

Seventy for McGwire. Almost 70 for Sosa. It's

percent increase.

"I think there are probably some new baseball fans who didn't even know what baseball was. Every player in the game should be proud of that," says the man who hit 70.

Seventy. 70. *Setenta*.

An absolutely mind-boggling number of home runs.

Seventy for McGwire. Almost 70 for Sosa. It's as if home runs are being calculated in yen.

Our throats and eardrums are sore. Our necks are whiplashed. We don't remember when an individual achievement so trumped team results. We don't recall two sluggers each having 66 home runs with two games left. We don't recall the Cubs and Giants in a one-game playoff for a postseason berth. We don't recall baseball as fun or captivating.

The '98 regular season is going, going, gone. But we won't forget. Ever.

The facts of the matter are now a part of the record. Mark McGwire hit five home runs in his last three games to finish the 1998 season with 70 and put the final noisy bells and whistles on the most extraordinary two-man performance in the history of baseball.

Now the legend begins.

Now, as the years pass, the stories will grow. McGwire and Sosa and their beyond-belief race to be the Home Run King are now and forever a part of the lore of baseball, as much a part as anything else the game has given us in its 130 years of American life. Did Babe Ruth really call his shot in 1932 in Wrigley Field? Did Roger Maris really lose his hair in 1961? Did Mark McGwire really hit a ball 545 feet in Busch Stadium? Did he really do \$10,000 worth of batting-practice damage to Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix? Did he really hit five home runs in his last 11 at-bats?

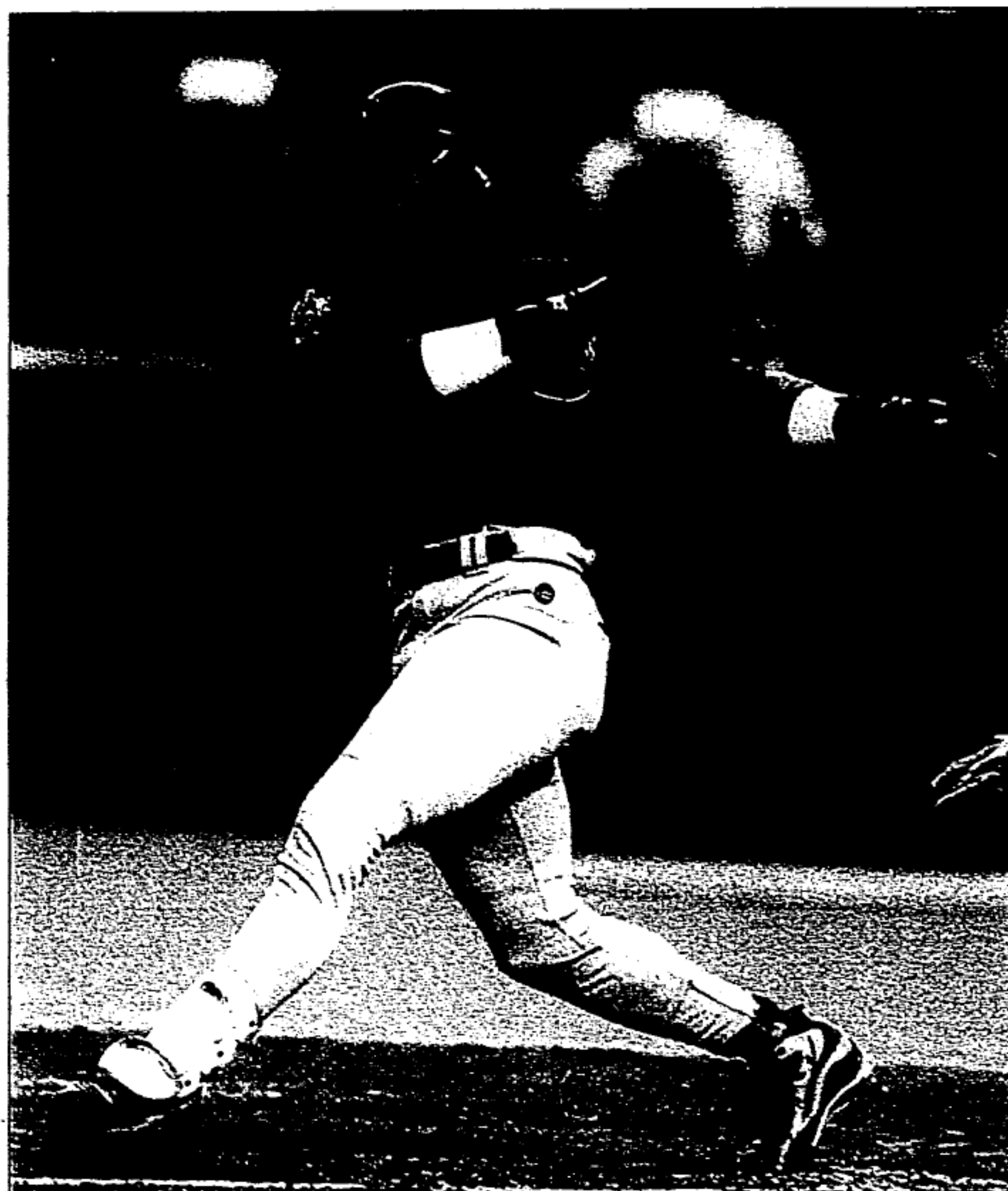
And did McGwire and Sosa really forge a rock-solid friendship and mutual respect for one another across the boundaries of race, nationality and regional Cubs-Cardinals rivalry as the Summer of '98 sweltered on?

This is how myths are made.

"To say the least, I've amazed myself," McGwire said. "I've amazed myself that I have stayed in such a tunnel for so long, through all that I had to deal with—the media and the expectations. Almost every eye in the country was watching me. It just proves to me that I can overcome anything there is to overcome with the strength of my mind."

Sosa, who at the end of a valiant effort to stay with McGwire came up short, is just as amazing. Until this year, he had never hit more than 40 home runs in a single season. But his constant peppering of McGwire's summerlong lead in the major league home run statistics and his *joie de vivre* over his unforeseen success will forever make him a favorite son of his adopted homeland and a national icon in his native Dominican Republic.

"History was rewritten," said Expos manager Felipe Alou, also Dominican, whose team gave up McGwire's final five home runs. "McGwire has to



CHICAGO'S KING OF SWING: Last Friday, Sosa hit his 66th (above), which led the majors for almost an hour. However, Sosa shifted his focus from hitting homers to helping his team with hits. And although he fell behind McGwire, it worked.



be compared with Ruth. And Ruth didn't have the record. But every time people think of long balls now, they think about Ruth. Nobody else is Ruth or McGwire. I feel kind of empty about Sammy Sosa because he provided so many home runs, too. It's been an incredible season."

The final weekend of McGwire's season is one of those photographs for the mind that will grow better with the years. He hit his 66th home run last Friday night to tie Sosa, who had hit his only 45 minutes

earlier. On Saturday, McGwire hit Nos. 67 and 68, the ninth time this season he'd hit more than one home run in a game. And on Sunday, he hammered the last two, including—and this, too, will become part of the lore—the winning home run in his last at-bat of the season, a three-run monster that broke a 3-3 tie with the Expos in the seventh inning.

That last one, the exclamation point on this most remarkable of seasons, came on the first pitch by Carl Pavano, who is 22, a rookie. It rocketed over the left-field fence, just inside the foul pole, 370 feet from home plate.

Said Alou, on the decision to let Pavano pitch to McGwire: "I just left it up to ... whatever. God. I didn't want to tamper with history."

Pavano, then, is this generation's Tracy Stallard (the man who gave up Maris' 61st in '61), if the Cubs' Steve Trachsel didn't take on that yoke when he gave up No. 62 on September 8. But Pavano is young. He's resilient. And he has perspective, the proper perspective.

"I hadn't given up a home run in my last four starts," he said, "and I gave this one up to the best home run hitter in history. I guess if you're going to give up a home run, you can give it up to him. I'm not going to bother looking at it any other way. What he did for baseball this year, and what he accomplished, is unbelievable."

"I watched his interviews to see if he was cocky, to see if he had an attitude about it. But he's genuine. So you can't be anything but happy for him. He's a man about it, and he's genuine. He gives back to the community and things like that. He does everything you'd expect of a really high-profile athlete."

That, we hope, will be the ultimate legend of McGwire and Sosa. For both of them saw their Season of Swats through with more grace and panache than anyone could have desired. Down to the finish. It was a most remarkable weekend. It was a most remarkable year.

