

Porter Given a Royal Reception

By SID BORDMAN

KANSAS CITY—Six weeks after leaving spring training to begin treatment for alcohol and drug addiction, Darrell Porter rejoined the Kansas City Royals on April 25.

In an emotion-filled clubhouse, following a 7-0 victory over Baltimore at Royals Stadium, Porter read a prepared statement to teammates and news media.

"I am very happy to be back," he stated. "Six weeks ago God gave me the strength, courage and determination to face up to my personal problems and to seek professional help. I went to Joe Burke (Royals' general manager) and advised him I was a drug addict and an alcoholic. My whole life has been affected. I have hurt my family, my friends, the great baseball fans of the Royals, my teammates and I almost destroyed myself.

"For the past six weeks, the doctors, the counselors and the staff at The Meadows in Wickenburg, Ariz., have made me realize the most important thing we have on our side is our life and good health. With their help I have a greater understanding and appreciation of myself and of my responsibilities. I have been successfully treated, and I graduated this afternoon.

"I will always be grateful and thankful to those who prayed for me, sent letters of encouragement and supported me. From this day forward, I will be facing the greatest challenge of my life. I am confident with the help of God and your support and understanding I will be successful. I will be in uniform tomorrow to complete my spring training."

The All-Star catcher quickly received a show of support from fans and teammates.

"We're enthusiastic about having Darrell back," said Pete LaCock, one of Porter's closest friends on the Royals. "It's like missing a friend. We all realize the seriousness of his problem."

Porter suited up the following afternoon, April 26. After the Royals fell to Baltimore, 4-0, Porter took batting practice before more than 1,000 fans, many of whom wore yellow ribbons as suggested by a local disc jockey to welcome

home the popular catcher.

Reporters, photographers and television cameramen, as well as Manager Jim Frey, surrounded the batting cage.

Some fans clapped rhythmically; others shouted encouragement. After Porter took his last swing, the fans gave him a standing ovation.

"It made me feel very warm," said Porter. "All along, I was worried how the public would react. I thought they would receive me all okay, but I didn't know.

"I was excited to get back. I felt loose and confident at the plate. My biggest problem will be getting my arm in shape. I have trouble with it every spring."

Porter might have been concerned about his arm, but it didn't take long to assert himself with the bat. He returned to the lineup May 4 and drove in three runs and scored a fourth in the Royals' 5-3 victory over the Red Sox. Porter belted a run-scoring triple in the fourth, then singled home two runs in the third. He had flied out as a pinch-hitter two days earlier in his first official appearance since returning.

John Schuerholz, vice-president and director of minor league operations for the Royals, was with Porter in his final week at the clinic.

"I did some throwing to John," said Porter. "I did some running and weight work, so I'm in pretty good shape."

