

They've Quit Teaching Dale How to Hit

Pull-the-Ball Experiments Upset Style

Oklahoman Also Beat Off Challenges for Outfield Post Last Two Springs

By FRANK GIBBONS CLEVELAND, O.

It isn't likely that the Cleveland Indian management will ever again try to remake or discard Dale Mitchell for the remainder of his truly remarkable career.

Mitchell isn't an "I told you so" kind of ball player, but he could be tossing that phrase at a number of people today. Because he is an excellent team man, meaning he keeps his mouth buttoned and does the best he can, the only difference between Dale now and early in the season is that he smiles more often. Also, that he is again the regular left fielder of the team picked to win the American League pennant.

For several years, they've been trying to improve on the original model of Mitchell. This was funny, because it was a pretty good job with a steady motor and good lines.

In 1950, for instance, it was decided in spring training that Mitchell wasn't helping the team nearly enough because he hit to left and center fields more often than to the right. This one had merit, for Mitchell does have tremendous power to right field at times and once hit a ball into the bleachers in Yankee Stadium's right-center sector.

Upset Normal Style

The only thing wrong with the attempted reformation was it upset Mitchell's normal batting style, which is to slap the ball to left if the pitch demands that treatment, or pull to right if that seems best. The "pull-the-ball" experiment was dropped after the season was only a few days old, and Mitchell moved back into the leadoff spot from third place.

He didn't mind that interference from the brass hats, who were Lou Boudreau and Coach Muddy Ruel on that occasion, nearly as much as he did the next experiment by the directorate.

That was last year when Al Lopez, in his first year as manager, decided that Harry Simpson might do more for him in left field than Mitchell. Simpson, who had rocked the Pacific Coast League, was installed in Mitchell's place as the exhibition season began.

"Simpson is a good prospect, but not this year," was Mitchell's only comment. When Simpson made it, Dale clenched his ever-present pipe more firmly between his teeth.

He finally got his chance on the way north against the Giants, who found that they couldn't get him out. His average for the exhibition trail was about .400, and when the season opened he was back at his regular stand.

11 Homers Last Year

Mitchell decided to go all-out last year in an effort to pull the ball and the results were interesting. He did hit more home runs than he ever had in one season before, 11, and he drove in more runs, 63. But he hit only 290, the first time in his career he had batted under .300 anywhere.

