

Roundup of Major Leagues' Outstanding Rookie Performers

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Tiger Topper



George Vico

By H. G. SALSINGER
Of the Detroit News

Billy Evans told Walter O. Briggs a few days ago: "In another year or two, your first base position will be solved for some time to come."

"You mean that we'll have to wait two years?" asked the Tigers' owner. "Well, perhaps less than that," Evans assured him.

He was referring to George Steve Vico, a Yugoslav from California's famed San Fernando Valley, six feet four inches tall, weighing 200 pounds, a lefthanded batter and righthanded thrower whose nickname is Sam.

The 23-year-old Vico has been the hit of the Florida training season. His fielding has caught the fancy of the crowds. He is loose and supple, wiry and strong, fast and quick, a fiery competitor. His aggressiveness is contagious. Unknown, unheralded, unsung, he arrived in Florida, but the customers took to him immediately. He is a spectacular fielder and wins many plays by doing a split that even the great Mordkin could not improve upon.

Vico has played only 48 games in Triple A (with Portland last year). He still has a number of things to learn. He needs experience. He could probably do an acceptable job of first-basing right now and it is certain that he would become the People's Choice at Briggs Stadium in no time at all, but Evans would like to have him go where he can play daily.

He covers the plate well and gives every indication of becoming a first-class hitter. With his power he should develop into a long hitter.

His main asset is aggressiveness. That is the quality that was the heart of the grandstand, pavilion and bleachers.

Ace of Phils



Dick Koecher

By STAN BAUMGARTNER
Of the Philadelphia Inquirer

Southpaw Pitcher Dick Koecher is the outstanding rookie of the Phils' crop. Unheralded, except by General Manager Herb Pennock, who said confidently during the past winter, "That boy will be one of our regulars," Koecher, 21-year-old 190-pounder, walked right by several other promising youngsters in assuming the title of best rookie.

With only three months' experience in Organized Ball as a hurler for Terre Haute, Koecher has all the poise of a major leaguer. In four games against the Red Sox, the Newark Bears and World's Champion St. Louis Cardinals (twice), the southpaw faced the best of both leagues without batting an eye. He had splendid control and splendid stuff.

In those 12 innings, he allowed three runs and seven hits, walked two and hit one. He has a fine, smooth overhand delivery with an excellent fast ball and good curve. He has not yet learned a good change of pace. Best of all, his fast ball is very much alive. Batters get only a small piece of it.

The Phillies gave Koecher \$16,500 to sign a contract and he is worth every cent of it.

Offered \$35,000 for Vico

DETROIT, Mich.—The Tigers were offered \$35,000 this spring for George Vico, rookie Tiger first baseman, Billy Evans, Detroit general manager has revealed.

Blond Bomber

By SHIRLEY POVICH
Of the Washington Post

Earl Wooten, who came to the Washington training camp unheralded from the Senators' Chattanooga farm team, is now the only rookie sure of his job with the Nats—and he's double sure.

While the plaudits of early training went to others of the rookie crop, Wooten quietly went out and made himself a job with the Senators as the most important utility man on the club.

He's a little blond lad who scales only 158 pounds and stacks up only five feet nine inches, but he opened the eyes of the Senators' bosses with his play in center field and first base.

He came up from Chattanooga with



Earl Wooten

a .312 batting average in 1946. He was sent back to Chattanooga last spring during the dither of excitement about Gil Coan.

This spring it was Wooten who stayed, Coan who was sent back.

Wooten is a righthanded hitter, which doesn't hurt his prospects with the Washington club. He went straight from the Carolina sandlots in 1944 to a regular place on the Chattanooga pitching staff at 19, won five games, then turned outfielder.

Schenz Shines

By ED BURNS
Of the Chicago Tribune

Infielder Henry Schenz rates as the Cubs' outstanding exhibition season rookie, though a trio of pitchers, Russ Meyer, Bob McCall and Doyle Lade, might give him a battle in a voting contest. Manager Charlie Grimm, Coach Roy Johnson and Cub scouts who had seen 26-year-old Henry were confident he would be retained by the Cubs even before he reported for spring training.

