

# DH Helps Yankees' Michael Fatten Anemic Swat Mark

By JIM OGLE

NEW YORK—Eugene Richard Michael spent most of eight years in the bus circuits before getting a chance in the majors. Then he was traded to the Dodgers by the Pirates, and a year later was peddled to the Yankees for cash.

"The Yankees went to the meetings trying to get Luis Aparicio and wound up with a run-of-the-mill shortstop in Michael," read the stories in the New York press. But Michael has beaten the bum rap, and six years later is among the most popular Yankees and one of the key men in the New Yorkers' return to the summit.

They laughed when the coming of the designated hitter turned many shortstops, including Michael, into No. 9 hitters. But Gene is enjoying the last laugh. He probably will reach his major league high in RBIs this year.

"I DIDN'T KNOW what to expect with the DH," Michael admitted, "but I didn't worry about it. What could I do about it, anyway? Now I realize it really helped me offensively. I get more chances to hit and drive in runs because of the DH."

Michael's improvement as a hitter started long before the DH. It goes back to last year and started because of a good suggestion by another Yankee shortstop, Phil Rizzuto, when Michael was moaning with a .210 batting average.

"Phil suggested that I throw away my light, short bat and get a heavy, longer one," Gene said. "With the longer, heavier bat I could choke up more and have better bat control."

"I RESPECT PHIL'S ideas, and besides, what did I have to lose? As soon as I started to use the new bat, I cut down on my strikeouts and picked up on my hits. For almost two months I hit around .296. It raised my final average from the low .200s to .233."

Michael has delivered many key hits this season and, in fact, has become known as Mr. Clutch. After delivering a game-winning hit against Baltimore, Ellie Hendricks and Earl Weaver yelled about Michael's bat being illegal. It turned out the bat was chipped.

"We thought Weaver was claiming Stick had pine tar too far up the bat," said a teammate. "He has it up to the label."

"Well, that's where he grips the bat, isn't it?" another remarked.

"THE BAT WAS old and dried out," Gene explained. "A piece chipped off, but that doesn't help the hitter. I would rather have a good surface."

As the season approaches the halfway mark, Michael has hung around .250, equaled his career high of three homers in a season, passed his last year's RBI total of 32 and driven home four game-winning runs, plus several tying runs.

Gene continues to do an outstanding defensive job, aided this year by Graig Nettles, who helps close the left side of the infield. With Nettles ranging far to his left, Michael can play position ball and cut down the territory he has to protect.

IF GENE HAS a gripe, it is against the system of nominating players for the All-Star team. There are eight shortstops listed on the American League ballot, but Michael isn't one of them.

"I think the whole system of nominating players is wrong," Gene said. "It is done too much on statistics and reputation, and it has to be done so early. A lot of players having good years are left off. It's impossible for a rookie to have his name on the ballot, no matter how good he is."

"I realize that allowing the fans to vote is good public relations, but they should at least allow the players to do the nominating. The fans vote for their favorites regardless of how they're doing. It is difficult for them to vote on current ability."

"THERE'S NO WAY I'm ever going to make an All-Star team," Gene said. "I was pegged early in my career as just another shortstop who couldn't hit and the reputation sticks. I'm glad that Ralph (Houk) and Lee (MacPhail) think differently."

"I like driving in runs and winning games. It's fun, but it's due to the DH to a great degree. When I would come up with men in scoring position and the pitcher following me at bat, I'd get nothing good to swing at. The pitchers didn't care if I walked with the pitcher coming up next."