Forty-five minutes. Less than a prime-time drama, more than a sitcom, time enough for Sammy Sosa to grab a piece of baseball's most famous record. Let the record show, under the category of home runs, that Sosa was the first to hit 66. He got there before McGwire. For 45 minutes last Friday night, Sosa was alone on Home Run Olympus. Forty-five minutes may not seem like much time, unless your lawyer's meter is running, but in Sosa's case, it bought him immortality.

It was hit off a fellow Dominican and friend, Astros righthander Jose Lima, who in August was speculated to have grooved a pitch for Sosa's 51st home run. Before the game Sosa joked that he had "not gone out lately" with Lima.

A righthander, Lima likes to challenge hitters, which accounts for 34 home runs allowed as well as an unexpectedly fine 16-8 season. In the fourth, he challenged Sosa with a fastball down and in,

as if home runs are being calculated in yen.

and 462 feet later, in the left-field loge, it descended as home run No. 66. The Cubs and Astros were tied at 2, and at that moment, Sosa held the record. A crowd of nearly 52,000 saluted.

Outhomering McGwire was just one of Sosa's concerns last Friday, with both poised at 65. There was the matter of the Cubs fighting for the National League wild-card berth. But McGwire and the Astros were relatively benign adversaries next to Mother Nature.

Hurricane Georges had devastated Sosa's Dominican Republic. On Thursday he took a call from President Leonel Fernandez, who told him to "play your game" as recovery efforts began. Sosa spent Friday morning telephoning family and friends on the island. He decided to set up a relief fund, which he announced to a media gathering late in the afternoon. Sadly and quietly, Sosa spoke of death, homelessness and despair wrought by the storm.

"I have to do everything I can to help my people," he said. "I have to try to find the strength to play a good game tonight."

Home run No. 66, then, was Sosa's gift to his storm-ravaged country, as well as a record-setter. The significance was largely overlooked, in light of subsequent events, including the Cubs' 6-2 loss that created a wild-card tie with the Mets and Giants. Forty-five minutes after Sosa touched home plate, one particular event at Busch Stadium was about to reclaim the spotlight. From the visitors' dugout Sosa glanced up at the large Astrodome screen. McGwire stood in.

While Sosa had the overlay of the hurricane and the Cubs' high-pressure lurch in the direction of a playoff berth to add context to his swings, McGwire's final at-bats were stripped bare of any pretense. Once the Cardinals won Friday night, 6-5, and assured themselves of a regular-season finish above .500, the final team-concept goal standing between McGwire and an unadulterated assault on the Busch Stadium fences disappeared. At least as far as St. Louis manager Tony La Russa was concerned, McGwire was free at that point of any team obligations.

"I'm just trying to think whether to say this or not," La Russa said late Friday. "I'm not speaking for the ownership or the coaches or the front office. But to me, Mark McGwire's home run record is the most important thing over the next two days."

That's one explanation for Saturday's two nuclear blasts—Nos. 67 and 68 traveled a combined 838 feet, and the 435-foot shot in the seventh inning left the building at a speed of 111 mph, according to the scoreboard sign that tracks the speed of pitches. Except that McGwire didn't buy into it. Saturday's swings, he said, were no different than Friday's swings, or early September's swings, or mid-May's swings.

Maybe, then, it was Sosa's 66th homer Friday night, coming as it did 45 minutes earlier, that propelled McGwire into Saturday's two-blast bonanza. That 45-minute stretch on Friday was only the second time McGwire had lost the lead since mid-May. On August 19, Sosa hit his 48th home

run against the Cardinals at Wrigley Field; McGwire caught up 58 minutes later and went back ahead a few innings after that.

Tom Lampkin, the Cardinals' backup catcher who played press secretary as McGwire began to limit his media access in the season's later stages, noticed something different in the big man's demeanor after he hit No. 66.

"It was the expression he got on his face after he tied Sammy on Friday," Lampkin said. "He just came into the dugout and looked at me. He didn't say anything. But it was almost as if he'd just broken



THE UNDISPUTED CHAMPION: McGwire not only smashed the single-season home run record, he set career highs in RBIs and runs scored.

the record again. The feeling that I got from him was, 'OK, I'm relaxed. I don't have anything to worry about now. I'm just going to go out and hit.'"

McGwire, though, never accepted the one-upmanship element as a motivator, either, despite the overwhelming evidence. He matched Sosa with a same-day home run 21 times.

"I don't have an explanation for that," he said. "Some things are meant to be unexplained."

McGwire's No. 66 came at 8:39 p.m. CT on a fastball over the inside half of the plate from righthanded reliever Shayne Bennett. Bennett, incidentally, spent the next afternoon chatting at length in the Expos' bullpen with Cardinals groundskeeper Tim Forneris, the man who retrieved McGwire Home Run Ball No. 62.

They had a common bond. They'd both had their hands on historic baseballs.

Saturday spelled out the difference between McGwire and Sosa between circumstances allowing one to pursue home runs, the other to pursue victories.

The Cubs were locked in a life-and-death duel with Astros righthander Shane Reynolds, trailing, 1-0, in the top of the fifth, when McGwire's 67th home run was announced. Sosa shrugged. Most of the Cubs ignored the news.

Flash forward to a tie game, 1-1, as Sosa came up in the eighth. Falling into an 0-2 hole against Jay Powell, Sosa did something McGwire never considered in the final weekend—he changed his approach. Down the stretch Sosa's pursuit of home runs occasionally had conflicted with team goals. There had been situations when Sosa swung for the fences when a contact swing was called for. This time he shortened his swing.

Sosa singled to center. Then Mark Grace singled, and both came home on Gary Gaetti's double. The Cubs cheered. Sosa and Grace were engulfed as exuberantly as for any home run celebration.

In the top of the ninth, McGwire's 68th was announced. Again, little reaction from the Cubs. Sosa was on deck when Mickey Morandini made the third out. When closer Rod Beck nailed down a tense 3-2 decision, Sosa raced in from right to shake Beck's hand.

"We got a big game tomorrow, that's all I'm thinking about," Sosa said. "I always said McGwire is the man, and I'm saying that now. He'll probably hit two more tomorrow. I hope he hits 70."

"I always said I'm more interested in the wild card, so if that's what it is, I'll take that, and that's a wonderful feeling."

On Sunday, Sosa kept swinging for singles. In the first inning he lashed an RBI single off Mike Hampton for a 1-0 lead. As the Cubs took the field for the top of the third, McGwire's 69th was announced. Sosa and center fielder Lance Johnson exchanged a few words.

"He's going to get 70," Sosa told Johnson.

Between the sixth and seventh innings, McGwire's 70th was announced. Trotting into the dugout, Sosa wagged a clenched fist and clapped.

He would add another single, but Sosa's Sunday almost ended badly, when he misplayed Carl Everett's drive into a triple that turned into the Astros' winning run in extra innings. However, Neifi Perez and the Rockies beat the Giants and put a smile back on Sosa's face. There would be another day, another game.

Later, wearing a Sosa cap with a "66" patch, he congratulated McGwire and repeated his mantra, "Thank you, Mark. You the man." But he would rather be playing for the wild card, Sosa went on, than have 70 home runs. Winning the wild card was driving him. He would swing for a single if the situation required a single.

Will you be remembered in 10 years? he was asked.

Replied Sosa: "Not only in 10 years, 50 years from now."

We'll remember Sosa all right. We'll remember

him for his stunning numbers and for prodding McGwire. We'll never forget him in Busch Stadium on September 8, graciously acknowledging McGwire's 62nd with hugs and his quirky fingers-to-heart salute. We'll remember him for settling for singles when the Cubs had to win.

Sosa the player was magnificent; **Sosa** the man was better. He was everything baseball needed in its summer of joy: agreeable, tactful, even-tempered and compassionate. His deferral to McGwire had just the right combination of respect and coyness. His bilingual fluency enabled millions of Latin American fans to feel closer to the chase.

We'll remember **Sosa** last Saturday night, answering a call from the Dominican consulate in Houston, along with teammates Henry Rodriguez and Manny Alexander, to help load trucks with food and emergency supplies for hurricane victims.

"The consulate asked if I could help," **Sosa** said. "I said, 'I'm there.'"

We don't think the concept of runner-up does justice to **Sosa** in 1998. We like to think of him as MVP. **TSN**

Michael Knisley and Steve Marantz are senior writers for THE SPORTING NEWS.

Memories are made of this

One exhilarating moment after another makes for a truly momentous baseball season.

Right from the start, the baseball gods hinted it could be a one-for-the-books season. Then, with a week remaining in the schedule, they confirmed it.