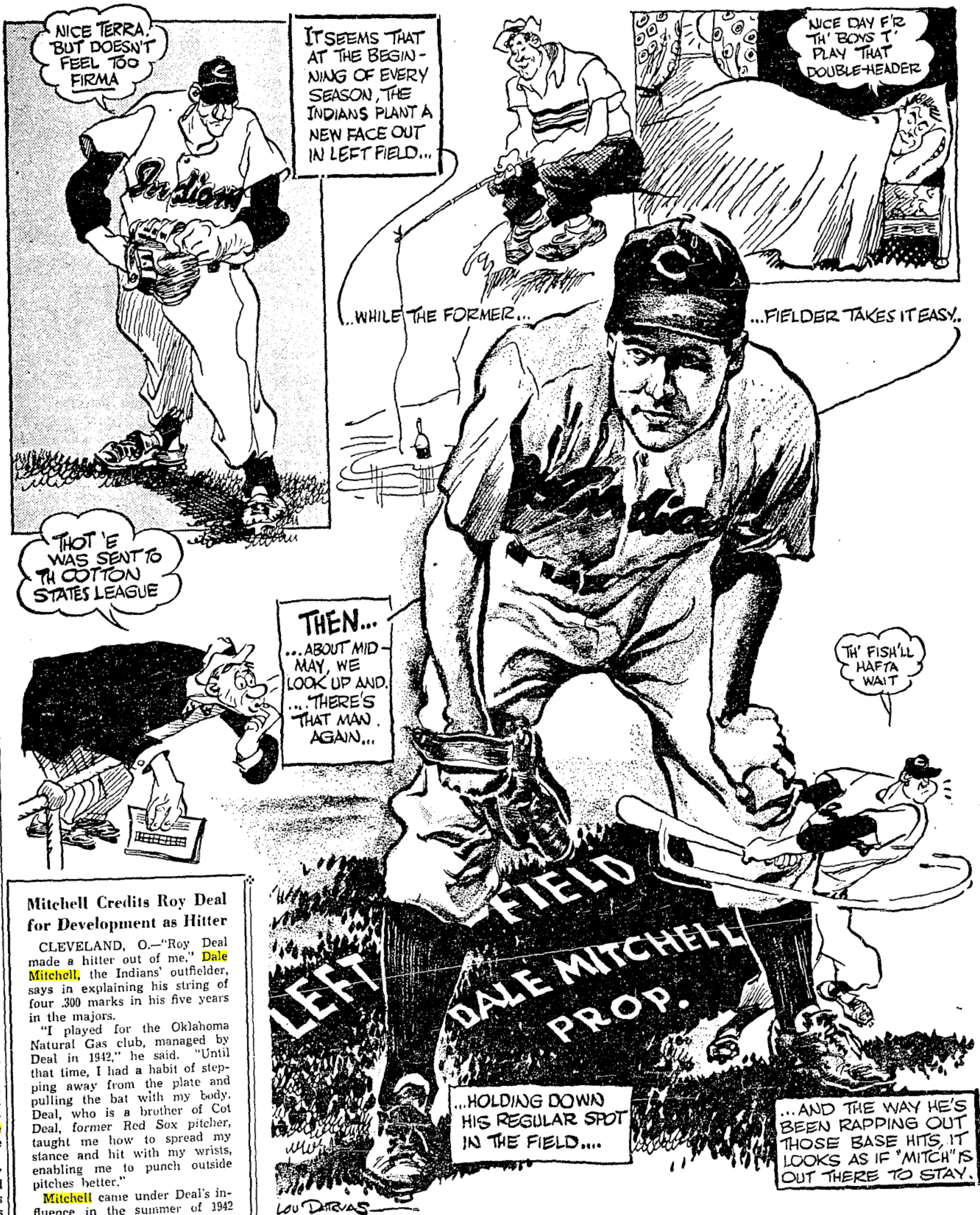
Still, it was a good year and Dale went to spring training this semester in a relaxed frame of mind. He owns a piece of several oil wells and they were pumping out black gold at a nice rate. His family was well and happy. At 31, the only serious worry he had was thinning hair.

"I don't think I ever contemplated a season with more confidence," Mitchell said. "Not a worry in the world."

That is, he didn't have a worry until a burly young man named Jim Fridley barged upon the scene with a smoking bat.

Within a short period of training time, Fridley suddenly was Cleveland's left fielder. Simpson, who had found the answer, was in right. Mitchell, one of Cleveland's heroes,

Can't Keep a Good Man Sitting Down ∴ By Darvas



Mitchell Credits Roy Deal for Development as Hitter

CLEVELAND, O.—"Roy Deal made a hitter out of me," Dale Mitchell, the Indians' outfielder, says in explaining his string of four .300 marks in his five years in the majors.

"I played for the Oklahoma Natural Gas club, managed by Deal in 1942," he said. "Until that time, I had a habit of stepping away from the plate and pulling the bat with my body. Deal, who is a brother of Cot Deal, former Red Sox pitcher, taught me how to spread my stance and hit with my wrists, enabling me to punch outside pitches better."

Mitchell came under Deal's influence in the summer of 1942 after he had compiled a .420 batting figure for the University of Oklahoma.

As a 12-letter man at Cloud Chief High School, near Norman, Dale had excelled in baseball, basketball and track, but at the university he confined himself to track, in which he recorded a 9.8 clocking in the 100-yard dash, and to baseball. Following his three-year hitch in the Army Air Forces, which carried him to France and the Rhineland, Dale returned to Norman in 1946 and clipped off a .507 batting average. It was his efforts as a sophomore player at Oklahoma U. that led Dale into the Cleveland organization. Hugh Alexander, one-time Indian outfielder, signed the youngster in 1942 following that .420 season.

was on the bench again with his lifetime average of .316. And why?

Chief complaint about the Oklahoma City oil baron was his throwing, which is admittedly weak, and his base-running.

Then, too, there was always that longing for a big guy like Fridley who

might bat in a flock of runs for the Tribe.

Forgotten was the fact that Mitchell and Bob Avila brought the Indians to life in 1951 with a batting streak during July that was hotter than the weather.

"Mitchell always was something of a leg hitter," was another theory. "He beat out enough infield hits to reach .300, and now he's lost that speed to first base."