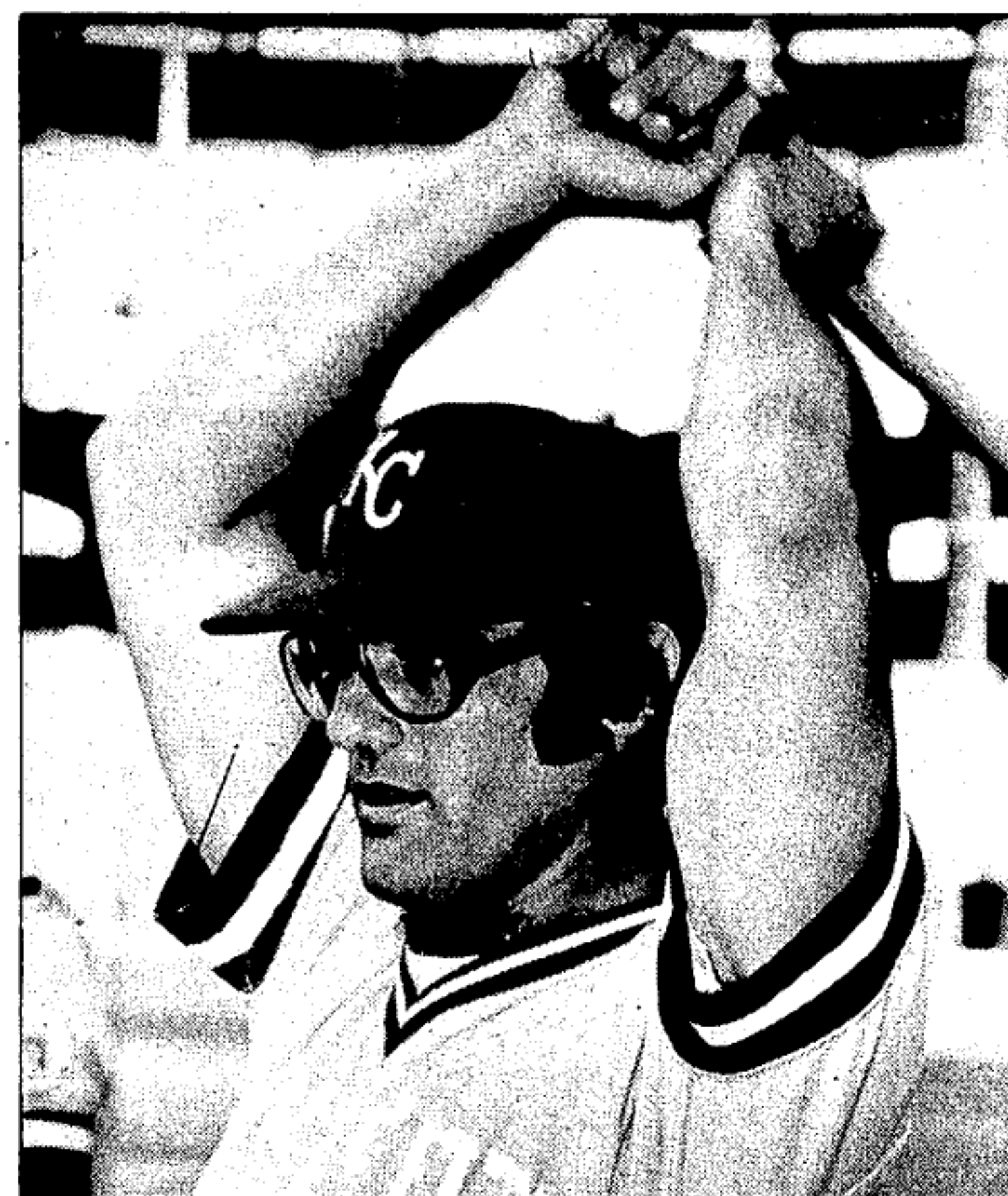
Baseball was on Porter's mind in Arizona.

"But it was not the most important thing," he emphasized. "I had to put first things first. This is a whole new game, a whole new life for me."

Burke, an understanding individual, said Porter "just needs some time. The toughest part of his life could be the next two months. He's told the truth, and there's really nothing more to be said at this time."

Porter conferred with Burke in spring training, seeking help for his problem after hearing Don Newcombe, former Dodgers pitching star who works in an alcoholic rehabilitation program. Porter went to Los Angeles first and was transferred to the center in Arizona.

Royalties: With Amos Otis sidelined by a broken finger, Frey turned his outfield into a revolving alignment. Only center fielder Willie Wilson was an everyday starter.



Darrell Porter . . . 'First things first.'

Through the first 16 games, Frey used six outfield combinations. . . . Clint Hurdle unloaded his first home run of the season on April 25. His three-run shot in the first inning off Steve Stone helped the Royals whip Baltimore, 7-0, behind Larry Gura. Two days later, the young right fielder broke up Dennis Martinez' no-hitter and shutout with another blast of more than 400 feet to the left of the Kansas City bullpen in right field. The Royals rallied for a 3-2 decision. "I think the fans in right field are happier," smiled Hurdle, who had been on the unfriendly end of their taunts earlier in the season. . . . When the Royals flew to Toronto for their late April series, they were wearing lapel pins displaying American and Canadian flags. Bill Phillips, a long-time baseball fan and member of the Royal Lancers, designed the pins to show the United States' appreciation of the Canadians' rescue of the U.S. embassy workers in Iran.

Gura's 7-0 taming of the Orioles was the lefthander's second shutout and third complete game.