There was, after all, commotion galore at Yankee Stadium on a Monday in April—but no game was in progress. Then, on the third Sunday of September, a clamor erupted at Camden Yards when a certain player never went to the plate or fielded a ball or took a throw or did anything.

If these strange occurrences—the collapse of a steel joint into empty Yankee Stadium seats and Cal Ripken's decision to take one day of vacation after 16 years of hauling his lunch bucket to the ballyard—were attention-getters, how do you categorize the historical significance of what happened *on the field* from opening day 1998 through last Sunday?

Groping for words? Don't fret. Noah Webster would be, too.



ROB LEVERONE / TSN



ED NESSEN / TSN

GREATNESS: McGwire overshadowed record-setting performances by Rodriguez (left), Clemens (center) and Jeter's Yankees.

Mark McGwire instigated all the wonderful fuss—a real surprise there, eh? Big Mac was given a good chance to break Roger Maris' home run record even before the season started, and then he goes out and hits a grand slam on Day One and slugs a homer in each of the first four games of '98.

Paul Bunyan in cleats becomes the main story—but hardly all of it. **Sammy Sosa** starts slowly, then does the unthinkable and the impossible: He hits 21 homers in 22 games. Juan Gonzalez has 101 RBIs by the All-Star break, for crying out loud. And Barry Bonds, rating nary a mention in the long-ball derby, instead forms the career 400-400 club, a homers/steals fraternity of exactly one.

Then there's that kid pitcher in Chicago, Kerry Wood. He begins the year in Class AAA to get a little seasoning—after one start, he's pronounced seasoned—and then strikes out 20 Astros in his fifth start for the Cubs. San Diego's Trevor Hoffman ties the record for consecutive saves, then Boston's Tom Gordon comes along and breaks it. David Wells pitches a perfect game for the Yankees and, 3½ months later, goes 20 batters deep into a possible sequel. Roger Clemens and Randy Johnson put up post-All-Star-break ERAs that render *minuscule* a poor choice of words. Clemens posts his second consecutive pitching "triple crown"—he leads in victories, ERA and strikeouts. And Dennis Martinez stirs emotions throughout the hemisphere by becoming the winningest Hispanic pitcher in history. All this in the Year of the Home Run.

Ah, the home run. McGwire shatters—no, obliterates—Maris' mark by hitting No. 62 with almost three weeks remaining in the season and

sets off a lovefest that warms baseball hearts pierced by the '90s labor mess and the ugly dismantling of last season's World Series champion Marlins. He finishes with an astonishing 70 homers and no asterisk (although his final figure will seem like a typographical error in the record book). Sosa's dogged pursuit (66 homers entering Monday's wild-card playoff game) and exuberance win him a place in fans' esteem, if not the No. 1 spot in the record book. (The only thing missing: the echo of "Holy Cow!" or "Hey, Hey.")

Ken Griffey Jr. hits 56 homers and winds up starved for attention. Gonzalez falters—if you can call it that—and has 157 RBIs at season's end. **Sosa** got his 158th on Sunday.

Alex Rodriguez becomes the third player to reach 40 homers and 40 stolen bases in one season—and he's only 23. Rickey Henderson leads the majors in steals—and he's 39.

Things are a-happening off the field, too. The game finally installs a commissioner. And 1998 brings the trade of the century—of the decade, anyway—when the Dodgers deal Mike Piazza to Florida. Then Piazza gets traded again. And Johnson, as long rumored, is sent packing by Seattle—but to the Astros, not the suitor-in-waiting Yankees.

Those Yankees hardly need the Big Unit. By August 18, they are 62 games over .500 and threatening the big-league record for victories in one season. Alas, they settle for most wins by an American League team.

Runaway division races are the rule, but that not-so-gimmicky wild-card innovation proves a godsend when the Cubs, Giants and Mets wage a death struggle.

Is there an end to all this? Not for three weeks, anyway—by which time Baseball '98 will have had ample opportunity to add a classic post-season to its can-you-top-this regular season. **TSN**

Sports Travel presents

The Sporting News®

Baseball Road Trip

See a different game!

There isn't an easier way to get to all the great ball parks and exciting ball games you've been planning to see!

Your **Sporting News® Baseball Road Trip** includes admission to ball games, hotel accommodations, transportation to games and between cities, tour host, reception, souvenir, and more!

Experience a different game with an **Umps Eye View™**. An exciting look into big league baseball with an umpire from that day's game!

Sports Travel, Inc. operates **Sporting News®** Road Trips.

starting at \$325

Call for the full 1998 Baseball Road Trip line up!
1-888-876-0107

SPORTS TRAVEL INC.
888-TSN-0107
www.4sportstravel.com/tsn
email: tsn@4sportstravel.com

BASEBALL

Baseball's Newest Media Darling

Mark McGwire Is Amazed, Amused at the Attention

By KIT STIER

OAKLAND—Mark McGwire would prefer to remain the strong, silent type even though he knows his bat probably won't allow that to happen.

That realization flashed before him when the Oakland A's arrived in New York for a series on the final weekend in May. Any 23-year-old rookie who is leading the American League in home runs is bound to attract attention in the Big Apple.

"We went into New York and they told me we were having a press conference," McGwire said. "I thought I'd be standing around with a couple of writers.

"Instead, I walked in and there were almost 30 people there, two cameras and a podium for me. I thought I was receiving some kind of an award. Really, I think all this is pretty funny. I try to laugh at it."

There were no awards for McGwire that day, just a lot of questions. But if the Oakland first baseman keeps hitting home runs the way he did the first two months of the season, he stands a fine chance of succeeding teammate Jose Canseco as the American League Rookie of the Year.

McGwire is polite and tries to accommodate the television, radio and print journalists who are demanding his time.

"I'm trying to take everything in stride," he said. "I understand why they are calling. But to me, it seems like it is so early in the season. There is such a long way to go."

He sees the headlines: "The A's Mark of Excellence," or "McGwire Just an Ordinary Guy" or "A's Big Mac Is Feasting." He is amazed, and amused.

"There are so many great home run hitters in this league," McGwire said. "Look at (Toronto's) George Bell and (Seattle's) Ken Phelps. These home runs have come in a hurry and I haven't played a long season yet."

Many observers are astounded that McGwire already has come so far. It took him 42 games this year to hit 19 homers

With four home runs in April and 15 in May, he just missed tying Mickey Mantle's 1956 major league record of 20 homers in the season's first two months. Mantle's mark might have fallen if McGwire had been an everyday player when the season opened, but he didn't become a regular until April 20, when he had just one home run.

McGwire's 15 homers in May left him one short of Mantle's major league high of 16 homers for that month in '56. The all-time record for homers in any month is 18 by Rudy York of Detroit in August 1937.

McGwire is on a pace that would put him well ahead of the American League and major league rookie records for homers in a season. Al Rosen of the Cleveland Indians hit 37 in 1950 for the A.L. record and Wally Berger of the old Boston Braves set the major league mark with 38 in 1930. That was matched by Frank Robinson of Cincinnati in 1956.

McGwire has opposing managers working extra hours. Lou Piniella of the Yankees saw the 6-5 redhead hit three homers in three games in Oakland May 18-20 and went to the drawing board.

"What do I think of Mark McGwire?" said Piniella. "I'll tell you what I think of him. I spent part of today looking at films of him to see how the hell we're going to pitch him. And I'm going to look at more films tomorrow."

On May 31, McGwire's third day in the series at Yankee Stadium, he put together his third two-homer game of the season. He connected twice with the bases empty off Tommy John.

McGwire's manager, Tony LaRussa, just sits, watches and enjoys the phenomenon.

"He is special in a lot of the ways Canseco is special," said LaRussa. "If you can reach the fences anywhere in the park, that's Reggie (Jackson) kind of power. Now all Mac has to do is go out and show that he can do it consistently."

Consistency is exactly what the 1984 Olympian who attended the University of Southern California is striving to achieve. A's hitting



Middle of the road: Mark McGwire's mental approach to hitting is never to let a poor at-bat or a good at-bat affect him too much.

coach Bob Watson figures that should be no problem.

"The most noticeable thing about him is that he is a big man with a compact swing," Watson said.

One thing not so noticeable is McGwire's mental approach. He never lets a poor at-bat or a good at-bat affect him too much.

Maintaining good work habits is

one reason that McGwire, at times, must put the brakes on the media blitz.

As long as it's time that doesn't interfere with his baseball work, McGwire will grant interviews.

"I like to get (to the park) early, kick back and relax," McGwire said. "I don't like to rush."

The A's public relations department has been tracking McGwire's progress in comparison with Babe Ruth's 60-homer season of 1927 and Roger Maris' 61-homer year in 1961. The daily updates, which appear in the A's press notes, haven't made it easy for McGwire as he tries to find time for his game preparation.