So it wasn't surprising that Fridley was the left fielder when the Indians opened their season in Chicago. The big guy, fresh up from the Texas League and something of a surprise with his steady whacking, did well in the early stages. He hit a home run to win a game over the White Sox for Bob Lemon.

The only game Mitchell started for some time was due to a stomach ache. Fridley ate something that didn't agree with him.

It took a combination of injuries to get Mitch's name on the starting card again.

Larry Doby and Luke Easter pulled up lame on the first eastern trip.

23 Triples in 1949 Reflects Mitchell's Speed on Paths

CLEVELAND, O. — Speed has been one of Dale Mitchell's greatest assets, and how well he utilizes this gift is indicated in his record, which includes a near-record total of 23 triples in 1949.

His three-bagger output that season was only three short of the American League record set by Joe Jackson, with Cleveland in 1912, and equaled by Sam Crawford of the Tigers in 1914.

Simpson moved to first base and Bob Kennedy went to center. Mitchell was in there through necessity and the Indians are happy now the emergency arose.

From the very start, Mitchell serenely sprayed hits all over the various ball yards. If people wanted to think that he didn't care where or how he hit the ball as long as he achieved a .300

average, that was all right with him. Let them fall where they would.

It may be only a coincidence, but the Indians won two in Boston and three straight in New York after Mitchell's return, and they came home in first place.

On May 17, Dale ballooned his average to .382 with four-for-four against the Senators. Manager Lopez admitted that he will not disturb the Oklahoman again.

In fact, nobody bothers Mitchell any more with tips on how to stand at the plate, how to hit to right field, and all such theoretical advice. It finally is accepted that here is a man who knows a great deal about applying a length of ash to the oncoming baseball.

And is Mitchell bitter about the campaign to slap him on the bench to stay? Not at all, for the young man isn't built that way.

"Al Lopez is one of the nicest fellows I ever played for," he says. "The way I see it, he tries to be fair to everybody."

Mitchell, 3-Base King, Threatens Records

Coached by Tris Speaker, Dale Stars for Tribe

Picked by Boss as Next to Hit .400 for Cleveland

First Lesson in Fielding Easy—He Had Wrong Glove; Left Field Swatter on Outside Pitches, He Kills 'Em Inside

By ED McAULEY

CLEVELAND, O.

Dale Mitchell is off and running. The husky Cleveland outfielder by way of Oklahoma City may never realize the qualified prediction of Manager Lou Boudreau that, if any Indian ever again hits .400, his name will be Mitchell.

But in the long list of those who would not care to argue against the thought is Freddie Hutchinson, the veteran Detroit pitcher off whom Mitchell collected five straight hits, a triple, double and three singles, in the season's opening game.

Dale naturally did not maintain that pace, but when the club moved east for the first time he was at the top of the league's averages with a fancy mark of .406, representing 13 hits in 32 trips.

But even if Mitchell never joins the exclusive company of .400 hitters, he is a promising candidate for another important place in the records of the game. Last year he collected no fewer than 23 triples.

Offhand, and by comparison with the home run and doubles totals of the leaders in those departments, 23 does not seem like an impressive figure. But it is exactly three less than the all-time American League record set by Joe Jackson in 1912 and duplicated by Sam Crawford in 1914.

The major league record for triples in one season is 36, established by J. Owen (Chief) Wilson of the Pittsburgh Pirates, also in 1912.

That Mitchell's performance was no ordinary accomplishment is attested by the fact that the last American leaguer to hit 23 triples in one season was Earle Combs, in 1927. Only one other American leaguer—except, of course, Jackson and Crawford—shares the 23-triple total. He was a pretty fair batsman named Ty Cobb.

Second place in the league last year was won by Bob Dillinger, who pulled up at the far turn only 13 times.

Mitchell probably would have set a new American League record in this department if he had not mysteriously lost the knack during the month of June, when most good hitters are beginning to find the range.