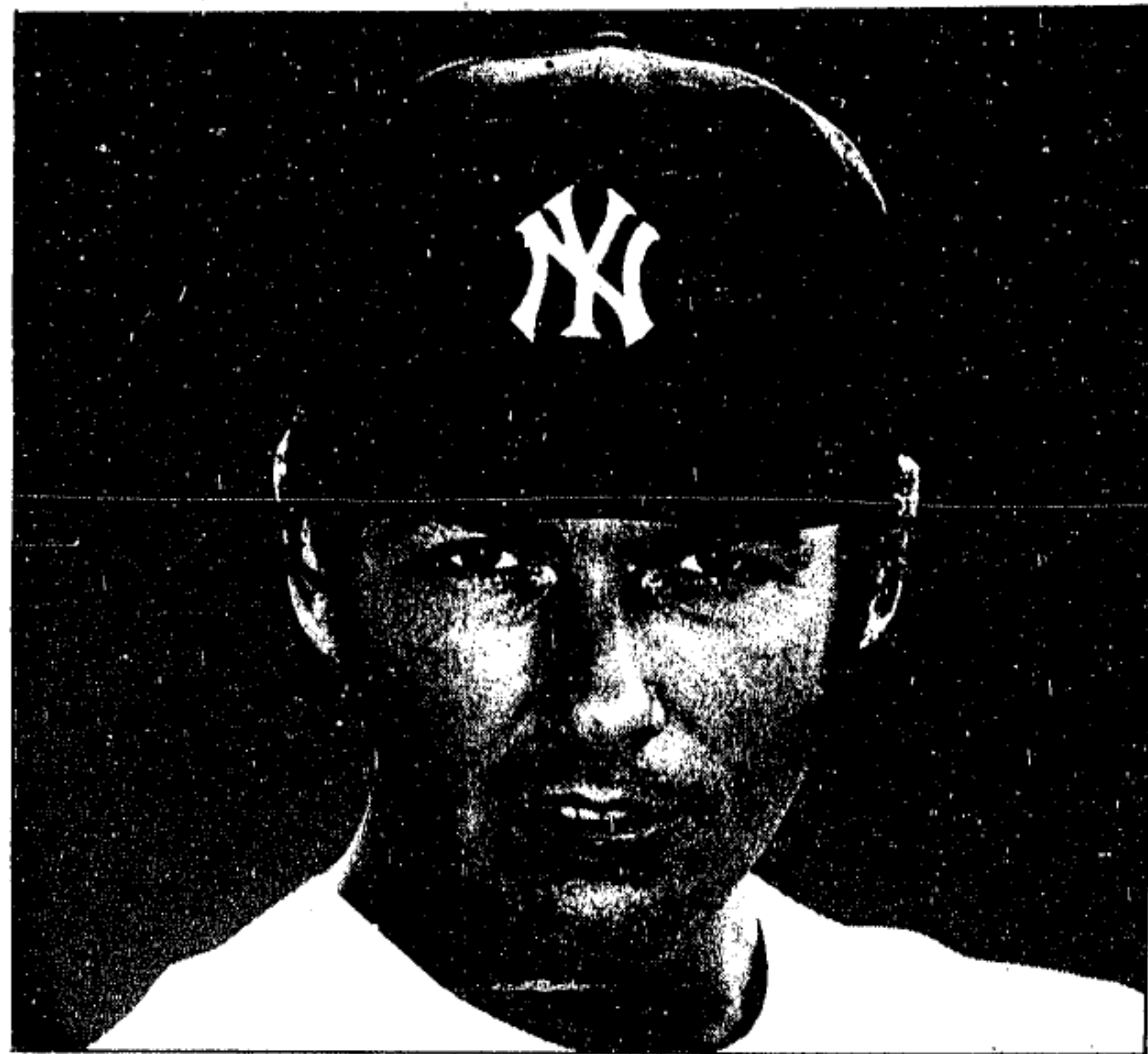
"The fans don't realize," Michael added, "that the No. 8 hitter in the old system was one of the toughest spots in the batting order. In a pinch, No. 8 got nothing to hit. With two out and none on, the pitcher bore down to 'save' the pitcher to lead off the next inning."

"Things are different this year with the designated hitter in the lineup. I get many more opportunities to drive in runs."

**Yankee Doodles:** Dave Pagan, up from West Haven (Eastern), will remember his major league debut. The Indians kayoed him in the second inning, but most of the hits were of the "seeing-eye" variety. . . . With three weeks to go before the All-Star break, Sparky Lyle already had 20 saves. . . . Freddie Beene has been the most pleasant surprise for Houk. Serving as the

long relief man, Beene has done a spectacular job. Freddie has a 4-0 record, three of the victories coming in relief. . . . Steve Kline is on the 21-day disabled list with an aching elbow, but is optimistic he'll be able to work the second half of the season. . . . Bobby Murcer went back over .300 July 1.

Ron Blomberg made ex-teammate Mike Kekich the victim of his first major league home run off a left-handed pitcher. . . . Day in, day out, Nettles has been the most consistent Yankee. He is playing a tremendous third base. . . . Houk is starting to use his reserves more. On July 1, Jerry Moses had three hits in the opener, then Bernie Allen had a three-hit nightcap. . . . After going more than a year without a triple, Roy White hit one in each game of the July 1 twin bill. . . . Jim Ray Hart had a rough month of June, but says he is always a good July hitter.



Gene Michael . . . The Last Laugh

# If you're calling the shots, we're the shot you're calling for.



Old Grand-Dad. The good stuff.®

Head of The Bourbon Family.

KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEYS. 86 PROOF AND 100 PROOF BOTTLED IN BOND. OLD GRAND-DAD DISTILLERY CO., FRANKFORT, KY. 40601.



# Hustler Michael Keeps His Promise, Wins Steady Job

By JIM OGLE

NEW YORK, N. Y. — No one can say Gene Michael didn't warn all the Yankee infielders during the winter that he was taking dead aim at one of their jobs. He said it loud and clear . . . and often.

"I know they say I have been pegged as an infield utilityman, and that isn't bad," Michael said. "In another year or so, maybe I'd like the utility job, but in 1971 I want to play every day. Ralph (Houk) had me working all three positions late last year, so I'll take a shot at any of them."

Michael, whose innocent face hides an iron will, came to camp ready to battle for a regular job. It was no surprise, therefore, to find him in the opening-day lineup at Boston.

"Yeah, I guess since I am in the opening-day lineup, I'd have to consider I reached my goal," Gene said. "That's only the first step, however. Now that I have the job, I'm going to hang onto it and the only way I can do that is to do a good job."

Michael has been the shortstop since the season started. He is playing a lot of shortstop. He has been covering plenty of ground and shows signs of hitting a lot more than the .214 he mustered last season.

"I stopped being aggressive at bat," Gene said. "After the '70 season ended, I did a lot of thinking. I was trying to figure out how I let myself get that way, but couldn't find a logical reason. My bat got lazy, then I didn't attack the ball as I should."

## .272 Nearer His Norm

"I'm not going to be a great hitter, but I'm not a .214 hitter, either. I firmly believe I should hit closer to the .272 I hit in 1969 than the .214 of last year, but I was an aggressive hitter in my good year."

It took Michael eight long years to climb from Grand Forks to the majors, but he has had four full seasons, plus part of a fifth, and is now in the pension fund eligibility group. That is always a great comfort to a player, especially one with a wife and three children like Gene.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't anxious to earn eligibility in the pension plan," Michael admitted. "There isn't a player around who doesn't wait for the day his eligibility is assured. After all, it's nice to know your family has something to fall back on in the future."

"Sure, I expect to be around for quite a while yet. I am lucky that weight is never a problem with me, so I won't lose my speed. I can play second, third or short and know the tricks of each position, but I'm better at short and second."

"Take a look around," Gene said. "Right now, there seems to be a shortage of infielders in the majors. Naturally, that helps a guy like me who wants to stick around. I didn't get a full season until I was 29, so I'm not anxious to step out."

## A Future Skipper?

"Yes, I'd like to try managing when my playing career is over. I wouldn't mind starting in the minors and trying to work my way up. After all, I was forced to work my way up as a player and never got discouraged. So I wouldn't shirk going the same trail as a manager."

Michael is a throwback to the old days. He loves to sit around and talk baseball after a game. When Bobby Cox and Len Boehmer were with the Yankees, they would join Gene in many long post-game discussions. All three had hopes of becoming managers. Now Cox is getting his chance at managing this year at Fort Lauderdale (Florida State).

"Sure, it tickled me to win the starting job," Michael said. "I know how Frank Baker feels. Boy, do I know how he feels! The same thing happened to me often enough,

but he's only 24 years old and just coming into his career."

Gene is a smart player. He has pulled the hidden-ball trick successfully four times, often decoys an opposing runner and is rated one of the best taggers in the business. His nickname—Stick—is due to his willowy frame, not his hitting.

