

New Noren Makes Ol' Case Look Good

Irv Flopped After Trade to Champions

Stadium Fans Beefed When It Seemed Yankees Had Dealt Jensen for a Lemon

By HAROLD ROSENTHAL
NEW YORK, N. Y.

The Yankees had clinched their fourth straight American League pennant a couple of hours earlier and the sounds of the revelry attendant upon their celebration resounded through the corridors of Philadelphia's staid Hotel Warwick. Loud were the praises being sung commemorating the feat that particular evening of Billy Martin, who, if memory serves correctly, nagged the A's and Harry Byrd to distraction with singles just beyond the clawing finger-tips of the Philadelphia infielders.

"Sure, he's great," toasted Casey Stengel, "but don't forget that other guy. He had a pretty good night, too. No matter what happens between now and the World's Series, or in the World's Series, I'm going to send him home for the winter to California and tell him that he's going to have every chance to make this team."

Translated from Stengelese, that baffling mixture of double-talk and rhetoric of almost knife-like clarity, it meant this:

"Don't overlook Irv Noren's performance tonight, too. I've decided to stick

A Harris Discovery

NEW YORK, N. Y.—The only player Bucky Harris scouted personally for the Washington club was Irv Noren. That happened in 1949, when Harris was manager of the San Diego club in the Pacific Coast League and Owner Clark Griffith appealed to him from 3,000 miles away to "look over this outfielder named Noren that Hollywood wants to sell me for \$60,000."

Harris didn't need to give Noren another look. He already knew the fellow.

"Buy him," he wired Griff.

with him despite his low batting average, because I think he's going to be of help to us in the future and perhaps be a star."

Practiced at Home

Stengel, as so many people have learned on so many occasions during the past half-dozen seasons, was right. Noren did go back to winter on the West Coast, secure in the knowledge that the Yankees weren't seeking to deal him off any more, and eventually did make the team. But it took a lot longer and it required a great deal more effort for him to do this than it does to read this particular passage in print.

Noren went home, according to Stengel, and practiced. He practiced during winter semi-pro games on eliminating his habit of "lofting" the ball, a deadly failing in the big American League parks. He practiced lining the ball; he forgot about those 29 homers he had hit several years back when he was the most valuable player in the Pacific Coast League and had commanded a price of \$60,000 when Branch Rickey had sold him after the 1949 season to Washington.

He sought to forget his soggy Yankee start when he had misjudged a couple of fly balls in the Stadium, and had a couple of feeble afternoons at the plate, twin efforts which had the wolves howling for his scalp. Along with it they had shrieked for that of George Weiss, the Yankee general manager, who had traded Jackie Jensen and three other players to Washington for Noren and a minor league infielder in May of 1952.

It took Irv a long time to forget, but 1953 was a better year than 1952, by 30 percentage points, at the plate. In the Stengel scheme of things, however, Noren was still a fourth outfielder. "He could play anywhere in baseball," was Stengel's critique on Noren's ability, but when it came to the Yankees—

Bomber Coach and Prize Plate Pupil



MUCH CREDIT for the skyrocketing batting average of Irv Noren, strong contender for the American League batting crown, is due Coach Bill Dickey (left), who has corrected several of the outfielder's plate faults, including his inability to hit high pitches.

Irv Learned How to Hit High Ones

By HUGH BRADLEY of the New York Journal-American

NEW YORK, N. Y.—A decision to quit laying off high balls has made a man of distinction out of Irv Noren. It's the reason why the Yankee outfielder's batting average has zoomed to around .360.

Don't get the wrong idea, however. There's nothing about the newest success story of a New York outfielder that can upset the tiny tots.

The kind of high balls for which our Irvin has a fondness are those thrown by pitchers. Because he has learned how to handle them he is the top thumper in the American League.

In the clubhouse the other day it was explained Bill Dickey had taught Noren how to hit the high one and that the 29-year-old Californian is socking so solidly because he no longer hits up at balls and he keeps his arms away from his chest in a modified imitation of the Joe DiMaggio stance.

All this may be true. It also is a fact that he was the most valuable player in two minor leagues (Texas and Pacific Coast) before the Dodgers sold him out of their

farm system to Washington and thus paved the way for him to come to New York in a deal for Jackie Jensen and Frank Shea two years ago.

Eventually, however, you have to come back to the high ball theme.

When Noren came to the Yankees he was a sucker for such pitches, letter high, either fast inside or outside.

Opposing chuckers knew it. They usually got a strike or two on him by feeding him such stuff.

With a strike or so advantage the hurlers then could have him at their mercy.

Smart flingers gave him breaking balls which he could not belt for distance.

All this year the situation has been different. In Florida he started swinging at the high ones and connecting.