Dale, Hit by Truck as Kid, Carries Scar as Reminder

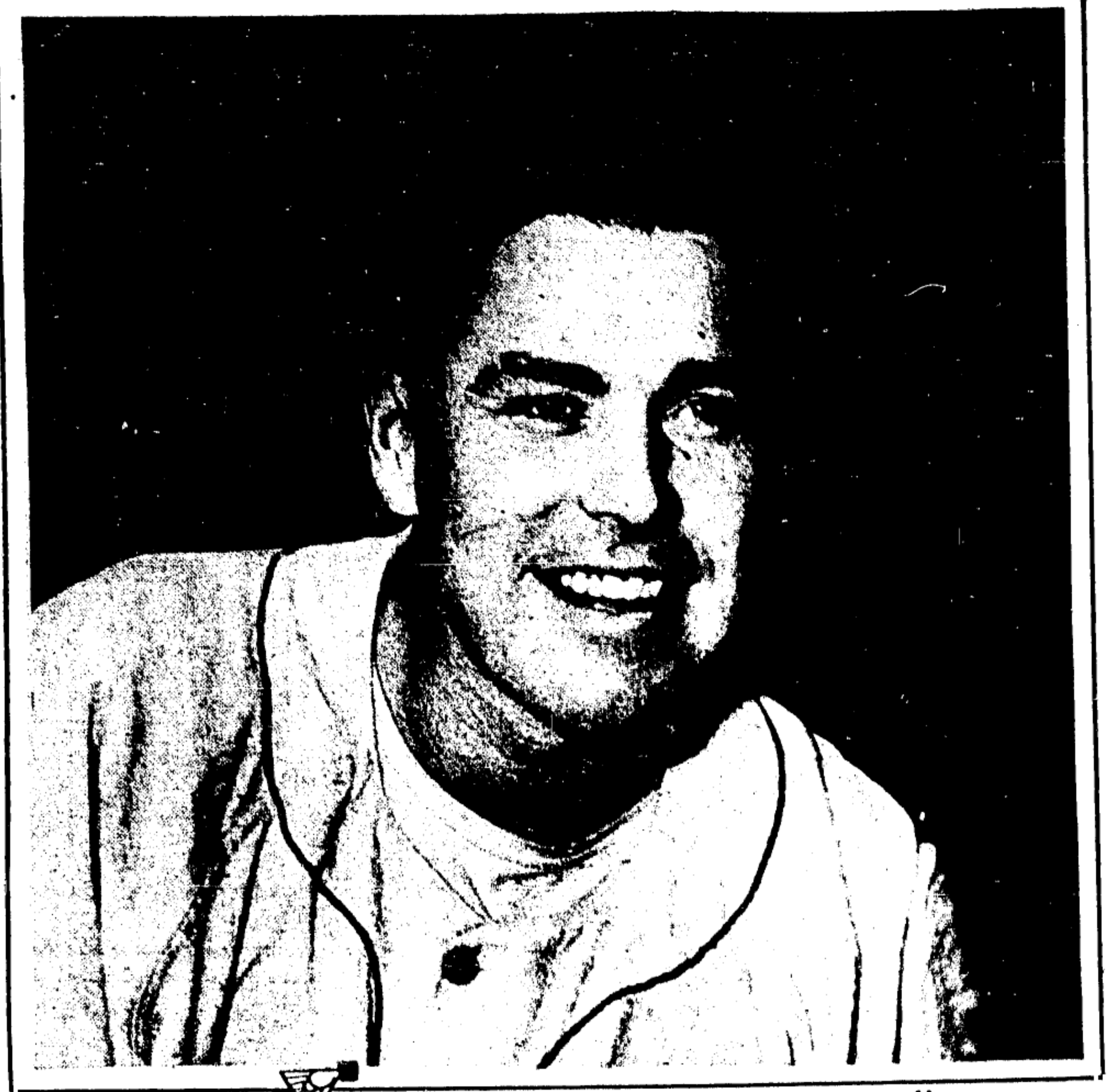
CLEVELAND, O.—Never could Dale Mitchell say, as could most big leaguers, that everything has happened to him except being hit by a truck.

Dale, at the age of 10, was crossing the road near his home in Colony, Okla., when a truck not only hit him, but lifted him to the engine hood. The Tribal outfielder wears a slight scar on his right cheek as a reminder not to challenge the highway juggernauts.

In the entire month, he had only one three-bagger.

Curiously, Mitchell enjoyed more success at triple-hitting on the road than in Cleveland's Municipal Stadium, where the distances between the outfielders would seem to enhance his prospects. He hit only eight triples at home, while gathering 15 on foreign fields.

Mitchell's emergence as the game's leading manufacturer of three-base hits could not have been forecast by students of his earlier seasons. In 1947 he had ten, and in 1948—when he batted .336—he collected only eight. Last year he hit the 23 mark with a batting average of .317. The explanation undoubtedly lies in the fact that enemy



DALE MITCHELL . . . ".300s spell confidence"

managers, early last season, believed they had hit on a way to stop the young Redskin:

Early in his career with the Indians, Mitchell developed a reputation as a dead left field hitter. Although he swings from the left side of the plate, by far the greater number of his hits shot past or over the shortstop. He was belting outside pitches.