Schenz won high appraisals despite the fact he has suffered all spring from leg misery known to the trade as shin splints. This handicap kept him from displaying what is said to be his greatest asset, speed. But he fielded and batted well enough to warrant assurance he will be retained as "infield insurance" this year.

Schenz, a veteran of 38 months' service in the Navy, first pointed toward an O. B. career immediately after he graduated from the New Richmond High School, near Cincinnati. At the age of 16, he attended a baseball school conducted by the Reds and was assigned to Bassetts in the Bi-State League. His pre-war experience included hitches with Salem-Roanoke, Tarboro, and Portsmouth, Va. Last year, Hank had a brief stay with Los Angeles, then went to Tulsa, where, in winning the Texas League's most valuable player award, he batted .333, led the league in doubles and runs, and stole 32 bases.



Henry Schenz

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Yankee Buster



Larry Berra

By DAN DANIEL
Of the New York World-Telegram

The standout freshman of the reconstructed and refurbished Yankees is Lawrence Berra, called the Yogi.

Berra joined the Bombers last September, after he had finished his chores with Newark. He caught in seven games and hit two homers, with a .364 average.

"There is lively competition for Aaron Robinson," said the experts. But he is competition for Robinson no longer. For Berra is the regular right fielder of the Yankees, and will open the pennant season in that position.

Persuaded that Berra would hit, and finding himself under the necessity of keeping Tommy Henrich, long the right fielder of the club, at first base, Billy Harris decided to try a picket line experiment with the Yogi.

Berra comes into this test not without some experience as an outfielder. He had played out there in 15 contests with Newark last season. The Yogi approached his new task with confidence, and marked it with elan. He has made no mistakes out there.

More than a quarter of a century ago, the Yankees had another Berra in Ping Bodie, born Francisco Pizzola. Bodie grew fat with success. Berra says he won't move out that way.

Berra comes from The Hill, which is St. Louis' Little Italy. Across the street from him lives Joe Garagiola, the Cardinal catcher, who is Yogi's pal. Berra was "stolen" from the Cards by Johnny Schulte, the Yankee coach who makes his home in St. Louis.

Larry broke in with Norfolk, rather high for a kid off the lots, in 1943. He hit .253.

Then Berra went into service. In 1946, he hit .314 with Newark, belted 15 homers and drove in 59 runs in 77 games.

Berra was born May 12, 1925, weighs 185 pounds, and stands five feet eight inches. During the Yankee training season, one of his feats was a batting streak of 14 consecutive games.

One of the feats Berra accomplished in the minors is probably without parallel. With Norfolk in 1943, he batted in 23 runs in two successive games. On the first day, he hit two home runs, two doubles and two singles in seven trips, batting in 13 runs, one more than the major league record held by Jim Bottomley. The next day he socked in ten more with a homer, two doubles and a single.

Larry Almost Sold Berra Before Getting Look at Him

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.—How Yogi Berra, the reformed catcher playing in the outfield for the Yankees, nearly became a member of the Giants was revealed by President Larry MacPhail of the Yankees the other day. MacPhail said he almost sold Berra to the Giants sight unseen, when Manager Mel Ott said he would like to take one of Larry's young catchers off his hands and was willing to go as high as \$50,000.

MacPhail took a shot in the dark and said: "I suppose you must mean Berra." Larry hadn't seen the youngster and didn't know anything about him. When Ott admitted it was Berra he was after, MacPhail began to hedge, thinking that if the kid was worth that much to the Giants, he must be better than the Yankees had suspected.

Larry admits the first time he saw the youngster his heart sank at refusing a big price for him. But when he saw Berra with a bat in his hand, the Yankee president lost his regrets.

Wooten Ex-Mortician

ORLANDO, Fla.—Earl Wooten, class young in a mortuary at the Senators, worked in a mortuary at his Pelzer, S. C., home before taking up baseball.

Miksis Sizzles

By HAROLD BURR
Of the Brooklyn Eagle

To Eddie Miksis, the young infielder, goes the distinction of being the outstanding rookie on the Dodgers. This, despite the fact that he has been up before. He's still the baby of the squad and won't be 21 until September.

"He's the most improved player on the team," says Manager Leo Durocher. "In other years I've had to coax him to do things. Now he jumps to do it almost before I even open my mouth."

