

## BASEBALL

## With Hernandez Gimpy, Mets Are Out of Step

NEW YORK—Whether the New York Mets can survive and prosper without **Keith Hernandez** will not be known until later in the season. But the early returns were not good.

The Mets lost **Hernandez** when he suffered what he called a cramp in his right leg June 6 at St. Louis. The injury was not supposed to be serious. A few days later, Hernandez was on the disabled list for the first time in his 14-year career.

Hernandez returned June 22, playing in a 3-0 victory over the second-place Pirates. The next day, as the Mets began a series in Chicago, **Hernandez** didn't make it through the first inning.

In his first at-bat against Greg Maddux, **Hernandez** hit what ap-

peared to be a double down the left-field line. He barely made it to first.

**Hernandez** was removed for a pinch-runner, and while the Mets were beginning a disastrous trip with a 4-1 loss to Maddux, the Mets' captain was being examined by the Cubs' physicians. Hernandez was examined again the next day, already aware that the news would be bad. A slight tear was found in his right hamstring. He returned to the disabled list and was given crutches to use for a few days.

During Hernandez's first stay on the disabled list, the Mets were 6-7. After Hernandez returned to the disabled list, the Mets won their first game, then lost the final two in Chicago be-

fore going to Pittsburgh, where they were beaten in the opener of a three-game series, 2-1, making their record without **Hernandez** 7-10—or 7-11 if you count the game he left in the first inning.

Before the Mets won the last two games in Pittsburgh to build their lead to 5½ games over the Pirates, Manager Dave Johnson said, "**Keith** is an impact player, a superstar. You can't replace the intangibles he provides for a team. His loss makes things a little tougher for us. But I think we'll survive."

At first, Johnson decided to replace Hernandez's offense, so, at least against righthanders, he used Lee Mazzilli at first base, Dave Magadan at third base and Howard Johnson at shortstop.

That put Kevin Elster, hitting .203 at the time, on the bench.

Against lefties, the manager planned to play Magadan at first, HoJo at third and Elster at short.

That plan lasted exactly three days. After the Mets' infield had a horrible day in a 6-3 loss to the Cubs June 26, Dave Johnson decided he had seen enough.

"If we're looking at 30 days without **Keith**, I think I'd better shelve the offensive platoon that isn't giving me more offense anyway," he said.

"I think we're looking at a month at least," **Hernandez** said. "From a dead stop, I can't drive off the right leg. And I'm not going to come back until I'm sure I can."

DAN CASTELLANO



Keith Hernandez

## McGee in RBI Groove

ST. LOUIS—After floundering 2½ months when he batted with runners on base, Willie McGee had all cylinders functioning at the end of June.

Not only did the St. Louis Cardinals' center fielder hit .365 for the month, but he had 16 runs batted in, including eight in a six-game span late in the month. And he had stolen 25 bases in 28 attempts, easily the best percentage of his career.

"I feel good about it," said McGee. "That's what I'm paid to do."

McGee's RBI total was a respectable 33, but he had hit just one homer.

"I don't try to hit homers," McGee said. "Even the years I hit a few I didn't try."

McGee hit 11 homers when he drove in 105 runs last year and he had 10 in 1985, when he won the National League batting title and the Most Valuable Player award.

"I haven't seen that many change-ups and breaking balls up that I could hit for home runs," said McGee. "It's a credit to the pitchers and," he said, laughing, "a lack of power."

McGee raised his average from .296 on May 31 to .324 on June 28. He was the first National Leaguer to get 100 hits—in his first 74 games—and he was on pace to exceed his total of 216 hits in 1985.

Although he drove in more than 100 runs last year, McGee is more comfortable in the role of creating rallies rather than finishing them off.

He credits his baserunning improvement to some off-season work with Bart Williams, a track coach at Contra Costa College, a junior college in Pablo, Calif.

"I worked very hard last winter and it's paid off," said McGee. "This the best that I've ever run on the bases, especially the first



Willie McGee

couple of steps. I'm a little lighter, too. I used to come in at 185 and I'm probably at 178 now."

As for his improvement as a run deliverer, McGee said, "They (RBIs) come in bunches. If I can stay relaxed in those situations, I think the pressure will go off."

RICK HUMMEL

## Replay Leads Ump to 'Moral Issue'

PITTSBURGH—For the first time—and quite by accident—not-so-instant replay was used by umpires in a National League game between the Pittsburgh Pirates and New York Mets June 27 at Three Rivers Stadium.

It all started with a pitch by New York's Dwight Gooden that went behind Jose Lind's head and to the backstop, allowing Rafael Belliard to score from third on what was ruled a wild pitch.

Then the scoreboard showed a replay of what seemed to be anything but a controversial call—except in the replay the ball seemed to strike something and change directions.

For a moment, there was indecision everywhere. Lind didn't act as if he'd been hit by the pitch, and Mets catcher Gary Carter didn't chase it.

