

Trade Winds Swirling Around Lee May's Head

By EARL LAWSON

CINCINNATI, O.—Rookie outfielder Hal McRae is playing third base in the Florida Instructional League, but Chief Bender, No. 1 aid to General Manager Bob Howsam of the Reds, claims the news isn't particularly earthshaking.

What Bender means is the Reds don't contemplate putting McRae on third next year, moving Tony Perez to first base and trading big Lee May.

But despite Bender's denial, one has to wonder.

As a third baseman, Perez is playing out of position. The slugging Cuban came up to the Reds as a first baseman. And first base, as anyone can tell you, is his best position.

But when you've got a guy like May on your club, you don't sit him on the bench. You find a spot for him in the lineup even if you have to do some juggling. This is what ex-Red manager Dave Bristol did back in May of 1967.

The Reds that year opened the season with Perez on first base and Deron Johnson on third. But early in May, when Johnson pulled a hamstring, Perez moved to third and May went to first base. Tony has remained at third. And May, except for occasional flings in the outfield a couple of years back, has been the Reds' regular first baseman.

Musclemen of N. L.

The booming bats of May and Perez are two big reasons why the Reds rate as the National League's most powerful hitting club.

But they're also a couple of reasons why the Reds don't rate equally as high defensively. May, as a first baseman, is more than adequate in the field. No player works harder to improve himself than the Big Bopper from Birmingham.

Perez, in an attempt to master the third base position, has put forth the same all-out effort displayed by May. But the errors he has accumulated over the last couple of years indicate the likeable Cuban is fighting a losing battle.

During the past season, for instance, Perez was charged with 35 errors, tops on the club. But, as mentioned, in Perez' case there are extenuating circumstances. First, he's playing out of position. Secondly, there's a tendency to overlook a guy's fielding lapses when he's swinging a potent bat.

The potency of Perez' bat is reflected by the set of impressive statistics he compiled during the past season.

Perez Top Hitter

Perez' .317 batting mark topped the Reds. He drove home 129 runs. Teammate Johnny Bench was the only major leaguer to chase more runners home. Tony also walloped 40 homers.

But moving Perez to first base where he belongs would mean parting with May. And the very thought of losing May's big bat is enough to make Manager Sparky Anderson wince.

As a rookie in 1967, May hit 12 homers, drove home 57 runs and batted .265. In 1968, he hit 22 homers, drove home 80 runs and batted .290. May's average dipped to .278 in 1969, but he jumped his

home run total to 38. And he drove home 110 runs.

During the past season, big Lee's average dipped to .253. But he still socked 34 homers. And he drove home 94 runs, which is remarkable when you consider the fact that he batted behind both Bench and Perez.

May's standout performance in the World Series also is enough to give the Reds' brass second thoughts about parting with him. The big first baseman rapped out seven hits, including two doubles and two homers, and drove home eight runs in the five games. And spectacular plays by Brooks Robinson robbed him of a couple of other extra-base hits.

Bender, in Florida to look over players performing in the instruc-

tional league, claims McRae is playing third merely to improve his versatility.

Before he broke his leg in winter ball in the fall of 1968, McRae rated as the standout prospect in the Reds' farm system. He was a second baseman then.

