

# Foli and Stanton Most Impressive Of Mets' Rookies

By JACK LANG

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — As spring training draws to a close and Gil Hodges is faced with the difficult task of cutting his Mets' squad, it seems fairly certain that two rookies will make the club and the Mets may at long last have a full-time right fielder.

Last year, Mike Jorgensen was the lone newcomer on the squad of the then-defending world champions. It might have been a mistake keeping Mike when you consider how little he played.

It's an old baseball chestnut that you don't keep a kid unless you're going to play him. The Mets kept Mike and didn't play him. As a back-up center fielder for Tommie Agee and a late-inning defensive first baseman, Jorgy went to bat only 87 times.

How much that year on the bench may have retarded Mike will be learned this year if he gets sent to Tidewater (International). In spring training, he has not looked like the same kid who hit .300 or thereabouts for four minor league clubs.

"I thought Mike was going to be a super star when I saw him a few years ago," one scout remarked recently. "But he doesn't look like the same player today."

## Garrett in Army

The newcomers making the club this year are sure to see much more action than Mike did in 1970. The drafting of Wayne Garrett by the Army left a big hole at third base and rookie Tim Foli has been given the job. He will share it with Bob Aspromonte, who may be at that station on opening day lest the kid Foli get the jitters in front of the big crowd.

But Foli will do most of the third basing for the Mets this year, provided his batting average can come close to what it was in the minors. At the start of spring training, Tim was wound tighter than a spring, but the more he played the more accustomed he became to his surroundings and he stopped pressing.

The only other rookie who seemed to have a chance of making it back north with the Mets was Leroy Stanton. His chances seemed to be based on what decision the Mets made about Jorgensen. If Mike is sent out, Leroy is certain to stick. And vice versa.

Stanton did impress with his bat in the exhibition games and he seem-

ed to be the type who would get a lot more action than Jorgy did in his rookie year.

Barring some last-minute change of heart, Hodges was fairly certain to give Ken Singleton the right field job.

The big switch-hitter from Mount Vernon, N. Y., did not win the job on what he did this spring, but rather on what the Mets saw for a few weeks last summer when he was hitting .280. That was before a muscle pull sidelined him.

## Singleton Has Power

Defensively, Kenny looked like the answer in right. He did not hit for much average, but when he connected, he did it with power. Three-quarters of the way through the exhibition grind, half his hits were for extra bases.

The Mets never have had three full-time outfielders at the same time. But Hodges seemed intent on letting Singleton join Cleon Jones and Agee on the picket parade. If Kenny makes it, the Mets certainly will be stronger in every way.

**Met Musings:** First squad cuts saw pitchers Jesse Hudson, Tom Moore and Rich Folkers sent to the minor league complex for reassignment, along with catcher Steve Chilcott and outfielders Dave Schneck and George Kazmarek. . . . Jones was hitting .429 when a back sprain floored him. . . . Art Shamsky was out 10 days with a back ache and upon his return hit a grand-slam homer his second time at bat. Shamsky and his business partner, Phil Linz, have opened a new bistro in Kew Gardens, N. Y., near Shea Stadium and are calling it "Doubles." . . . Donn Clendenon had only four hits in his first 22 trips, but three of them were homers. . . . Nancy Seaver had post-birth complications and was readmitted to Greenwich Hospital for a few days. However, it was not serious and Tom did not have to leave the club. . . . A score of Latin-speaking players are attending classes twice a day here to learn how to speak some English. Whitey Herzog and Joe McDonald, the farm bosses, enlisted the aid of the Berlitz School of Language to instruct the players. They are being taught some baseball phrases as well as enough English to get by off the field. One of the most intriguing phrases in their new vocabulary is: "It will cost you money if you miss the bus."



Dave Johnson . . . 'I Can Feel Myself Becoming a Better Hitter Every Day.'

## Dave Johnson Is One Contented Bird

By PHIL JACKMAN

MIAMI, Fla. — Last year at this time, Dave Johnson was saying he wanted to be traded. The Oriole second baseman just had gone through a tough contract negotiation and he was, well, disgusted.

Like the man says, what a difference a year makes.

Talk to Johnson these days and everything's ginger-peachy. More than likely, an early contract signing played a part.

Not once this spring has Dave mentioned money, which has to be a personal record, and he's even talking as if he's going to stick around in the game for quite a long while.