"What I saw was the ball go behind the hitter. I did not hear a sound," said plate umpire Paul Runge. "No one said anything. (Carter said he yelled that it was a foul ball.) The runner scored. I looked around and put my mask back on. The play was basically

But Runge began to doubt himself after taking a look at the scoreboard.

"I saw the replay on the screen. At that point, (Mets Manager) Davey Johnson had not come out. I saw the ball hit something," Runge said.

All of a sudden, Runge had a moral issue on his hands. He thought he had blown the call.

"I don't know if I did the right thing baseball-wise," Runge said. "But it became a moral issue. I don't know if I'll be reprimanded or not, but this winter I will know I got the call right."

Johnson saw the replay and appealed to Runge, who said he would check with the other umpires. All said they saw the ball deflect off something, but could not say they saw or heard it hit Lind's bat.

The meeting of umpires lasted five minutes. Runge finally sauntered over to the Pirates' dugout, where Manager Jim Leyland was sitting, calm on the exterior but seething within. He knew as soon as he saw Runge walking his way that the umpires were going to change their ruling and take

away the run.

Leyland argued that they could not change their call because of a replay, which has not been approved for use in baseball.

"We're not playing football. We don't need a team meeting to decide what's right or wrong," Leyland said. "Obviously, he was confused on the play. The umpires admitted they had not seen the ball hit the bat. They said it changed direction. Well, it could have hit Lind's helmet. It could have hit Carter's glove or the bat."

Leyland protested the game, but the protest was dropped when the Pirates won, 2-1.

Runge's concern that he might run into trouble was dismissed by N.L. President Bart Gamatti. "There are no grounds for reprimanding a guy for trying to do his job right," Gamatti said. "My God, I commend him for it."

A bigger question remained: Should baseball use replays to aid umpires?

"I think it takes away from the game. The people want the human element," Runge said.

## Ruffin Has Stuff in Pen

PHILADELPHIA—The qualities that led the Philadelphia Phillies to promote Bruce Ruffin from Double A to the major leagues in 1986 were the same qualities that prompted the club to move the 24-year-old left-hander from the rotation to the bullpen.

Ruffin, who was 4-6 with a 4.08 earned-run average in 14 starts, made his first major league relief appearance June 22 at Veterans Stadium. Three appearances later, he was 1-0 as a reliever with a save and a 1.80 ERA.

"I really like Ruffin in the bullpen," said Manager Lee Elia. "I just think he has the perfect makeup for it. It takes a certain kind of attitude to come into a tight situation, and he's cold. He's not intimidated by anything. And with his sinker-slider combination, he'll get a lot of ground balls. That can be big late in a game."

The Phils purchased Ruffin's contract from Reading (Eastern) on June 24, 1986, and gave him the spot in the starting rotation created when Steve Carlton was released.

Ruffin was 9-4 with a 2.48 ERA as a rookie. But he slipped to 11-

14 with a 4.35 ERA in his sophomore campaign. The idea that he might someday be used in relief was born in spring training.

Elia plans to use Ruffin in the late innings to set up Steve Bedrosian. According to pitching coach Claude Osteen, Ruffin showed better stuff coming out of the bullpen than he did as a starter.

"He's thrown harder than I've ever seen him throw," Osteen said. "As a reliever, he seems to come into the game and give you exactly what you want. And that's go right after the hitter."

"We've already put him in a couple of situations where his back was to the wall, and he came out firing. That's exactly what you want to see."

Although he relieved only three times in 30 minor league games, Ruffin, 24, said adjusting from starting to relieving was no big deal.

"My freshman year in college (Texas), there was never any question but that I was a reliever," he said. "I'm not happy about the move, but I'm not unhappy about it either. If this is the way I can help the club, then so be it."

BILL BROWN

## Sutcliffe on the Block

CHICAGO—Just as in 1984, when he went 16-1 after being traded to the Chicago Cubs, Rick Sutcliffe may be traded to a pennant contender.

General Manager Jim Frey admits he has had inquiries about trading the 32-year-old righthander, who just missed winning his second National League Cy Young Award in 1987, and that several American League teams have shown interest.

"There have been three clubs that have said they want starting pitching," Frey said. "They name some young guy, and I say, 'I don't want to trade the young guys.' They say, 'How about Sutcliffe?' And I say, 'It would not be an easy call because of the way our ball club is.'"

"It would be a big deal, a major deal," said Frey, who said he had not talked to

with the three teams. "It's one of those things where curiosity gets the best of you. But no one has ever come back to me with any real idea of their sincerity."

If the Cubs remain close to the Mets and Pirates in the N.L. East race, Sutcliffe may be more valuable in Chicago than the young players he would bring in return. But Sutcliffe is available because of the development of such young pitchers as Greg Maddux, Jamie Moyer and Jeff Pico.

Although he has a no-trade provision in his contract, which lasts through 1989, Sutcliffe said he would not let that stop a trade.

"I'd rather not be traded, but if trading me would help the Chicago Cubs, I won't stand in the way," he said. "I'll do what's best for them. Truthfully, I can't see this club not being in it."

DAVE VAN DYCK