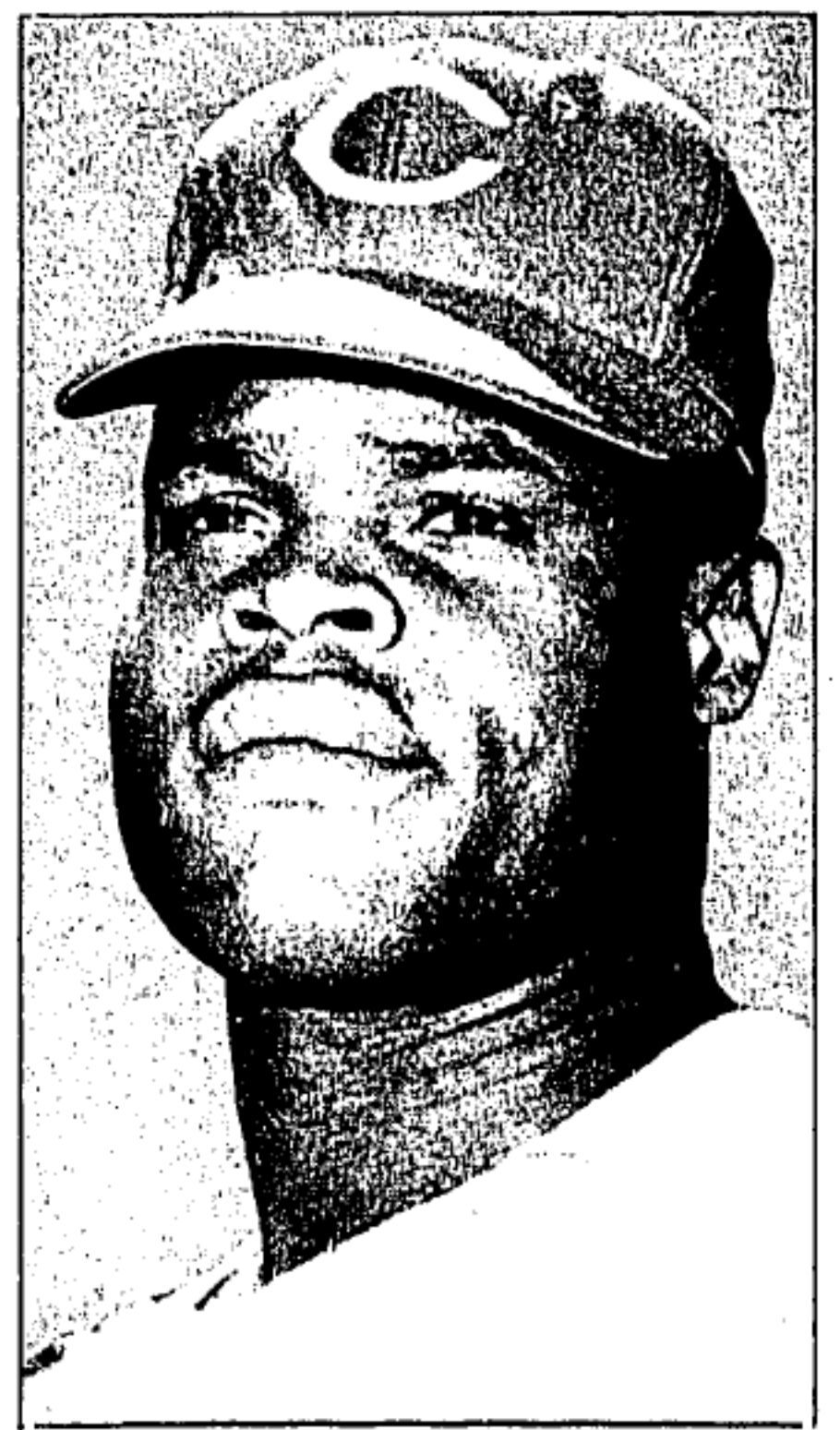
Out With Leg Injury

The year 1969 was a wasted one for McRae as he recuperated from the leg injury. During the past season, McRae platooned in left field with Bernie Carbo and rapped out more than a few timely hits. And in the World Series he went five for 11.

"We figure he'll have a better chance to regain his mobility by playing the infield instead of the outfield this winter," said Bender.

As for the possibility of moving Perez to first and swapping May, Bender commented: "I think I can speak for Howsam by saying that if a great deal involving May comes along, we'd have to consider it. But right now we don't anticipate any such thing."