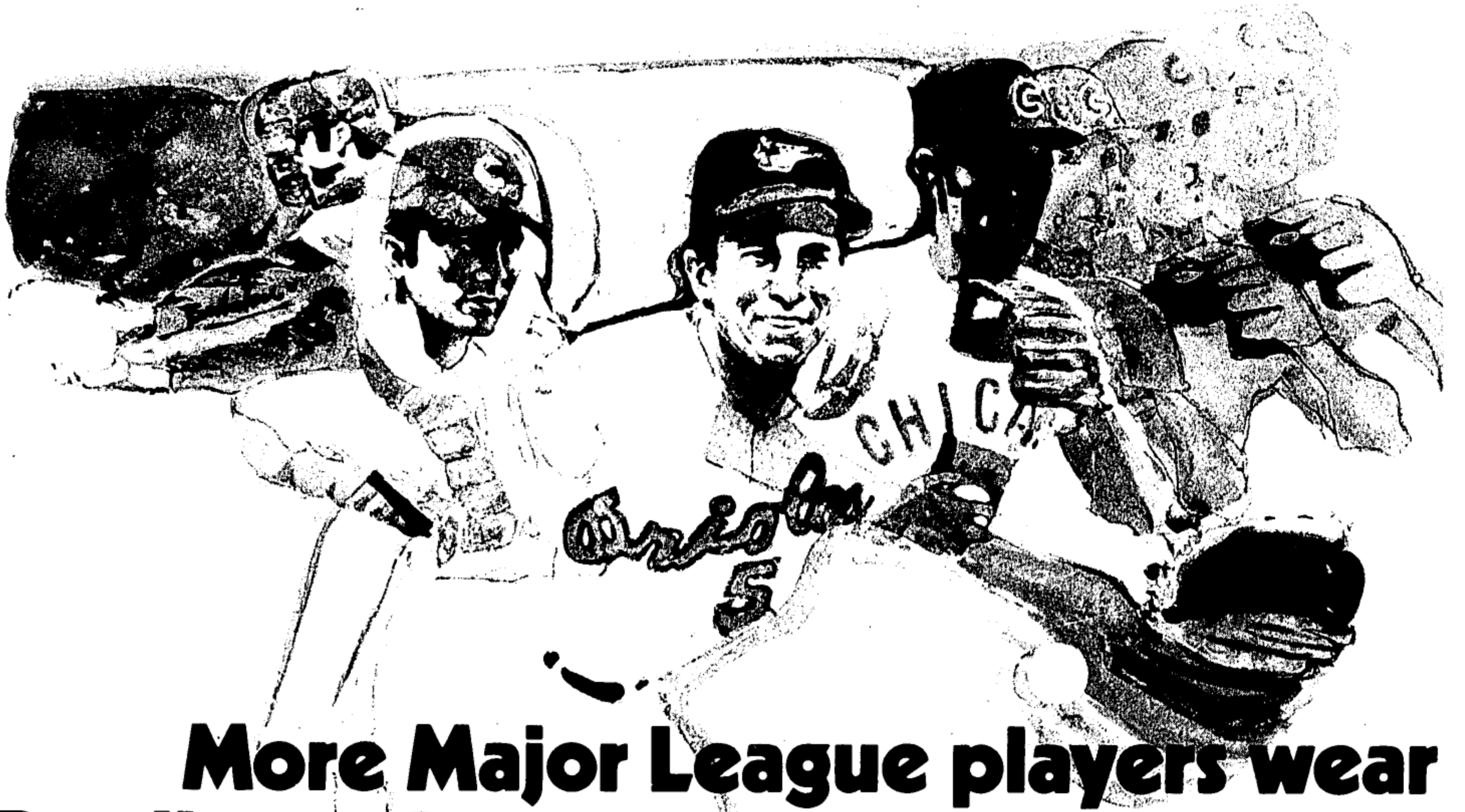
"I owe a lot to Stick," Thurman

Munson said. "The first couple of weeks last year he saved me several errors on throws to second. Not only did he save me errors, but he made the tag at second."

**Yankee Doodles:** Munson was presented with his Rookie of the Year award by three former winners—Curt Blefary and Ron Hansen, who won at Baltimore, and coach

Dick Howser, who won the award at Kansas City. Stan Bahnsen would have participated, too, but he was warming up to pitch the Yankee Stadium opener. . . . A crowd of 34,745 gave the Yanks their biggest opening day crowd since 1966. . . . Munson was off to another slow start at bat with a 0-for-15 drouth after getting two hits in the first

game. . . . The Yanks got a big lift when Mel Stottlemyre and Steve Kline pitched back-to-back shutouts at Washington. . . . Blefary's first inside-the-park home run gave Kline a 1-0 victory over Dick Bosman. . . . Jack Aker and Lindy McDaniel both failed in their first rescue attempts, but Lindy snapped back on his second outing.



**More Major League players wear Rawlings gloves than any other kind. Players like Brooks Robinson, Johnny Bench and Billy Williams. A few want minor customizing. But all wear, basically, the same Rawlings gloves you can buy in the store.**



Rawlings gloves are available at sporting goods stores and departments everywhere, at prices that fit every budget.

Johnny Bench, Brooks Robinson and Billy Williams are members of Rawlings Pro Advisory Staff.  
Rawlings Sporting Goods Company • Division of A-T-O Inc. • 2300 Delmar Blvd. • St. Louis, Mo. 63166

**Rawlings**



**"THE MARK OF A PRO"**