"This is all a surprise to me," he said as teammates, playing on his many nicknames, passed by with greetings such as "Hey, Big Mac" or "What's happenin', Quarter Pounder?" or "Hello, Carrot Top" or "Giving another interview, Agent Orange?"

It is a surprise because McGwire, a righthanded batter, was supposed to share playing time at first base with Rob Nelson, a lefthanded-hitting power prospect, when the season began. But Nelson struck out in 12 of his

Top Rookie Sluggers

Leading rookie sluggers in major league baseball

Player, Year	HR	RBI	Avg.
Dale Alexander, Det., 1929	25	137	.343
Fred Lynn, Boston, 1975	21	105	.331
Hal Trosky, Clev., 1934	35	142	.330
John Mize, St. L.-N., 1936	19	93	.329
Ted Williams, Boston, 1941	31	145	.327
Joe DiMaggio, N.Y., 1936	29	125	.323
Tony Oliva, Minn., 1964	32	94	.323
Walt Droop, Boston, 1950	34	144	.322
Richie Allen, Phil., 1964	29	91	.318
Wally Berger, Bos.-N., 1930	38	119	.310
Jim Rice, Boston, 1975	22	102	.309
Rudy York, Det., 1937	35	103	.307
Frank Robinson, Cin., 1956	38	83	.290
Wally Joyner, Cal., 1986	22	100	.290
Al Rosen, Clev., 1950	37	116	.287
Jim Ray Hart, S.F., 1964	31	81	.286
Bob Allison, Wash., 1959	30	85	.261
Jimmie Hall, Minn., 1963	33	80	.260
Earl Williams, Atl., 1971	33	97	.260
W. Montanez, Phil., 1971	30	99	.255
Ron Kittle, Chi.-A., 1983	35	100	.254
Jose Canseco, Oak., 1986	33	117	.240
Mark McGwire, Oak., '87	20	42	.263

*Through games of June 14

first 24 at-bats and was optioned to Tacoma (Pacific Coast) on April 20. From that day on, McGwire has been Oakland's main man at first base and the newest media darling in baseball.

First signs that the kid was something special showed in a three-game series in Detroit May 8-10. In three games at Tiger Stadium, he homered five times and drove in seven runs.

The Tigers are probably wondering why they didn't draft McGwire. He homered in Detroit when the Olympic team played an exhibition game there in 1984 and he hit his first major league homer at Tiger Stadium—a 440-foot blast to dead center field last September. In five games at Tiger Stadium in the big leagues, all six of his hits have been homers.

In 25 games in May, McGwire hit .275 with the 15 homers and 24 runs batted in. His slugging percentage was .813.

Among his first 49 hits, through June 14, he had 20 homers, 22 singles, five doubles and two triples. That bothered him in a way.

In fact, he was elated to drive in two runs with singles in a two-game sweep of the Blue Jays May 16-17 in Toronto.

"You've got to mix in a single once in a while," said McGwire. He was hitting .253 (43 for 170) through June 8 and was hoping to lift his batting average.

That McGwire is batting at all is largely the result of the sharp eye of Ron Vaughn, his hitting coach at USC. McGwire started his college career as a pitcher and USC coach Rod Dedeaux, now retired, wanted him to stay that way.

Dedeaux was not overjoyed when Vaughn made a hitter out of McGwire during Alaskan Summer League play in 1982.

"That was the first year I took hitting seriously," McGwire recalled of the season in which he won a batting title with a .384 average while playing for the Anchorage Glacier Pilots, who finished second in the National Baseball Congress tournament. "Ron is the guy who took me and turned me into a hitter. He probably knows (Continued on Page 12, Column 1)

Buying Groceries for the Mac

NEW YORK—When pitcher Tommy John was traded by the New York Yankees to the Oakland A's August 18, 1982, he needed a coach.



Tommy John

BASEBALL

Almost a Quitter Once, Lee Smith Finishes Now

And You Can Credit Billy Williams With the Save

By JOE GODDARD

CHICAGO—Billy Williams had to talk Lee Smith out of quitting baseball in 1979.

How ironic! Williams himself had to be talked out of quitting the Chicago Cubs' organization in 1959 by scout Buck O'Neil. Williams will be inducted into the Hall of Fame in July.

Credit O'Neil with a save.

Smith is on a pace to challenge Rollie Fingers as the game's all-time savior. If he succeeds, he'll probably make his way to Cooperstown, too.

So credit Williams with a save.

"My bags were packed," Smith said of his decision to quit when Manager Randy Hundley dropped him from the Midland (Texas) rotation in favor of Jeff Ledbetter.

"I was going to hang up 'em up for basketball," Smith recalled. "That was my real love—basketball. But they sent Billy down to talk to me, and he talked sense. I'll never forget it. He said, 'You can't get moved up because you haven't done anything to deserve it. You don't have any numbers. Where are your numbers?'"

Williams not only recalls the conversation, but where it took place.

"Lee, his wife (Diane) and I were riding back to a hotel in a '51 Chevy," he recalled. "We were all crammed together in the front because the back was all rusted out. It was rotten, is what it was."

"I knew he wasn't happy. I just didn't know how serious he was. I said, 'When you show people you're better than Double A, you'll get moved up. But you haven't shown anybody. You think they're going to move you up with those numbers?'"

Williams was right. The Cubs weren't going to promote Smith until his earned-run average dropped. The 6-6, 245-pounder was headed for a 4.93 ERA that season. He had posted a 5.98 ERA the previous year and a 4.29 ERA for Pompano Beach (Florida State) in 1977.

But Hundley, responding to the Cubs' demand to move Ledbetter into the rotation, did Smith a favor: He found relief in relief. With a fastball that had been faster than 90 mph since he matured physical-

ly, Smith had the pitch he needed to reach the big leagues. The rest was mental maturity.

"I think our talk ticked him off," Williams said. "I mean, here was a guy who spent the afternoons playing basketball with (teammate) Eric Grandy when he should have been concentrating on baseball. His heart wasn't in it; that was plain to see. He had to make a decision. He also had to understand where Hundley was coming from. Randy had Ron Davis there and guys like Ledbetter, Herm Segelke. They were going to be the Cubs' future. He had to get them ready. If Smitty was going to make it, he would have to prove it."

"It was time for him to decide on his livelihood. It was time for him to find out what he could do."

Smith found he could operate effectively out of the bullpen. And when the Cubs traded Bruce Sutter to St. Louis at the end of the 1980 season, Smith saw light—for the first time—at the end of the tunnel.

"I thought I'd be moved up, and I was," Smith said. "Donnie Moore was already gone (to St. Louis), but they still had Dick Tidrow for relief, and Bill Caudill, Willie Hernandez. I thought, 'How am I going to pitch with these guys here?'"

He didn't. He made the team in 1981, but was being used only for mop-up work when the players' strike began.

"I was just beginning to feel good about myself when that happened," Smith said. "I had to get me a part-time job fixing driveways and stuff in Louisiana for \$2.65 an hour. I

was thinking again about basketball when my dad called. He's real superstitious, and that day he'd seen a black cat cross from the left side of the road to the right. That's supposed to be good luck. 'Don't do anything yet,' Dad said. 'Your luck is about to change.'

"And you know, it was. Three hours later, (Cubs executive) C.V. Davis called, and said, 'Come on back. We're going to play.'"

That wasn't the end of Smith's confusion, however. The next year, 1982, was the Cubs' first under Tribune ownership. Lee Elia was the manager, and he was strapped for starters. He had aging Ferguson Jenkins and fading Chuck Rainey and Doug Bird. He needed Smith.

"One day I'd pick up a save. Two days later I'd be starting," Smith said. "The same thing was happening to me that had happened to Willie (Hernandez) and Caudill. Willie got all mixed up in '80, ended up 1-9 and had to go back to Iowa (American Association) the next year. Caudill was 1-7 in '79. They didn't know what they were doing. And, now, neither did I."

Starting was only temporary—and mostly on an emergency basis. Elia and Smith's next managers, Jim Frey and current pilot Gene Michael, have kept Smith in his rightful place.

"Dallas Green was the first to figure it out," Smith said of the Cubs' president and general manager. "He said, 'Hey, if two innings is all he's got, it's better to get 'em at the end of a game than the beginning.'"

The Fast Ball Was Better Than the Jump Shot

CHICAGO—Lee Smith knows it now. His heart may have been in basketball when he starred for Northwestern State (La.), but not his knees. They wouldn't have lasted if he had played in the National Basketball Association instead of the National League.