Obviously, the way to halt that sort of thing was to give him inside pitches. So the Tribe's rivals tried it—and made the fellow not only a more frequent hitter, but a more powerful one as well. In the first two weeks of last season, he had a home run over the fence in right and three triples to right-center.

Just Tries to Meet Ball

"My coach at the University of Oklahoma," Mitchell explains, "was a firm believer in meeting the ball, rather than in trying to knock it out of the park. I suppose it was natural, when I first came into the league, for the pitchers to throw the ball outside, just because I'm a lefthanded batter. When I met that sort of pitch, it went to the left side of the field. But if they want to pitch me inside, I'll just have to hit to right."

Although Mitchell is one of the most intelligent, best-educated and articulate of the Indians, he is at a loss for words to explain either his native talent with the bat or his improvement in the power department.

"I still just swing the way I've always swung," he testifies. "Just trying to meet the ball where it's pitched. I suppose the longer a fellow is in the league, the better he gets to know opposing pitchers. Experience may have helped me. Then, too, I've had three full seasons batting over .300. That spells confidence. When a hitter knows he can hit, because the averages say so, he doesn't worry much when he steps up to the plate."

Mitchell is one of the fastest of the Redskins—he ran the 100-yard dash in 9.8 at Oklahoma—and as leadoff man sets up many early scoring opportunities which a slower athlete would find impossible.

In a 1949 game with the Red Sox, for example, Mitchell, in the opening

He's 'Not Unusual,' Says His Missus

CLEVELAND, O.—According to Mrs. Dale Mitchell, the most unusual thing about her husband is his lack of the unusual.

"In the ten years we've been married," says the attractive Mrs. Mitchell, "Dale has been what you might call a good, solid citizen."

"I've been waiting for something to happen," she laughed and winked at Dale. "That's what keeps me interested."

Dale's trademark is his constant pipe. Lately he also has acquired an interest in gin rummy. Last year during spring training he found himself an opponent in Jim Schlemmer, sports columnist of the Akron Beacon Journal—and he won't let go.

Fact is when Schlemmer asked Dale to speak at an Akron sports banquet last winter the Tribe outfielder said yes. "I couldn't refuse," observed Dale. "I had too much of his petty cash."

inning, was on second base, with Larry Doby on first. Boudreau was at the plate—and in a quandary. He didn't want to bunt so early in the game, yet he was afraid of killing the rally by grounding into a double play. Tentatively, he faked a bunt and observed that Vern Stephens, the Boston shortstop, was not holding Mitchell close to second.

"That's all I needed to know," Boudreau explained later. Boudreau flashed the double steal sign, the strategy worked and the manager climaxed it with a single which scored both his teammates.

The Cleveland Brain Trust rates Mitchell the most improved defensive performer on the club, and for much of this advance the credit must go to Tris Speaker, the advisory coach who works tirelessly every spring with all the outfielders.

In Mitchell's case, Spoke had a big job to do, for Dale was deficient in practically every department of out-fielding. In spite of his speed, he was not an outstanding fly-catcher. His judgment was erratic. He couldn't throw either strongly or accurately, and he had no sound ideas on the subject of fielding ground balls.

Today, Mitchell has no defensive weaknesses, except an arm that just naturally isn't as strong as the wings possessed by some gardeners, but even this is not too great a handicap. He had ten assists last season, a figure which suggests that he was far from

a total loss in the business of throwing out runners.

His most sensational play occurred in Bob Lemon's 1944 no-hitter against the Tigers. Mitchell raced to the left field corner and leaped against the stands for a one-handed stab of a drive plainly ticketed for extra bases.