Pitchers found he no longer was a sucker and began experimenting with new offerings in the effort to get him out.

Headliner Now

Noren Originally a Pitcher, Dodger Scout's File Shows

NEW YORK, N. Y.—Like Carl Furillo, Stan Musial and so many other outstanding outfielders, Irv Noren was originally a pitcher, although he was scouted as an outfielder-first baseman. This was brought to light by Dick Walsh of the Dodger farm office, whose assistance was asked in tracking down the original scouting cards on the Yankee star, tracing back to the time he was signed by the Dodgers.

"Let's see," mused Walsh. "He's probably somewhere among the pitchers."

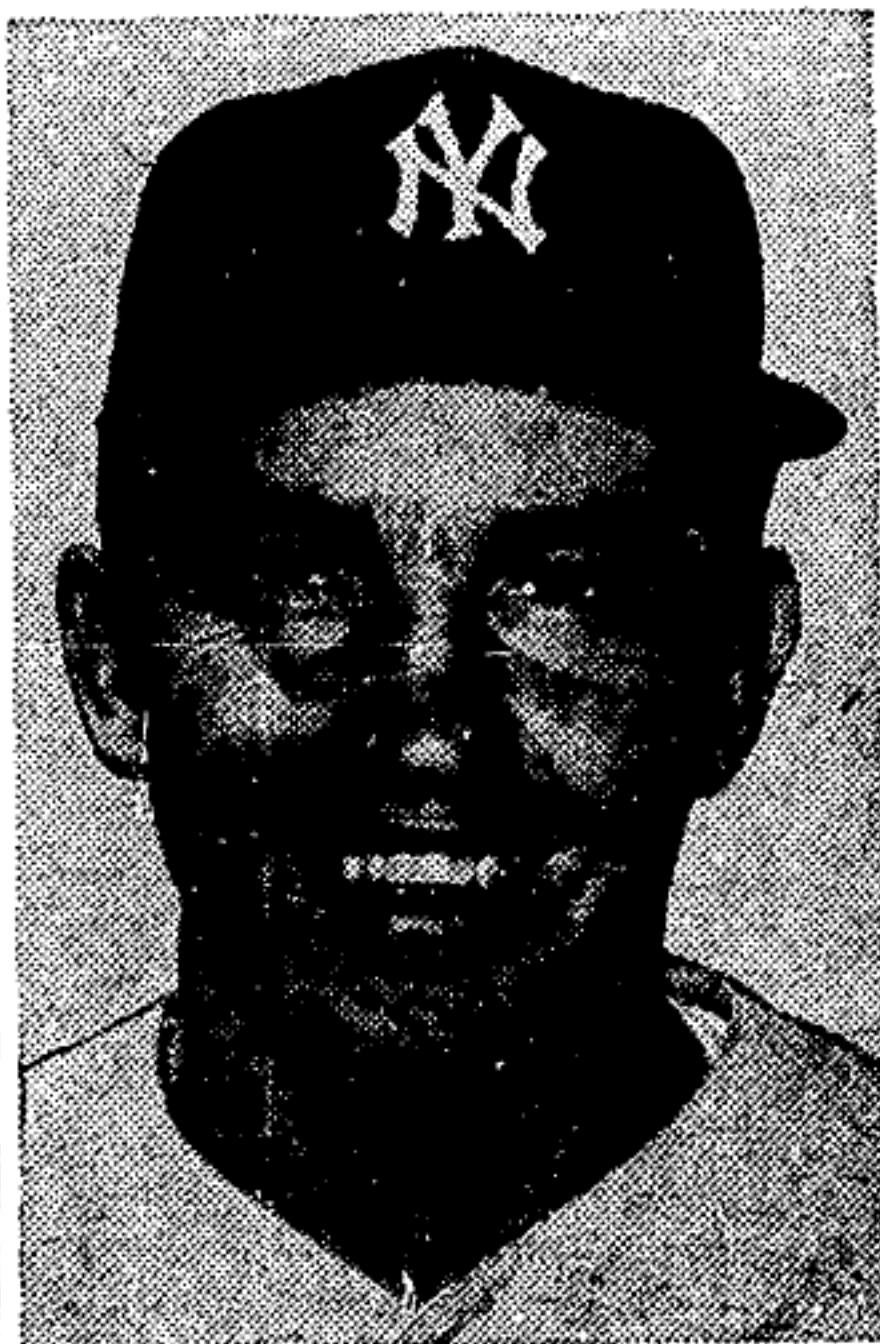
"Pitchers?"

"Yes, pitchers," replied Walsh. "I ought to know. I batted against him in American Legion ball in California when we were kids."

Noren was strictly still a fill-in or a two-platoon.