"I think I could have played in the NBA," said Smith, the Chicago Cubs' ace relief pitcher. "I had a couple of tryouts with the Jazz when they were in New Orleans. But the team doctor told me even if I did make it, I'd probably only play two years tops."

"I figured one in the hand was better than two in the bush, so I chose baseball. Besides, I always thought I had a better fastball than a jump shot."

Smith, however, always will wonder about basketball. He averaged 32 points and 18 rebounds his senior year at Castor (La.) High.

At Northwestern Louisiana, he was a defensive specialist.

"I only weighed about 186 pounds then," said Smith, who now weighs more than 240. "One season I averaged 10.9 points and

10.8 rebounds. I was pretty proud of that."

He also was proud of head-to-head competition with future NBA standouts Robert Parish, Purvis Short and Calvin Natt.

"I did pretty good against Natt, but his team had identical twins that killed us," Smith recalled.

If Smith was an NBA player, he'd want to be like Charles Barkley or Moses Malone.

"I like the way they play," he said. "Moses, he takes no prisoners. I like that kind of action."

JOE GODDARD



A onetime starter in the minor leagues, Lee Smith found relief in relief.

By June 6, when Smith recorded his 14th save of the season and the 158th of his career, he already ranked 13th on the all-time list.

He's years away from Fingers' record of 341, but Smith is only 29. Smith saved 31 games last year, when he became the first National League pitcher to save 30 three years in a row. Ironically, the only year he has led the league was in 1983, when he saved 29.

Fingers' record certainly plays a more prominent role in Smith's future than basketball.

Cubs pitching coach Herm Starrette, who said he has never had a "relief horse" like Smith, is cutting down Smith's innings.

"Smitty had to pitch a lot of innings last year because we couldn't get our starters that far along and

we couldn't get Smitty the lead," Starrette said, recalling the Cubs' 70-90 record.

"I like to bring him in now without having to face the tying run if I can help it," Starrette added. "That way, if the first hitter gets on, I've still got him facing the tying run. He's a better pitcher that way. I can get more out of him than with three-inning stints. Three-inning stints kill a good reliever, power pitchers especially. Trick pitchers, like a knuckleballer, are different."

Smith hasn't forgotten his previous pitching coach, Billy Connors, who had him junk the curve by saying, "If you want to put cattle on your farm, throw your fastball." He also taught Smith a slider to go with his fabulous fastball.

Starrette constantly monitors Smith's slider.

"Sometimes he throws it like he's turning a doorknob," he said. "That's no good."

He also reminds Smith to get off his back heel, to push off more on the ball of his foot.

"Otherwise, there's not much I have to tell Smitty," Starrette said. "He has a good, sound delivery, and he knows the hitters. I pretty much leave him alone."

Just think where Smith would be if Williams had left him alone in Midland in 1979.

"If I hadn't been a high draft choice," said Smith, a second-round pick in 1975, "I probably would have been gone before Billy got there."

McGWIRE

(Continued From Page 10)

more about my swing than anybody, even better than I do

"Rod wasn't too happy that I was turned into a first baseman. He wanted me to pitch."

However, Dedeaux shared one of the loves of former Baltimore manager Earl Weaver—the three-run homer. Dedeaux didn't complain when McGwire hit 31 homers in the spring of 1984, his final season with the Trojans, and set a USC career record with 54 homers.

"I think he's still a major league prospect as a pitcher," Dedeaux said. "But with that bat in his

hands, he's awesome."

And Dedeaux knows a thing about power hitters, having coached Dave Kingman, Fred Lynn and Steve Kemp at USC.

Former opponents have noticed a change in McGwire since his collegiate days.

"He's not the same hitter," said Baltimore rookie Jay Ballard, a former Stanford pitcher who was victimized by a McGwire homer on May 24. "He's a lot bigger now and he is swinging the bat a lot better. He still has a nice swing, he has always had that."

The swing may be due in part to McGwire's father, John, a Pomona, Calif., dentist and an avid golfer.

Mark's size, or at least his 225 pounds, is proof that his mother is a heckuva cook.

McGwire is the second of five children—all boys and all scale busters at 200 pounds plus. Brother Danny, 18, is a quarterback at the University of Iowa.

John McGwire had his sons on the golf course as tots. At one time, Mark even contemplated a golf career.

And, oh, that cooking.

"It is funny to look back and think of the number of meals my mom had to cook," McGwire said. "She had to double and triple recipes. She had to go to the store twice a week and it cost her a cou-

ple of hundred dollars each time she went."

As fast as Ginger McGwire would put food out, the boys would gobble it up. It must be kind of lonely now with only 17-year-old J.J. at the dinner table.

"Now it's a breeze with only one kid at home," said McGwire. "But J.J. still eats like a horse."

McGwire's size and athletic ability prompted the A's to make him their No. 1 draft choice in June 1984. And he has turned the soft weight he carried as a collegian into hard muscle through weight training, making him an even more imposing figure.

The New York Mets had consid-

ered taking McGwire in '84, but opted for Shawn Abner. New Yorkers now are wondering if the Mets might not have made two mistakes in the A's favor.

Back in June 1966, the Mets made Steve Chilcott, a 17-year-old catcher from Calabria, Calif., the No. 1 pick in the entire draft. The A's, who resided in Kansas City back then, had the No. 2 selection and took an Arizona State outfielder named Reggie Jackson.

There is one difference in the '66 and '84 drafts, though. No one ever accused Reggie Jackson of being at a loss for words, the way McGwire has been during his whirlwind arrival in the majors.

BASEBALL

Breakup Doesn't Hurt McGwire's Play

PHOENIX—Mark McGwire doesn't linger on the subject of his divorce. He admits to it, then prefers to talk about other things. **McGwire** did say that the breakup of his marriage had no effect on his work at first base for the Oakland A's last season.

Mark and **Kathy McGwire** are in the final stages of divorce proceedings that began last year. The A's slugger gave Manager Tony LaRussa a lot of credit for helping him get through the difficult summer of 1988.

"It wasn't distracting," said **McGwire**. "I had a talk with Tony and I asked him to watch me very carefully. He complimented me for my ability to separate my life off the field from my life on the field."

Rumors that McGwire's marriage was in trouble circulated in the A's clubhouse through most of last season. The couple tried several times to work out problems, but finally sought a divorce.

"It's done," said the 1987 American League Rookie of the Year. "I got the divorce. Kathy and I are very good friends and we have a beautiful child. We're going to see each other the rest of our lives because we have Matthew."

The McGwires' son was born at the end of the 1987 season. **Mark**, who had already amassed 49 home runs, most ever by a rookie, passed up a chance to reach the half-century mark when he left the team before the final game of the season to be with Kathy during Matthew's birth.

"I love my kid to death," **Mark** said. "We're going to make it a positive thing where he can grow up in two households."

LaRussa said he was impressed with the way **McGwire** handled himself while dealing with his personal problems.

"**Mark McGwire** has shown in his first years that he is amazing," said LaRussa. "He's one of the amazing A's; he's just a strong



Mark McGwire

guy mentally."

LaRussa didn't take any credit for helping **McGwire** through a difficult '88 season.

"All of what he did, he did because he handled himself very well," said the manager.

Those who suggest that **McGwire** didn't have such a great second season should take another look at the bottom line. McGwire's .289 batting average, 49 homers and 118 runs batted in as a freshman left him with a tough act to follow. No longer a new face to pitchers, **McGwire** batted .260 with 32 homers and 99 RBIs last year.

"When you look at consistent run production, he had a great year," said LaRussa.

McGwire refuses to make ex-

cuses for his output in 1988.

"I think I had a pretty darn good year," he said. "I was third in the league in home runs, in the top eight in runs batted in and second in the league in game-winning RBIs (with 20).

"I think people looked at me more for what I didn't do compared to 1987. I don't think that's fair."

There were also those who found **McGwire** to be more standoffish in his second year than in '87, when he tried to satisfy all interview requests. **McGwire** was available last season, but on his own terms. All he asked for was time alone, to prepare for a game that is demanding both physically and mentally.

"I didn't want to do anything unless it was scheduled before a game," **McGwire** said. "I did so much in 1987 that I had to stop in 1988 and get ready for games."

The 6-5 redhead also limited the time he spend at card shows and other engagements in the off-season, instead devoting most of the winter to preparation for '89.

"I wanted to stay at home; I didn't want to be away from my son that long," **McGwire** said. "We do so much traveling all year long, the last thing I wanted to do was fly back East."

McGwire, whose '89 contract will pay \$425,000, with another \$75,000 possible in bonuses, said he hopes to improve this season.

"There is always room for improvement, definitely as a hitter," he said. "My first year I hit more balls to right center and I didn't do that last year as consistently."