"I think," he was saying during a bus trip to Fort Lauderdale one morning, "that my best hitting year will come when I'm about 32 (which would be four years hence)."

## Too Many Stances

"I'll tell you why. I just can feel myself becoming a better hitter every day."

His first three years in the big leagues — 1966-67-68 — Johnson used a different batting stance every time he went to the plate, total: 1,530 (including the '66 World Series).

"Well, not quite that many," he admitted, "but almost. It takes time to know yourself as a hitter, though, so I was never in any hurry."

"The last two years, I've done very little changing."

And it has shown in the averages, Johnson maintaining a steady .280 to .290 gait in 1969 and '70. Prior to that, he hit anywhere from .200 to .300 with a final resting place in the mid .240s.

"Once you find a set way of hitting," he explained, "you can maybe do a little experimenting during spring training in hopes of improving while not running too much of a risk of messing yourself up."

## Good Spring Hitter

"I think I'm to that point now. I have always hit well in the spring, so I start out confident. This helps, too."

Just as important to the Orioles is the fact that, with a steady average, Johnson has learned to relax afield and perform the way the organization figured he would all along.

Last year, he had a scintillating .990 fielding average and many will tell you he was even better than the year before when his reading on defense was .986.

Such figures have led him to a \$45,000 salary and happiness in the same infield with Boog Powell, Mark Belanger and Brooks Robinson. About the only trade Johnson talks about these days is a switch in partners in an after-practice golf game.

**Bird Banter:** No definite decision has been made in the case of Paul Blair as a switch-hitter, but the center fielder looks as if he can hack it from the left side of the

dish. Through the first 15 games, Blair led the Orioles in hits and most of them were struck lefthanded off front-line pitching. Earl Weaver was surprised at the amount of power Blair generated with a seemingly easy swing. . . . Andy Etchebarren, Mark Belanger and a friend hit a \$1,070 quinella at Miami jai alai. One night later and they would have been out of luck, the fronton closing down due to a parimutuel clerks' strike.

Jim Palmer's not about to forget the night of March 19. During the second inning of a game against the Yankees, his usually reliable defense made three errors in a minute and a half. Four unearned runs resulted. The Birds ended up winning the game, 6-4, running the Yank losing streak to 11 games. "Doesn't mean a thing," quoth Ralph Houk. . . . In Brooks Robinson's first game back after being out for a week with an 11-stitch spike wound on his left forearm, he socked a game-winning double. . . . The night before Bobby Grich left to pull weekend duty with his Marine Reserve unit, he knocked in five runs just so Weaver wouldn't forget him too quickly. . . . Don Baylor: "If I get a chance to play with the Orioles—and I know I can play—then all I have to do is get in one of my grooves. I have two or three of them a year and if I have one, the others are going to have to start worrying about me." They already are.



Tim Foli . . . Likely Met Regular at Third Base.

## Blair Swings a Hot Bat From Left Side

By PHIL JACKMAN

MIAMI, Fla. — Back at the beginning of the Orioles' spring training, it was as coach Billy Hunter said: "I thought Paul Blair working on becoming a switch-hitter was a lark."

About the only people who took it seriously were Manager Earl Weaver and the player himself.

On the first day in camp, Blair said he'd know by the time the club left Florida if he'd be able to bat from the left side. He blew the timetable by about 10 days. It's full steam ahead as of right now.

"If we opened against Washington tomorrow," Paul said, "and (Dick)

Bosman was on the mound, like he figures to be, I'd bat lefthanded."

Through March 21, Blair showed nearly as good an average from the left side (.346 on 9-for-26) as from the right (.350 on 7-for-20).

## Corrected Two Flaws

He had a little trouble earlier getting the strike zone down and handling breaking pitches, but practice has cured both these ills.

"And they're throwing me everything now," he added with a smile. "A week ago, I hit a slider and a fast ball off Carl Morton. . . . I got a hook off Don Sutton. . . . George Stone threw me a changeup."

"He's going to swing at some bad pitches," said Hunter, who has had the best look at the experiment from the third base coaching box. "But I've completely changed my thinking on him, he's looked so good."

Hunter added:

"If Paul ever learns to drop a bunt from the left side, he's going to be murder because it's a step and a half closer to first base."

Learning to bunt from the left side should be no problem for Blair. Most baseball men will tell you it's easier to lay one down from that side anyway.