

it did in 1977, its inaugural year, when, because of a couple of judicious trades, the Blue Jays had Alan Ashby, Rick Cerone and veteran Phil Roof on hand, plus Whitt, who had been plucked from Boston in the expansion draft.

The Jays' young catchers who were in camp this spring—Matt Stark, Greg Myers and Pat Borders—have caught a combined seven games in the major leagues, and Myers is the only one with at least one season of Triple-A experience.

Whitt has done a lot of growing up in eight-plus seasons with the Blue Jays. He developed into an excellent defensive catcher who throws well and a power hitter who can produce runs consistently.

The oldest player on the team, Whitt also has become a father figure in the Jays' clubhouse.

"I sort of enjoy the role," he said. "I talk to others, especially the young guys, when they get down in the dumps. It doesn't take that much, just letting them know you are behind them and expressing some of the feelings of what I went through."

"I think that is what helps them, knowing that you have been through it. It doesn't cure everything—they still have to handle that part themselves—but it helps."

Whitt's experience in handling pitchers on a staff that is still primarily young is another of his assets.

"He takes a lot of worry away from the pitcher," said lefthander Jimmy Key, who led the American League with a 2.76 earned-run average last season.

"He knows how to set up the hitters, something a young guy just isn't equipped to do. He knows how to adjust to the pitcher and he is able to look at what he is throwing and adapts what he calls accordingly. That's experience."

"Off the field, too, he's a guy you look up to. He's been there and he's been through it all."

Last season, Whitt equalled his career high of 19 home runs and drove in a career-high 75 runs. When the Jays hit a major league record 10 home runs in one game, Whitt accounted for three of them.

A member of the free-agent class of 1986, Whitt signed a three-year contract with Toronto last year. There is a chance he could become a free agent again. There is still a charge of collusion against the major league owners, and a decision from arbitrator George Nicolaus is forthcoming.

"Naturally, I would like to stay in Toronto," said Whitt, who is a native of Detroit and still lives there in the off-season. It's a convenient locale for his family until his three children finish school each year and can join Whitt in Toronto for

the summer. The Whitts have a second home in Dunedin, Fla., where the Blue Jays train each spring.

A big favorite with the fans in Toronto, Whitt is involved in the community and each year sponsors a charity golf tournament. As far as Whitt is concerned, once a Blue Jay, always a Blue Jay.

NEIL MacCARTL

MILWAUKEE BREWERS



Paul Molitor

There was a hard ground ball hit to the third baseman and the runner was hung up between third base and home. It should have been a simple rundown play—three throws and tag the runner out.

But this runner was Paul Molitor, who doesn't surrender without a battle. He raced, he scampered, he ducked and he dodged before he was finally tagged out.

The Milwaukee Brewers were 18-2 after beating the Oakland A's, 8-7, on April 29 last year. Molitor contributed to the victory with a home run the inning after his mad dashes between third and home.

But he suffered a torn hamstring during the rundown and played in only 12 more games before the All-Star Game. By then, the Brewers' sizzling start had cooled off into a 42-43 record.

Molitor returned to the lineup after the All-Star Game and helped the Brewers finish third in the American League East with a 91-71 record.

For the record, the Brewers were 75-42 with Molitor in the lineup. Without him, they were 16-29.

"We're definitely a better team with Paulie in the lineup," said Manager Tom Trebelhorn. "It's just hard to say one guy can have that big of an impact."

How much of an impact does Molitor have on the Brewers? A look at the Brewers' two biggest seasons helps answer that question.

In 1981, the year of the players' strike and the split season, Molitor missed most of the first half of the

season with torn cartilage in his ankle. The Brewers finished third in the first half with a 31-25 record. After Molitor returned, Milwaukee went 31-22 and finished first in the second half.

The following year, the Brewers won the American League pennant. Molitor batted .302, scored 136 runs and drove in 71. But his most significant number that year may have been his 160 games played, a career high.

The man who makes the Brewers go has been plagued by injuries throughout his career. At the start of spring training, Molitor, who hit safely in 39 straight games last season, was asked what his goals were for 1988.

"That should be easy," he said. "Stay healthy."

In attempts to keep Molitor from avoiding injuries, the Brewers have moved him from second base to center field to third base. This year, he's back at second—Jim Gantner has been moved to third—and the reasoning is the same; to guard against Molitor aggravating his hamstring or elbow, which he also injured last year.

"If it helps Paulie stay healthy, that's the main thing," said Gantner, who would prefer to play second. "If we're going to win, we need him in as many games as possible. The bottom line is we want to win."

Keeping Molitor in the lineup could be easier if he was used strictly as a designated hitter. But that would be taking advantage of only part of his game.

