28.

A strained quadriceps muscle kept him out of the lineup for most of the first three weeks in July. However, when Jacoby returned to full-time duty, he got hot again.

The Indians were hoping he would stay that way.

SHELDON OCKER



Boston's Rick Cerone has gone from diaper changer to No. 1 catcher.

Cerone Takes Charge Behind Plate for Sox

BOSTON—On April 10, 1988, Boston Red Sox catcher Rich Gedman suffered a broken big toe on his right foot. That bad break for Gedman was a good break for veteran backstopper Rick Cerone.

Cerone, hoping to play in his 14th major league season, had been released by the New York Yankees in spring training. He was home in Cresskill, N.J., "changing diapers," as he put it, when he got a call from the Red Sox and was signed by the club April 14. He filled in until Gedman's return and ended up playing 84 games in 1988.

This season, Cerone started out as Gedman's backup, then became part of a catching platoon when Gedman struggled early in the season. On June 20, Cerone was given the No. 1 job by Manager Joe Morgan.

"I'm going to let him catch a few games in a row to see if he can give us some production," Morgan said at the time.

Cerone did just that. Through the first week of August, his batting average hovered near .270. He already had 32 runs batted in, five more than he had all of last season. Gedman, meanwhile, was hitting near the .200 mark with 13 RBIs.

"Last year when he came here he started fast but tailed off as the season went on," Morgan said of Cerone. "This year he's been consistent since the first exhibition game."

"He's done the job all year with the bat and he's been very underrated as a catcher."

Cerone, 35, has taken charge behind the plate, a fact he demonstrated in a June 16 game in Chicago. Righthander Roger Clemens threw a two-hitter and shut out the White Sox, 2-0, with Cerone calling the game.

"In the third and fourth innings he wanted to go to his breaking ball," Cerone said of the Red Sox ace. "I told him, 'You've got a good fastball; let's keep using it, keep going hard.' And he did."

But Cerone isn't looking for praise.

"I just try and do my job when I'm in there," he said. "That's what this game is about."

General Manager Lou Gorman said the Red Sox were fortunate to sign Cerone last year.

"Rick has done an outstanding job for us," Gorman said. "We were in a bind when Gedman got hurt last year. Cerone gave us a big lift and he's continued to do so."

JOE GIULIOTTI