Another Lezcano Chapter Penned by Carlos of Cubs

By RICHARD DOZER

CHICAGO—It may not be a good bet that Carlos Lezcano will be the National League's rookie of the year, but for the Chicago Cubs he is definitely the longshot of the year.

Lezcano, 24, a second cousin to Sixto of Milwaukee, was battling to save the ring finger of his throwing hand at this time two years ago. Now he is making contributions to the Cubs, a team he had virtually no hopes of joining in spring training.

"I think I may need a year in Triple A," Carlos freely admitted—a belief that was reinforced by a look at the Cubs' deep and well-established outfield.

Who could find room amid (left to right) Dave Kingman, Jerry Martin and the three who felt they belonged in right: Scot Thompson, Ken Henderson and Mike Vail?

Carlos Manuel Lezcano, that's who.

Lezcano may yet get that final apprenticeship in Wichita (American Association) that he had expected. But for now, he is playing more often than not and is giving the Cubs the best center fielding they've had since Rick Monday in 1976.

"He's got to play to stay up here," cautioned Preston Gomez in a sort of managerial prophecy that will make it easy for Carlos to understand his fate. The question was only whether he could hit major league pitching well enough to stick. But Lezcano, whose first two big-league hits were home runs, was staying close to .300.

A number of things have given Lezcano a more thorough test this spring than he might have had. When Martin was slow in recovering from knee surgery, Lezcano was an immediate hit in spring training. When Thompson had a week's siege of shoulder trouble, Lezcano got more playing time. When Miguel Dilone left the club during the boycott, Lezcano stayed.

When the season opened, Carlos was in center field but was shelved the next four games because of left eye damage suffered in an opening-day collision with Ken Henderson. Later, Henderson went on the disabled list with a hamstring pull, and again Carlos surfaced in center—Martin shifting to right. Now Thompson finally is starting to make inroads on Lezcano's playing time, and the day of decision may come with the return of Henderson.

The Lezcano story began when club Vice-President Bob Kennedy saw the fleet Puerto Rican while watching his own son, Terry, play with Lezcano at Florida State in 1976 and '77. Because Carlos was a foreign student, he could be signed without going through the draft.

"And we couldn't have signed him if Florida State had been invited to the NCAA tournament," Kennedy recalled.

But Kennedy closeted scout Eddie Lyons with Lezcano in a Tallahassee motel room, and when he got the word that FSU was not tournament-bound, he phoned Lyons, who, said Kennedy, "signed him that very minute." Carlos got a mere \$7,500 bonus but has no regrets.

"They told me they would start me in Double A, and that's what they did."

After modest beginnings (.231 in '77) at Midland, his career was put in jeopardy when he leaped to touch a no-parking sign after his day's workout in Scottsdale, Ariz., the following March. He came down with his finger nearly severed from his hand. His ring caught on the sign and had torn the finger to shreds.

Dr. Leonard Bodell, a Scottsdale surgeon, is responsible for saving the finger, although Carlos said the doctor told him several weeks later that "it was dead and he didn't think he could save it.

He played baseball in '78 until returning to winter ball for Arecibo in his native Puerto Rico. But '79, which normally would have been his year at Wichita, found him "starting over" at Midland, where he batted .326 with 11 homers and 82 runs batted in.

Carlos has returned to bachelorhood after an ill-fated marriage that ended more than a year ago. But his ex-wife, a Puerto Rican also, is a flight attendant for an American airline now, and they remain friendly.

"She is a nice girl . . . and who knows?" he smiled, declining further comment.

Cubbyhole: The Cubs hit 20 home runs in their first 20 games, well ahead of last year's pace that produced 135, fourth highest in the league. . . . Kingman has demonstrated fielding prowess that has scouts rewriting their "book" on him. During April he threw out Frank Taveras and Garry Templeton trying to score from second base on singles to left.

Bruce Sutter, who saved seven games, won one, and lost one in his first nine appearances, balked twice in the same game (April 25). He didn't balk once all last year but admitted he had become careless and didn't stop at the belt "because I wasn't worried about the runner." The Cubs led by three runs and beat the Pirates' 5-3 when the runner eventually scored. . . . Dennis Lamp suffered the Cubs' first kayo of the season in the first inning April 26 when the Bucs won handily, 9-2.

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