And **McGwire** said he would just as soon stay out of the spotlight, adding that he was happy last year when Jose Canseco drew most of the attention by putting together an MVP season.

"With the team doing well and (with) Jose, it took a lot of the media attention away from me," said **McGwire**, "which I enjoyed."

KIT STIER

Parrish Up to Challenge

MESA, Ariz.—Another catcher, perhaps a younger player, might not be so eager to replace ageless wonder Bob Boone, who left the California Angels in the off-season. But Lance Parrish, who has the unenviable task of filling Boone's shoes, won't mind whatever comparisons may be made.

"Look at it this way: Bob Boone was probably one of the greatest catchers in the game, and the Angels still were under .500 the last two years," Parrish said. "I don't think you're going to see a drop-off. I've proven over the years what I'm capable of doing."

But little of that proof came during the 12-year veteran's two seasons in the National League, with Philadelphia in 1987 and '88.

Derailed by the transition from the American League, where he spent 10 years with the Tigers, and bothered by miscommunication with the pitching staff and fan criticism, Parrish posted a .230 average with 32 homers and 127 runs batted in in his two seasons with the Phillies. Those numbers hardly matched Parrish's record as a perennial All-Star in Detroit.

Unhappy in Philadelphia, Parrish was sent to the Angels for minor league pitcher David Holdridge in October. Even if he hadn't been traded, Parrish most likely would have left the Phillies via new-look free agency, the same route that Boone took to Kansas City.

"It was either here or back to Detroit," said Parrish. "But if it was the Tigers, it would've meant again packing up my family (already settled in Yorba Linda, a suburb of Anaheim). It was just so much easier this way."

Parrish appeared headed to



Lance Parrish

the Angels after the 1986 season. Then the owners' collusion restrained free-agent movement. At the time, however, the Angels claimed that it was Parrish's lower-back problems that kept them from signing him.

"That was a very convenient excuse for a lot of teams," Parrish said. "It started with the Tigers making an issue out of the back to hold down my salary."

"It's a problem I'll have to face my whole career, but I know how to handle it. I just have to keep doing my therapy."

Although back problems may prevent Parrish from matching Boone's standards defensively, he does not have a peer among catchers when it comes to offense. In nine full seasons with the Tigers, he averaged 24 home runs and 78 RBIs.

"I feel like I'm very capable of getting back to my previous numbers," he said. "You can't have a career year every time out. But I know what I'm capable of accomplishing."

TOM SINGER

Incaviglia Hopes to Cut Down on KOs

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla.—Pete Incaviglia's winter tutorial with Manager Bobby Valentine paid off in the early days of the Texas Rangers' exhibition season. It took him 10 plate appearances before his first whiff of the spring.

For Incaviglia, that's progress. After all, the outfielder has averaged one strikeout for every 3.2 plate appearances in his three-year career.

"That's what I'm striving for, to cut down on my strikeouts," Incaviglia said. "Right now I'm doing something new, trying to make more contact, and it's just a matter of getting my timing down."

This winter, Valentine worked with Incaviglia on shortening his stride into the pitch. Valentine said Incaviglia had taken about 20 inches off his stride, cutting it by more than half by going from 36 inches to about 16.

"It's going to keep his head still and get his bat through the zone quicker," Valentine said. "He's



Pete Incaviglia

going to be able to see the bad pitches sooner."

In an exhibition game against Detroit early in the spring, Incaviglia singled to right field on a pitch from Doyle Alexander that was high and inside.

"He has swung through that pitch 1,000 times," Valentine said. "He got a base hit on it today."

Incaviglia recognizes the need to cut down on his strikeouts.

With 153 in 418 at-bats last year, he shared the American League dunce cap with Milwaukee's Rob Deer. Moreover, his 116 games were the fewest played by an A.L. strikeout leader since Pat Seerey struck out 102 times in 105 games in 1948.

In addition to decreasing his strikeout total, Incaviglia has set other goals.

"I'm trying to be shorter and quicker. My goal is to hit .300 and drive in 100 runs," he said. "If I do that, I'll probably hit 30 to 40 homers. That will make a big difference in the win-loss column. I'll help the ball club more by doing that than by hitting 45 homers and hitting .250."

Incaviglia also hopes to walk more.

"It's important to the team that I get close to 80 or 100 walks," he said. "Then if I can cut my strikeouts down from 160, to 90 or 100, it's going to make a difference in the win-loss column."

PHIL ROGERS

Sox Want Pitching Strike

SARASOTA, Fla.—Sammy Ellis wants his pitchers to go on strike. The new pitching coach for the Chicago White Sox is preaching strikes, especially with the first pitch.

Ellis wants the first pitch to every batter to be a strike. He would like it to be a quality strike, but that isn't important, as long as it's a strike.

Ellis has even compiled computerized data to help his pitchers see how greatly first-pitch success affects the outcome of an at-bat.

Statistics from the 1988 season show that batters have a .214 average when the first pitch is a strike, while they have a .301 average when the first pitch is a ball. The on-base percentage of batters who are thrown a strike on the first pitch is .052.

"Your chances of giving up a hit if your first pitch is a strike are slim," said Ellis. "And I'm sure guys with great stuff have even better statistics than those."

In every meeting with his pitchers, Ellis stresses the point, especially to the youngsters. He notes that last season, only four teams in the league gave up more than the 533 walks allowed by the White Sox.

"We're trying to eliminate their fear of throwing a first-pitch strike," Ellis said. "We tell them that if they get their brains beat out, make it early in the count and not late in the count when you have to throw strikes."

"We know in the long run they'll be ahead of the game. And everyone knows the defense is better and more alert if you throw strikes."

The idea is being stressed throughout the organization.

"Only guys who throw strikes will pitch for the White Sox," Ellis said. "We're not going to call up any guys who can't throw strikes."

Ellis doesn't even mind that opposing teams will read about his intention to make his pitchers open with strikes.

"I don't care if they know it," Ellis said. "I wish every writer in the nation would write about it. They'll all know it after we go around the league once anyway."

Ellis thinks the statistics will hold, even if the opposing hitters know when a strike is on the way.

"Don't forget," he said, "it could be a curveball. We don't care what pitch he throws, as long as it's a strike."

DAVE VAN DYCK

CLEOUIE

Not only has **Mark McGwire** brought baseball back to life with the quantity—and quality—of his home runs, but his phenomenon has a Ruthian feel that surely will stand the test of time, too *By Michael Knisley*

As if the mesmerizing magic of Mark McGwire, which already is baseball's feel-good story of the summer, needed an extra flourish, there was the irrepressible Stan Musial last Saturday afternoon to throw out the first pitch in Busch Stadium. And wouldn't you know it? After his ceremonial heave to the plate, Stan the 77-year-old Man, still a boy at heart, whipped out his trusty harmonica and treated another sellout St. Louis crowd to a virtuoso rendition of *Take Me Out to the Ballgame*.

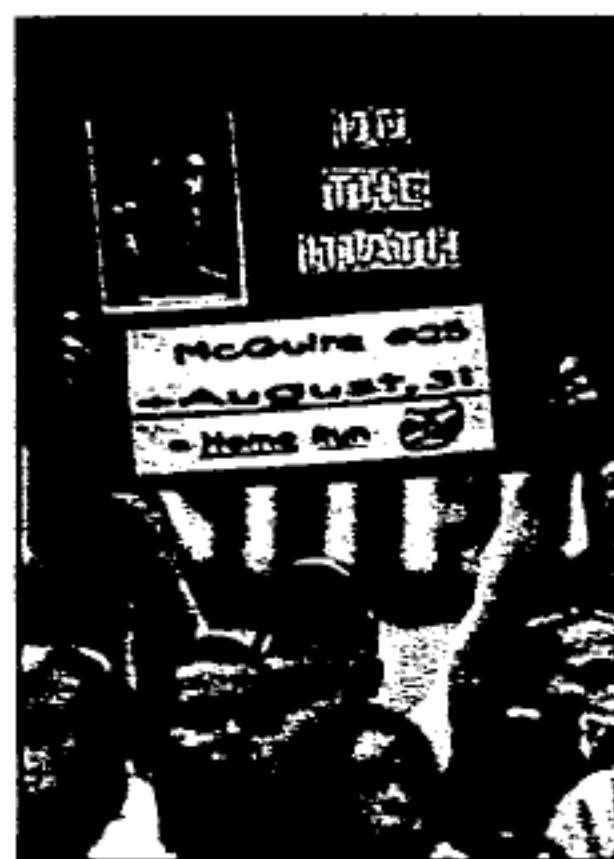
Some 20 minutes later, McGwire joined Musial as a bona fide legend of the game. In the bottom of the first inning, McGwire hit his 60th home run of the season, a two-run, 381-foot sky hook to left field off the Reds' young lefthander, Dennis Reyes. That tied him, of course, with the Babe, the last word in baseball legends who hit 60 home runs in 1927, and it left him one shy of Roger Maris' 1961 all-time season record.