Red Hots: Red pitching coach Larry Shepard, managing in Puerto Rico, has Milt Wilcox, Mel Behney, Ross Grimsley and Vern Geishert on his staff. Don Gullett, the Reds' 19-year-old rookie lefty, won't pitch winter ball. "Sparky used Gullett a lot during the last weeks of the season and in the post-season games," said Bender, "and thinks Don will benefit from a rest." Long before the season ended, though, Gullett refused to pitch in Puerto Rico.



Lee May

Horrible Home Mark Galls Redbirds

By NEAL RUSSO

ST. LOUIS, Mo.—The Cardinals will have at least one special incentive to atone for their scandalous record at home last season. Scandalous it was, for the Redbirds' won-lost percentage was their worst in at least 30 years.

The special incentive will be a chance to show their stuff before one of the most outstanding clubs to represent St. Louis — the 1946 squad that upset Ted Williams and his fellow Red Sox.

The Oldtimer celebration will mark the 25th anniversary of that Cards-Bosox World Series. The Redbirds have invited every man who competed in that classic to be on hand at Busch Stadium for the Oldtimer Day on Sunday, August 8.

The 1970 Cardinals, though cheered on by most of the 1,600,000 fans who turned out at Busch Stadium, stumbled to a 34-47 finish in their maiden season on AstroTurf. That was one more victory than the 1954 Redbirds collected, but the '70 Cards lost four more home games than the club of 16 years ago (154-game schedule).

Plus .500 on Road

The opposition finished with only three more runs than the Cardinals for the entire 1970 season, but the invaders had a big bulge, 418 to 377, in St. Louis. Red Schoendienst's men had a 367 to 329 run advantage on the road, where they wound up with a 42-39 log.

Even though the Cardinals went

without a pennant for 17 years, from 1947 through 1963, they finished above .500 at home every year except 1954 and 1970 for the last three decades.

The 1958 Cardinals finished at 39-38 at home, but the Birds usually have had a decent bulge at the home port.

Over the last 30 years, they have had such brilliant home showings as 60-17 in 1942, 58-21 in '43, 54-22 in 1944, 51-26 in 1960, 53-28 in 1963, 49-29 in 1946, 47-28 in 1950, 48-29 in 1945, 1952 and 1961, 48-30 in 1953, 49-32 in 1967, 46-31 in 1947, 48-33 in 1964 and 47-34 in 1968.

Oddly, in the year whose reunion will be celebrated in August, the Cardinals had exactly the same record home and away, 49-29.

The '46 reunion party (with the Dodgers in town) was one of many highlights announced when the home schedule was released. The Birds, incidentally, will launch their home card against the Giants. In a strange getaway, they will oppose Willie Mays & Co. in a day contest Saturday, April 10, then will follow with a Sunday doubleheader.

There will be only one other twinbill, against the Astros July 9.

Divided Weekends

There will be two split home weekends. The Expos will be in St. Louis for Friday and Saturday night contests July 16-17, with the Mets then moving in for a Sunday game. And then on Friday, August 6, the Giants will be at Busch, followed by the Dodgers on Saturday, August 7 and Sunday, August 8.

The Birds have booked four businessmen's specials (weekday games starting at 12:30) and four teen nights. There will be 60 night games.

Joe Hague learned that being too frank can boomerang on you when you're giving a talk out of town as a member of the Cardinals' speakers' bureau.

"Some of the things that got in the paper didn't come out quite the way I intended them to," Hague said of his visit to Peoria, Ill., for an awards banquet.

Asked about charges that Allen had hurt the club's morale, Hague was quoted as saying, "I can't go along with that and at the same time I'm not sure he was a 'winning' ball player."

Comment on Cardenal

Hague was quoted in similar fashion about Jose Cardenal, whose reputation for "loafing" and sulking had preceded him. The Cardinal outfielder-first baseman reportedly criticized the swap that sent Carl Taylor and Jim Ellis to the Brewers for 34-year-old catcher Gerry McNertney and two minor league pitchers.

"A lot of what I said in Peoria was misconstrued," Hague said. "It came out making me sound like I was ripping the club for those trades. All I get paid for is playing ball."