"Offensively, he's the catalyst of our attack," said Trebelhorn. "Defensively, he gives us the knowledge of the opponent and some real important leadership."

"He's not afraid to ask questions. He's not afraid to take chances. A lot of problems on defense come from uncertainty."

"Paulie isn't bashful about asking about certain players or situations. And he isn't bashful about giving his opinion. He wants to do it right."

A couple of years ago, coach Larry Haney pointed out that the Brewers' first winning season coincided with Molitor's arrival in 1978. "He's had a lot to do with our success," Haney said.

As far as indispensable players, Haney said he couldn't choose Molitor over Robin Yount.

"Those are the two best players I've ever been on a team with. Molitor and Yount complement each other, batting back to back."

But, said Haney, "We've really noticed how important Molitor is because of our record in the games he's missed."

A lot of the games Molitor has missed have been because of the

way he plays. He plays the game the only way he knows how—hard. And when he's in the lineup, the Brewers play better.

TOM FLAHERTY

BOSTON RED SOX



Roger Clemens

The Boston Red Sox have a perennial batting champion in Wade Boggs; a career .302 hitter in Jim Rice, who has averaged 28 homers and 104 RBIs in 13 major league seasons, and a crop of talented youngsters headed by Mike Greenwell. They also have a five-star closer in Lee Smith, who has recorded 30 or more saves in each of the last four years.

But when it comes to indispensable players, they all run a distant second to the Rocket, pitcher Roger Clemens. Last year, Clemens joined Jim Palmer and Sandy Koufax as the only pitchers in history to win back-to-back Cy Young Awards outright.

Clemens is 60-22 with a 3.08 earned-run average in 105 major league games. Over the past two seasons, he was 44-13 with a 2.74 ERA, pitched 28 complete games, including a league-leading 18 in 1987, and struck out 494 batters in 535 1/3 innings.

He's a stopper in the true sense of the word. He was 14-1 following a Red Sox defeat during their league championship season in 1986 and 12-1 after a team loss last year.

Dissatisfied with the club's contract offer a year ago, Clemens walked out of camp on the eve of the exhibition opener and didn't return until the final day of spring training. He kept in shape by pitching to high school teams, but learned that wasn't the best method to prepare for the 1987 season.

He lost his first two starts and went on to struggle through the first two months. On June 12, after 13 starts, he was 4-6 with a 3.51 ERA and the Red Sox were in fifth place, 11 games behind the leader.

"There's no question that was one of the big factors in our poor season," said Red Sox General

Manager Lou Gorman. "Of course, there were others, but you can't lose a pitcher of Clemens' ability and not suffer a severe blow."

It took Clemens a while to get into a groove, but when he did, he was almost unhittable. He was 16-3 with a 2.68 ERA over his final 23 starts, yet the Red Sox didn't get any better. By the time June rolled around, the slow start of Clemens plus the losses of pitcher Oil Can Boyd (shoulder injury) and catcher Rich Gedman (free agency until May) had taken their tolls on the team.

"Who knows whether we could have survived the first two months even with a razor-sharp Clemens and stayed in contention?" said Manager John McNamara. "Nobody knows anything for sure in this game. But I'll take my chances with him. He's the type of player that can lead a team through adversity."

"He's the type of pitcher every club has to have to win a championship. He's the type of pitcher that when he goes to the mound, you know you have a chance to win. In addition to his pitching, he has a tremendous effect on the other players because of his work habits."

Red Sox pitching coach Bill Fischer said, "Clemens is a diamond. One like him comes along about every 50 years. He's the man you build your pitching staff around. He's your stopper. He's your leader and he puts people in the ball park."






Clemens' value also can be measured by his attitude. He's never satisfied with a performance; he always feels he could have done better.

"Nobody has to tell me about my pitching," he said. "I'm my worst and toughest critic. I'm never satisfied. I'm always striving to do better, always looking to improve myself."

Clemens startled the baseball world on April 29, 1986 when, barely eight months after arthroscopic shoulder surgery, he set a major league record by striking out 20 batters in nine innings against the Seattle Mariners. Since then, he's had 10 or more strikeouts in 21 games. His 256 strikeouts last year rank second only to Smokey Joe Wood's 258 strikeouts in 1912 in the club record book.

Batters usually doom themselves to failure when they fall behind in the count to Clemens. Last year, they batted a collective .089 and struck out 89 times when the count went to 0-2. The year before, opponents hit .088 and fanned 48 times with an 0-2 count.

"To me, he means 20 victories, and I'm glad I don't have to face (Continued on Page 18, Column 1)

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