Thanks to the scene in St. Louis last weekend, and settings just like it wherever McGwire and the Cubs' Sammy Sosa play these days, baseball is blooming, and booming, in full, loud color. Not since September 6, 1995, when Cal Ripken Jr., broke Lou Gehrig's record for consecutive games played, has the game had a happier time. And even Ripken's remarkable moment didn't generate the enthralling grip on a hemisphere of baseball fans, Canada to the Caribbean, that the home runs hit by McGwire and Sosa, the Dominican darling (page 60), have this summer.

The old ballgame is in pretty good shape. And lest you suspect hyperbole in any of those brazen statements, chew on a quick, if apocryphal, illustration from Tolland, Conn., a far remove from the baseball breadbaskets of St. Louis and Chicago. Late last week in Tolland, three police officers were wounded in a shootout. As the most seriously injured of them came out of surgery in a local hospital, this reportedly was his first question: "Did McGwire hit one?"

True or not, that query, or a similar one that substitutes Sosa's name, is being asked in hospitals, in coffee shops, on subways and around water coolers across the Americas every morning these days.

"It is unbelievable," McGwire says. "I play this



PHOTOS BY BOB LEVERONE / TSN

game, and it just turns out that it happens to be America's pastime. What is happening right now with myself and Sosa and (Ken) Griffey has brought baseball back on the map. If you want to say it has brought America together, it has. So be it."

On Friday and Sunday, the answer to a continent's question was: No. McGwire didn't hit one. He was 0-for-3 with a walk in both games. Even with those two oh-fers, McGwire hit homers in four of seven games last week. He hit one against Atlanta on Sunday, August 30. Then two against Florida on Tuesday, September 1. Two more, again against the Marlins, on Wednesday. And the Ruth-tying 60th against Cincinnati on Saturday.

That's six monster home runs in a record rush of a week, which from Sunday through Saturday included 21 official at-bats for McGwire. The average major leaguer, as a point of reference, hits one home run in every 36 at-bats. Over the course of this record season, McGwire has averaged a home run in every 7.4 at-bats. And last

week, it took him only 3.5 at-bats, on average, to hit one out of the park.

Already, McGwire has hit more home runs in one season than any other righthanded hitter in history, and he became the only player to produce three consecutive years with 50 or more home runs when he hit his 50th way back on August 20. By the time you've opened this magazine, he quite likely will have tied or surpassed the Maris mark of 61 and moved closer to yet another landmark, if under-publicized, record: Joe Bauman's 72 home runs for Roswell, N.M., in the Longhorn League in 1954, which is the most hit in a single season at any level of organized baseball (TSN, September 7).

McGwire, at 34, somehow seems larger than life even as we watch him in the here and now. That phenomenon grows partly out of his imposing physical presence (6-5, 250 pounds) and partly out of the prodigious distance and hang time of his home runs. The shortest—the *shortest!*—of his six home runs last week was the 381-foot moonshot deep into Busch Stadium's left field stands off a cut fastball on a 2-0 count from an overmatched Reyes, 21, who was making his 15th major league start on Saturday.

"It wasn't a bad pitch," Reyes said. "If he's going to get me, he's going to get me with my best pitch."

In fact, it wasn't a very good pitch. It moved back toward the center of the plate instead of staying on the outside corner, which is where Reds catcher Brook Fordyce wanted it.

"It was right in his happy zone," Fordyce said.

That happens, obviously, to a lot of pitches McGwire sees—enough now that, as time goes by, McGwire's legend surely will grow in a parallel line to the myths that make Ruth, the Sultan of Swat, baseball's most fabled player. Maris' legacy didn't evolve that way; so although it is Maris' record that McGwire breaks this year, the Cardinals' big first baseman has more in common with the man whose mark he tied last Saturday with No. 60.

Ruth, simply, *was* baseball, or a god of baseball, to generations of Americans. When Maris hit 61 home runs in 1961, he humanized the Ruth record, made it mortal, which arguably is one of

the reasons his feat didn't meet with the universal public acceptance that Ruth's had. McGwire, despite last month's hand-wringing over his use of the dietary supplement androstenedione, seems to be pushing the home run record back into the neighborhood of the gods.

"This is the moon landing we're watching," says former Cardinal Mike Shannon, who broadcasts St. Louis games on the radio with Hall of Fame announcer Jack Buck. "This is a brand new Ford automobile being invented. And because of the electronic media today, there are more people aware of it. They all want to see a piece of history. They're seeing Magellan."

A few more numbers are in order, for the proper perspective. Maris' 61st home run came in his team's 163rd game (counting a rainout makeup) in 1961, on the last day of the season. That saddled him, temporarily, with a separate entry in the record book, since Ruth's previous single-season record of 60 home runs had come in a 154-game season.

McGwire's 60th home run on Saturday happened in the Cardinals' 142nd game. There will be no talk of separate entries.

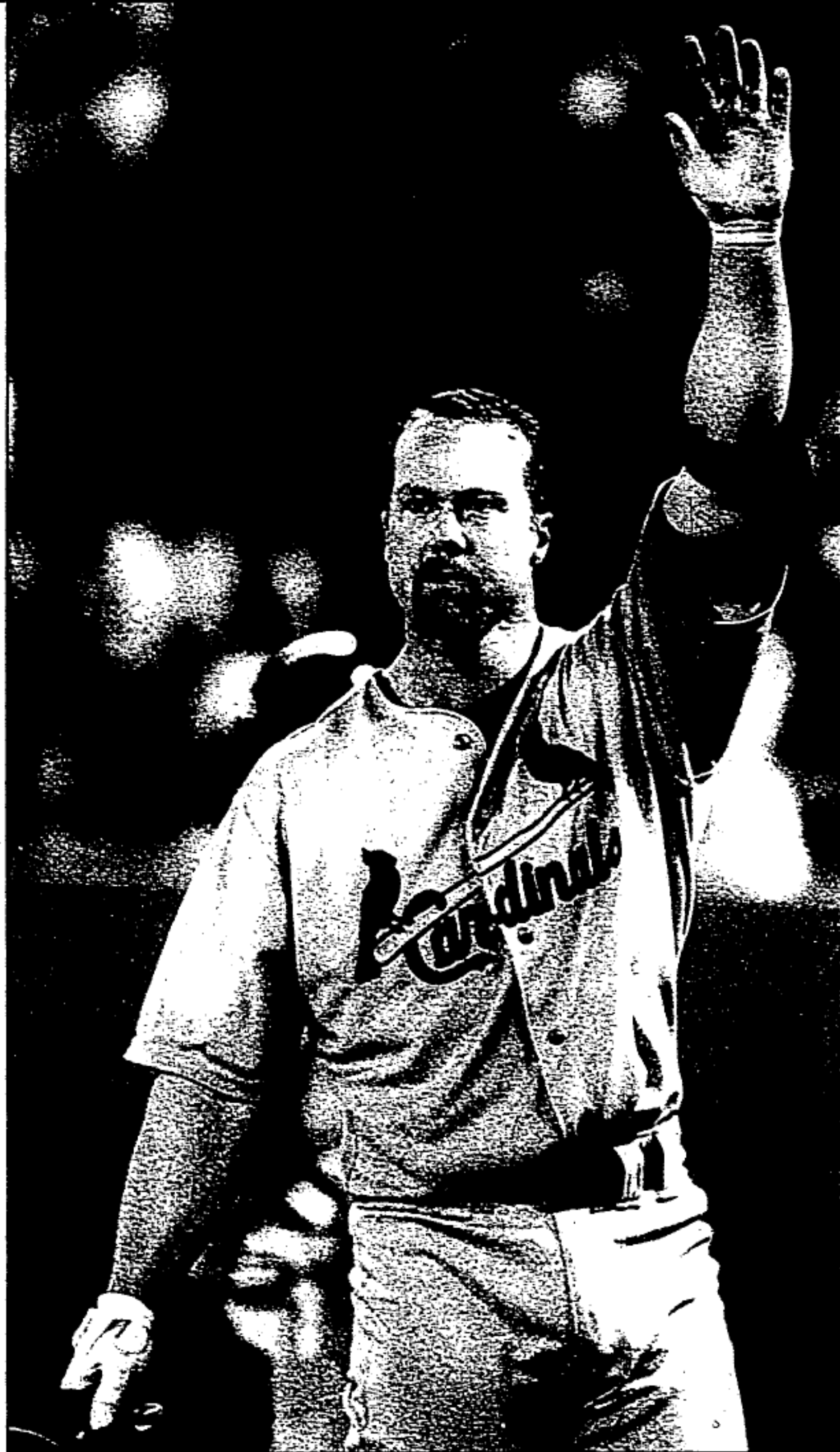
"Babe Ruth ... what can you say?" McGwire says. "You're almost speechless when people put your name alongside his name. I wish I could go back in time and meet him. I mean, it's really tough to say. Obviously, he was the most important sports figure in the world of that time. Hopefully, someday when I pass away, I'll get to meet him, and then I can really, truly find out what he was really like."