Hague praised, perhaps a bit too lavishly, second baseman Julian Javier, new second baseman-shortstop Ted Sizemore, utility infielder Dick Schofield and veteran shortstop Dal Maxvill.

"As for myself, I wouldn't trade Maxie for any shortstop in the league except Don Kessinger, and Glenn Beckert isn't half the player Javier is," Hague was quoted as saying.



Joe Hague Turns Pitcher at Son Joe, Jr.'s Meal Time.

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Reds' Rest Decree Boosts May, Perez

By EARL LAWSON

CINCINNATI, O.—It's Dave Bristol's contention that playing baseball year-round is too much of a physical strain on players, even if they're as strong as Lee May and Tony Perez.

And today, May and Perez are just about ready to agree.

There were no loud complaints from May and Perez in midseason of 1968 when Bristol announced he wasn't going to give the two Reds' sluggers permission to play winter ball. But you didn't have to be a mindreader to know that Bristol's decree rankled Lee and Tony.

And, in a way, you couldn't blame them for being more than a little perturbed. Passing up winter ball was a little like tossing money down the drain.

"I know Lee and Tony don't like the idea of passing up the money they make in winter ball," Bristol remarked at the time. "But, in the long run, they'll benefit from the winter's rest. And so will the club."

No Good for Regulars

Winter ball is great for the player who puts in most of the regular season sitting on the bench, claims Bristol. But, for guys who play regularly, forget it.

"Both Tony and Lee are bound to be stronger this season," Bristol predicted early this spring.

And, on the basis of present returns, it looks as if May and Perez are going to make Bristol's pre-season prediction come true.

Perez had nine homers as the Reds went into a May 23 game with the Expos at Crosley Field. That's four more than he had at the end of May in 1968.

What's more, the slugging Cuban was batting at a .315 clip, 62 points higher than his average at the end of May in 1968.

"Last year I hit the ball hard and it went nowhere," said Tony. "This year I hit it hard and it takes off."

"Maybe," he mused, "I was tired last year and didn't realize it."

May had eight homers as the Reds went into the May 23 game with Montreal. Last year, the muscular Red first baseman did not get his ninth homer until July.

Pitching problems which plagued the Reds in 1968 still exist. But as the Reds headed into the final week of May, they were still maintaining their reputation as the best hitting club in baseball.

Five Top 20 Mark

Five players already had driven home 20 or more runs. And a sixth player, National League batting champ Pete Rose, the club's leadoff hitter, had 19 RBIs.

Surprisingly enough, tied with Perez for the club lead in RBIs was Bobby Tolan with 28.

The speedy Tolan figured to get his share of leg hits. Going into the May 23 game with the Expos, he had ten infield hits, five coming on bunts. The power Tolan has displayed has been a pleasant surprise for Bristol. Numbered among Tolan's first 48 hits were three doubles, four triples and six home runs.

Tolan's six homers exceed by one his total output for the 1968 season, when he put in most of his time on the Cardinal bench.

Tolan, though, isn't the only Red player who already has topped his home-run output for the 1968 season. Alex Johnson socked No. 7 May 14 against the Phillies. He hit only two last year.

What's the difference?

A Philadelphia writer put the question to Johnson. His answer,

"five," had teammates splitting their sides with laughter.

But then, that's Alex. He doesn't go for detailed explanations.

The way Johnson has been rapping the ball, he appears bent on capturing the batting title Rose won last year. The Red left fielder sported a .342 mark, tops on the club, going into the May 23 game with the Expos.

Rose Battling Slump

Meanwhile, Rose was struggling to get back over the .300 mark after an early May tailspin sent his average tumbling to .279. Pete was six points shy of the coveted .300 mark after banging out three hits in a May 21 victory over the Phils.

Johnny Bench and Perez also banged out three hits apiece in that same May 21 game with the Phils. Johnny's base knocks gave him nine for 14 since his return from a brief stint on the bench.