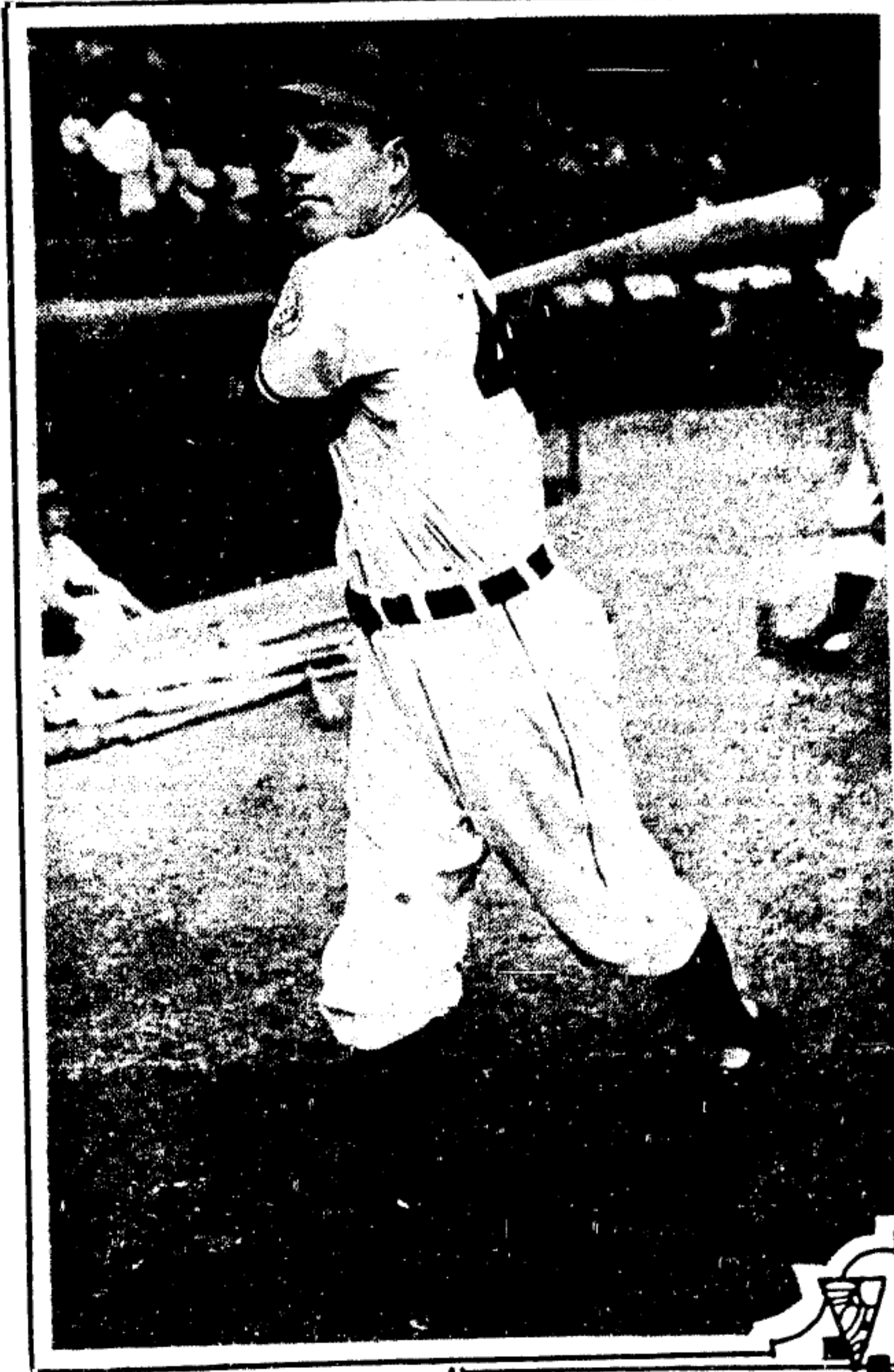
First Lesson Easiest

"The first lesson I gave Mitchell," Speaker once told us, "was the easiest in all my experience. I simply told him to get himself a glove. He was trying to play the outfield with an infielder's mitt."

On the personal side, Mitchell is a quiet, pipe-smoking husband and father who thinks it's about time he made some important progress in his chosen profession. Dale started late, mainly because he wanted to finish his college education. He stepped off the campus into the Oklahoma City lineup in 1946 and batted .337. Joining the Indians near the close of that campaign, he got into 11 games and compiled an average of .432.

Curiously, the Tribe tried to farm him back to Oklahoma City in 1947, but was forced to recall him immediately when Commissioner Happy Chandler reminded the front office that the game's GI regulations prohibited such optioning.

Mitchell became a regular soon after his return to the Wigwag in June of 1947, and finished the year with an average of .316.



MITCHELL AN IDEAL LEADOFF MAN