Perhaps one of the reasons baseball seems to have come to life during the advance on the home run record is the ease with which fans connect to the game's history at moments such as these. Ruth and Maris, for instance, are getting as much publicity these days as McGwire and Sosa, a phenomenon that occurred in '95, too, when Ripken's 2,131st consecutive game brought Gehrig back into the public eye.

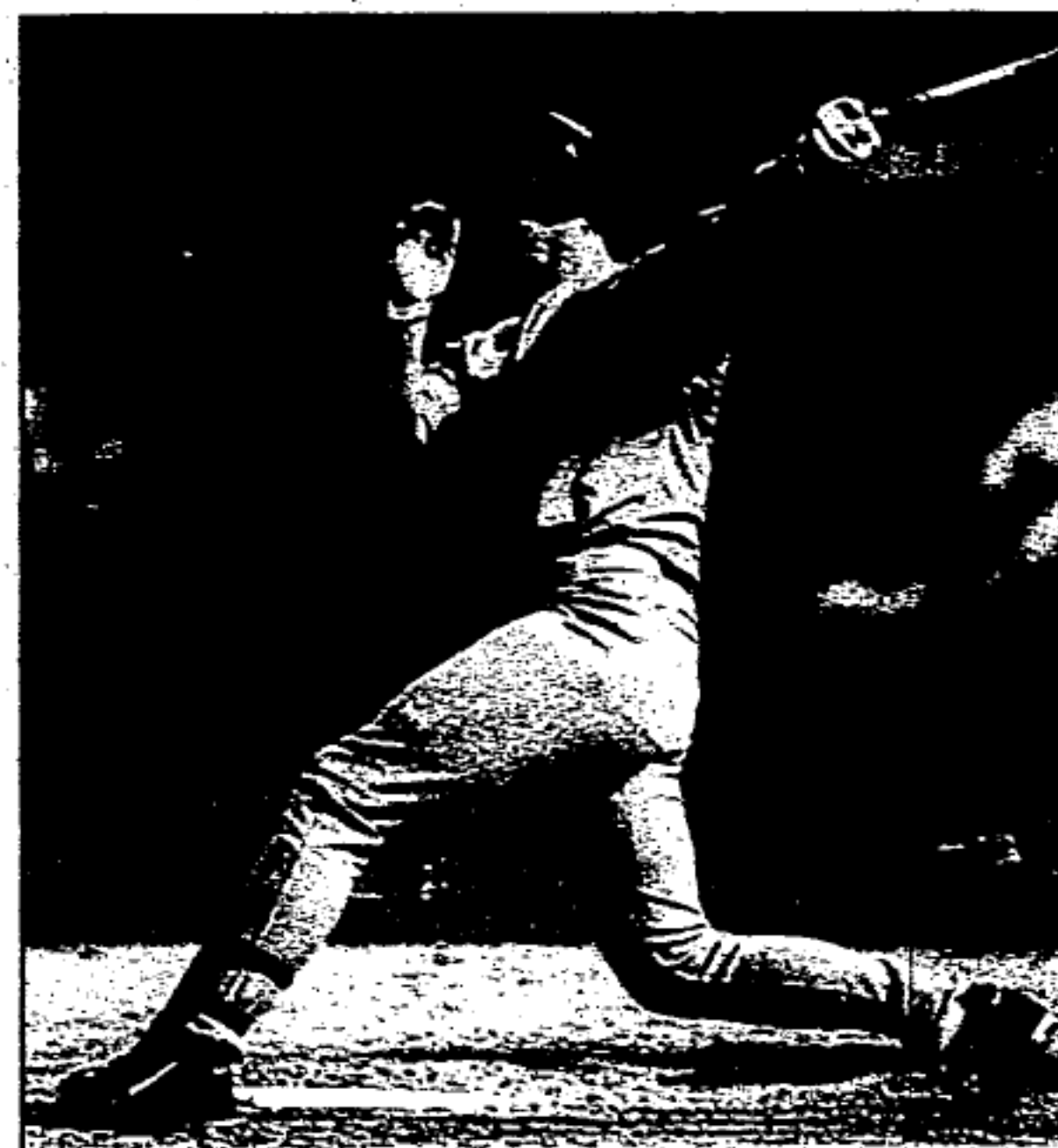
Hack Wilson, who held the National League season record for home runs with 56 in 1930, was out front again when McGwire and Sosa passed him last week. McGwire points to Henry Aaron, who holds the record for career home runs at 755, as the game's real home run king. (For the record, McGwire's 60th gave him 447 in his career. He would have to average 50 home runs over the next six seasons, by which time he would be 40, to threaten Aaron's mark. And as we mentioned earlier, nobody except McGwire has hit 50 or more in three straight seasons.

Musial was on hand last Saturday at Busch Stadium to lend a visual link to the Cardinals' glorious past. So was another St. Louis Hall of Famer, Red Schoendienst.

"My father-in-law used to go to see the St. Louis Browns play when the Yankees came in, just to see Babe Ruth take batting practice," Schoendienst says. "He'd go out just to watch him. And, of course, he isn't with us anymore, but he told me that Ruth was the one guy who could electrify



BOB LEVERONE / TSN



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

SPECIAL DELIVERY: McGwire's four-homer binge in Florida, including No. 59 (above), merited curtain calls and sent McGwire mania soaring nationwide.

'This is the moon landing we're watching. ... And because of the electronic media today, there are more people aware of it. They all want to see a piece of history. They're seeing Magellan.'

—Cardinal broadcaster Mike Shannon

a crowd. And he did. There was no question. And the other guy he talked about was Rogers Hornsby, who he said was the best righthanded hitter he ever saw play.

"But McGwire ... he just hits them so high and so far. He's something different. You watch him when he gets in a groove, and it's just like watching a movie. Boom! And they keep on going. It's beautiful, the way he swings."

Or maybe one of the reasons baseball comes to life at moments such as these is the ease with which the moments connect fans—and players and coaches and managers and writers, for that matter—to their own futures. Because somewhere down baseball's long time line, the subject will come up. And if you were there, then you will speak to it with authority.

And if you weren't there, then you will have seen it on videotape, and you'll speak to it with authority, anyway.

"I'll be able to tell my grandchildren that I worked with the guy who broke Babe Ruth's record, and the guy who broke Roger Maris' record, and the guy who is the top home run hitter of all time," Cardinals hitting coach Dave Parker says. "Hopefully, I'll be able to tell them I worked with the only man in the history of baseball to hit 70-plus home runs in one season."

When McGwire stepped to the plate in the bottom of the first inning last Saturday, the rail along the visiting dugout on the third base side of Busch Sta-

dium was lined with Cincinnati Reds. Fourteen of them stood up to watch his at-bat. The rest of them elbowed their way to the front when he swung and connected.

Eddie Taubensee, a catcher, was among them.

"A Babe Ruth, a guy like that, you're talking about a legendary slugger," Taubensee says. "And here, I can sit back when my kids are older and tell them I played against Mark McGwire. The thing that's great about this day and age, you know ... when people talk about Babe Ruth and how far he hit the ball, that's all they can do: talk.

"Now, 50 years, 60 years later, we talk about Babe Ruth and Mark McGwire, and we have video of Mark McGwire. When guys come up to the game 30 years from now who are like him, and we start talking about how far the guy can hit the ball in batting practice, things like that, and how he measures up to guys in the old days, we can go to the videotape to see how he compares with Mark McGwire. These will be the old days."

We have witnessed baseball history, then, and we'll make it our own. Some of us, anyway. The man who was closest to McGwire as he crossed the plate to complete his 60th home run trot of the season was Fordyce, the Reds' catcher last Saturday. What weighty, mythic thoughts was he thinking when McGwire approached home?

"I was so into the game," Fordyce says. "I just looked to make sure he touched the plate." **TSN**

Michael Krisley is a senior writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.