Bob Skinner found Bench's hits particularly rankling.

The Phillie manager is getting a little tired of watching the Red catcher tattoo Phillie pitching.

"And," vowed the Phillie manager, "we're going to do something about it . . . pitch him differently."

It was another way of Skinner's saying that Bench might be wise to stay loose at the plate the next time the Reds and Phillies clash.

Red Hots: As of May 23, Tony Cloninger had a 2-5 record. And, oddly enough, each of Tony's victories came on a two-hit shutout. The veteran Red righthander, plagued by wildness this season, walked only one while blanking the Phils, 4-0, with two hits May 20. He reeled off the victory in one hour and 42 minutes. . . . Clay Carroll picked up his third victory in six decisions when the Reds beat the Phils, 6-5, May 21. The Reds' winning rally came after Carroll wild-pitched the Phils to a 5-4 lead in the top of the ninth inning. . . . Red lefty Jim Merritt was working on a perfect game when rain forced postponement of the May 18 game with the Mets. The Reds were leading, 3-0, after three and one-half innings. . . . Pete Rose had two hits washed out with the Reds' lead.

Yellow Marker Provides Predicted Ump Headache

CINCINNATI, O.—During the off season, the Reds' management had a yellow line painted across the scoreboard at Crosley Field and announced that, in the future, balls hitting above the line would be home runs.

At the time, there were predictions that the new ruling would provide many a headache for an umpire before the 1969 season ended.

The first rhubarb precipitated by the yellow line wasn't long in coming.

In the fourth inning of a May 20 game at Crosley Field, Alex Johnson sent a smash bouncing off the scoreboard in left-center.

Second base umpire Frank Dezelan ruled Johnson's drive hit below the yellow line and restricted the Reds' slugger to a double. His call was immediately challenged by Reds' third base coach Vern Benson and the members of the bullpen. As usual, though, the ump's decision prevailed.

The next day, Deron Johnson, the Phillies left fielder, confided that Alex' drive had hit about a foot above the yellow line and should have been a homer instead of a double.



LEE MAY receives customary congratulations from Johnny Bench after socking his twelfth homer of the season.

Nolan Shipped to Indy To Rebuild Sore Wing

By EARL LAWSON

CINCINNATI, O.—Red Manager Dave Bristol didn't have much of a choice.

"His arm isn't strong enough right now to cope with major league hitters," said Bristol. "He needs work. And he can get it with the Indianapolis club."

Bristol was referring to Gary Nolan.

The Reds optioned the 21-year-old righthander to their American Association farm club May 22.

How long Nolan remains in the minors depends upon how long it takes him to recapture the form which made him a winning pitcher with the Reds the past two years.

Nolan fanned 12 batters in seven inning, but wound up a 3-2 loser to the Los Angeles Dodgers in the Reds' season opener April 7.