Miksis has built up his confidence in himself. Perhaps the stretch he did in Uncle Sam's Navy explains it. He



Eddie Miksis

has been hitting well this year on a team that has been disappointingly backward with the stick. His power is to left field and right center. He hit a home run in Panama that left the Brooklyn dugout gasping. He plays either shortstop or third base, has a good arm and, like all Rickey's children, he's got wings.

The Dodgers signed him out of the Burlington, N. J., High School. He was farmed out to Trenton and entered the Bainbridge Naval Training Station, where he played ball.

Brave Rave

By HOWELL STEVENS
Of the Boston Post

Glenn Elliott, 27-year-old bespectacled lefthander from the Pacific Coast, has proved the outstanding rookie of the Braves' spring training season. He pitched 24 lustrous innings against major league opposition before finally encountering a sour round. Over this brilliant stretch, which included parts of seven games, the former Oregon State star, who teaches school during the winter, permitted just five runs, approximately one every five chapters.

Glenn blanked the A's for three innings, gave the Pirates but one run in seven sessions, the Yankees one in three, and allowed the Browns three in eight reels. Then, on March 29, at Lakeland, after hurling three runless rounds against Detroit, the Tigers suddenly launched a big rally and drove him from the mound. This immediately followed Elliott's first hit of the year. One swallow doesn't make a summer, but anybody who can flip as well as Glenn in six successive games would be welcomed by any manager.

Elliott was born in Sapulpa, Okla., on Armistice Day, 1919, but his family moved to Hollywood, Calif., three years later and remained there until 1935, when he and his kin migrated to Myrtle Creek, Oregon, where they have lived since. Glenn entered Organized Ball with Vancouver in the Western International League in 1942, and during the last four years he has pitched for Seattle.



Glenn Elliott

Fain Top A



Ferris Fain

By ART MORROW

Of the Philadelphia Inquirer

The Athletics will move into Philadelphia with at least three others new to the big leagues—Outfielders Austin Knickerbocker and Ray Poole and Infielder Dick Adams—but the rookie on whom they are counting most is one whose name has not yet appeared in even a training camp box score.

Before injuring his knee in the first week of practice, Ferris Fain made such a favorable impression that Connie Mack is banking on him to play first base regularly.

Fain, who became 25 years old on March 29, is a lefthanded product of the Pacific Coast League who stands five feet 11 inches and weighs 183 pounds. His father, the late Oscar Fain, was a well known jockey in his day, riding Duval to second place behind a horse named Worth in the 1912 Kentucky Derby, but it was early apparent that Ferris—sometimes called "Burrhead" because of his thick, wavy dark brown hair—would be too big for the saddle. He turned to baseball, playing sandlot, semi-pro, high school and American Legion ball around his home in Oakland, Calif.

At the age of 17, Fain signed with the Seals. Except during his three seasons in the Army Air Corps, he has played with no other team since.

In 1940, his first full season, he got into 130 games, batted .246, and the following year, hitting .312, he led the league in walks and runs scored. After slipping to .216 in '42, he went into service.

After he batted .301 and drove in 112 runs for the Seals in 1946, the A's made him their No. 1 draft choice.

Lockman Lauded



Whitey Lockman

By KEN SMITH

Of the New York Daily Mirror

Carroll (Whitey) Lockman stacks up as the No. 1 Giant rookie at this stage of the training season.

Among 21 minor leaguers on the New York list, Lockman is the furthest advanced. This lithe, tow-headed North Carolinian can run, throw and hit and his competitive instinct asserts itself often. When he was a 16-year-old Jersey City fledgling, he would stretch singles into doubles at the slightest hitch by a complacent flycatcher handling a bounding hit. His daring, Ty Cobbish stunts on the paths sounded the keynote for a new era among the ponderous moving Giants of recent seasons. At 20, Whitey is ready.

Lockman is not exactly a stranger to the Polo Grounds. Opening the 1945 season as regular center fielder at the Polo Grounds, he batted .340 in 32 games before joining the Army. Mustered out last January, he reported this year a mature player. Batting second, he has hit long and often in the exhibitions.

Clint Hartung may eventually outslug him, but, as the situation stands, Whitey is the biggest single reason why the Giants are rated stronger than last year.