And then the fruits of careful tutelage by such men as Bill Dickey and Babe Herman started to materialize in startling fashion. The 1954 season started normally enough with the Yankee publicity department preparing a new sluice of adjectives on Mickey Mantle. Suddenly it was caught short with an abysmal lack of background material on the league's new batting star, Irv Noren.

It was a funny situation in New York. Willie Mays was driving the fans wild over at the Polo Grounds; Duke Snider was pounding the ball to a pulp in



IRV NOREN . . . Ex-Dodger chattel shines as Yankee.

Brooklyn, and the distinguished Yankees had to vie for space in the newspapers with a player whose own previous stock of clippings would have had to be stretched somewhat to fill a five-and-ten notebook.

Writers who sought background material on Noren had to dip for it in Brooklyn, of all places, in the dusty files of ex-Brooklyn organization play-

Irv Backed Newspaper's Series With Hitting Surge

NEW YORK, N. Y.—The amazing wealth of outfield talent among the three New York clubs precipitated a mild journalistic sweepstakes in mid-season, with various newspapers "backing" sundry stars with installment series on their careers. First to break into print was one on Willie Mays; next came one on Duke Snider.

One of the papers decided to use a series on Irv Noren and assigned its Yankee reporter to write it during the period when Noren was clouting at a .360 pace. By the time the series had been completed, Noren was in something of a slump and the newspaperman was in something of a sweat.

He collared Noren during the big home series with the Indians and advised him that the article would start appearing on the following Monday and would Irv please try for a couple of hits in the week-end games.

Noren advised him not to worry and came out of a one-for-24 slump with four for five, two for four and three for four against Cleveland hurling in three games. The large type remained above the article.

ers maintained in the Dodger front office. There they discovered a series of cards, 47 all told, on Noren, scout-

Case's Type--an Infielder in Outfield

Manager Says Development Was Held Up by Injury to Jaw With Washington

ing reports ranging from the one first turned in on him by Tom Downey which served as the basis for the Dodgers signing him for a \$5,000 bonus, to the last one turned in by Clay Bryant during 1949 spring training when a cogent phrase appeared, "Should be in the money."

Brooklyn, or rather Branch Rickey, then the Dodger boss, made a mistake, of course, on Noren. There was a slew of hot outfield prospects in Brooklyn vying for the left field spot—Carl Furillo and Duke Snider had the other two berths. There were Cal Abrams, Marv Rackley, Tommy Brown and a number of others. Noren didn't fit into the picture.

An Honest Mistake

Stengel thinks Brooklyn made an honest mistake on Noren; that it wasn't a deal predicated on the picture of some loose change floating around the Washington ball club's coffers.

"I guess they felt that he could not play left field too good on account of his being a lefthander and that he couldn't pull the ball too good. He had a habit of hitting over second and to left-center," declared Casey.

Stengel feels, too, that the jaw injury Noren sustained during his tenure

Good at All Spots

NEW YORK, N. Y.—"That feller," said Casey Stengel, nodding toward a group of Yankees awaiting their turns at the batting cage, "is my underrated guy." While there was some uncertainty as to whom Stengel was talking about, he presently offered a clue that it was Irv Noren.

"He's a good ball player wherever you put him. Left field, center or right, or even first base, it makes no difference to him."

with Washington held him back in his development. "He was pretty well busted up and they had a lot of trouble getting him to bite correctly, y'know, the occlusion," said Stengel, the ex-dental student.

The Yankees gave up a good deal for Noren—Jackie Jensen, Archie Wilson, Frank Shea and Jerry Snyder. For one reason or another, none of the quartette which went to Washington was deemed capable of figuring in the Yankee picture. Noren was. It took a little while, plus a considerable amount of Stengel's courage of his convictions, before Noren assumed his place as one of the top players not only on the Yankee club but in the league.

Ol' Case Likes Irv's Style

Noren is Stengel's type of outfielder, one that Casey describes pithily as—"He plays the ball like an infielder." Stengel has nothing but ill-concealed disregard for outfielders who "play it safe, who think things out." He wants his outfielders to move like members of his keystone combination.

It takes a long time for Casey to find an outfielder of this type.

Stengel is human, he has his moments of doubt. There was the period when Noren was on the block in 1952, when the offer of a good pitcher would have started the wheels turning to delete the lean-jawed Californian from the roster of the world's champions. Today it's different. He's as much an "untouchable" as it is for a Yankee to be.

"Oh, I'd trade him," smiled Stengel. "If someone offered me a house, or something like that. But not for anything else."

And since Stengel has a pretty fair house in Glendale, Calif., himself, chances are that Noren's name will be coupled with Stengel's as long as the maestro is handling the reins on the Yankees.