Gary Fanned Five Batters in Row

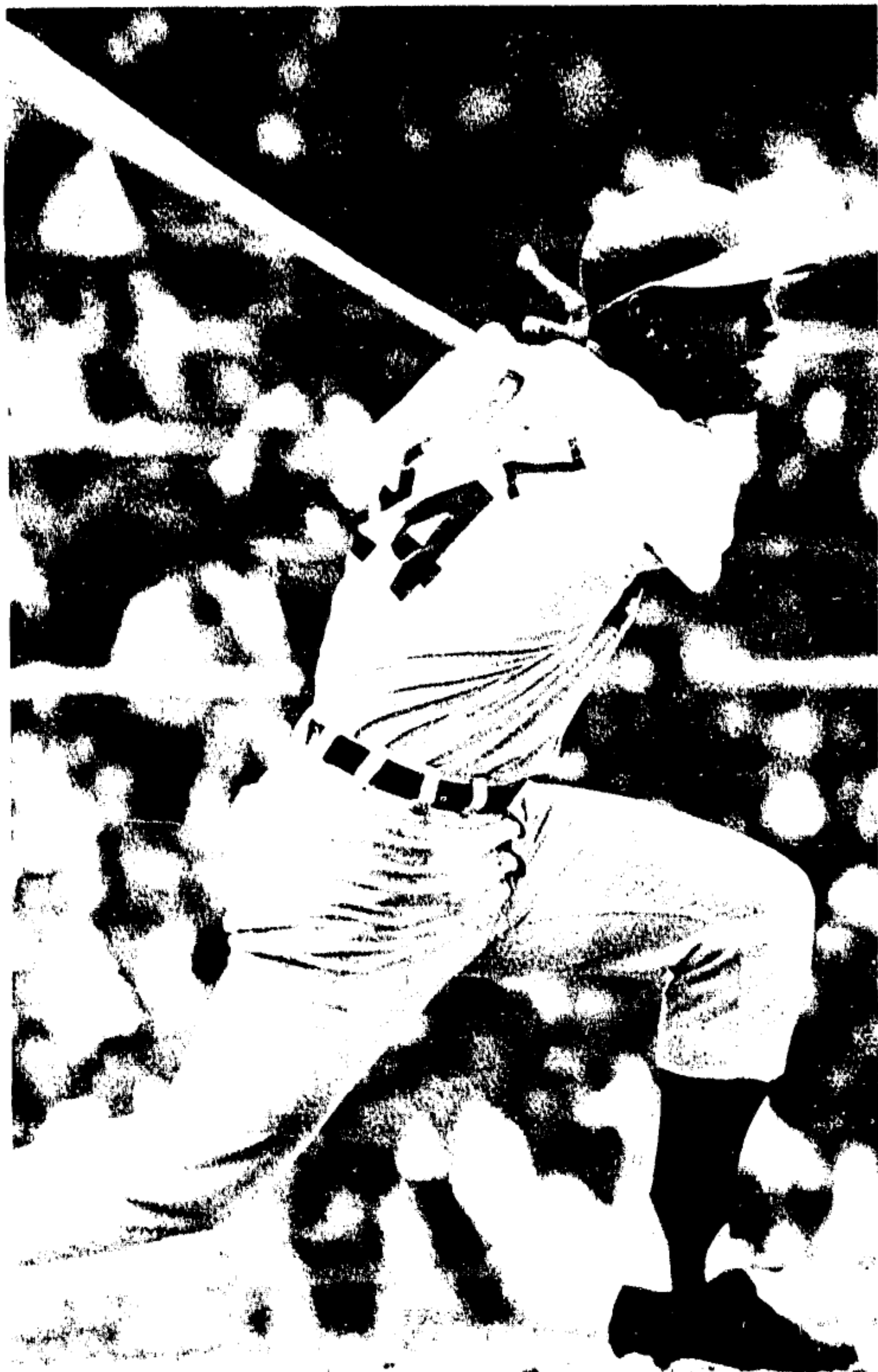
Five days later, he pulled a muscle in his right forearm pitching against the Braves and left the mound with a 5-2 lead in the sixth inning after fanning seven batters, five of them in a row.

However, it wasn't until April 23 that he returned to the mound. And then he was routed in the fourth inning by the Dodgers in Los Angeles.

Nolan's last regular season appearance came in relief against the Mets May 6 when he was tagged for two homers in one inning he pitched.

The decision to send Nolan to Indianapolis came after the young righthander was nicked for four runs in four innings in a May 19 exhibition with the Indians at Crosley Field.

"Gary," said Bristol, "can't help us until he rebuilds the strength in his right arm. We hope he can do it down there."



Tony Perez . . . No Sign of Weariness Now.



CHICO RUIZ scampers across the plate with the tying run in the ninth inning of the May 21 game at Cincinnati as Mike Ryan, Phillies' catcher, drops the ball. Ruiz scored from second base on Johnny Bench's single and the Reds then scored a second run to defeat the Philies 6-5. Doug Harvey is the umpire.