



Will he? ... or won't he, return to San Francisco, that is.

The Thrill's out of it

With the thrill of the season over, the question now for Giants' fans is: Is The Thrill going to be gone forever?

The Thrill, a.k.a. Will Clark, is eligible for free agency, and there is considerable doubt whether he will be back with the organization next year. Negotiations broke off early in the season and are set to resume this week. Clark is in the final year of a four-year, \$15-million contract that paid him \$4.25 million in 1993. The Mets, Rockies and Orioles are among the teams who could have interest in bidding for Clark.

What the Giants must decide is if his subpar numbers the past two years are an aberration, or a trend. Clark hit .300 in 1992, but with just 16 homers and 73 RBIs, his lowest totals since his rookie season. His power numbers this year were nearly identical. Clark insists, "Next year is going to be totally different."

They must decide if his possible replacements, rookie J.R. Phillips or veteran Todd Benzing, can do a comparable job at a greatly reduced rate.

More than anything, they must decide if they can afford to shell out the anticipated \$5 million a season it will take to retain Clark, in light of a payroll that is set to skyrocket based on the Giants' runaway success this season. Put slightly differently, they will weigh whether they can afford, from a marketing and public relations standpoint, not to retain Clark, who remains a highly popular and visible player.

"It's safe to say the fans and I have always had a good understanding," Clark says. "I've thoroughly enjoyed the support they've given me, especially this year, which has been very trying. I appreciate their support more than they understand."

Giants Manager Dusty Baker is convinced that Clark can retain his former level of play. When he re-inserted the hobbling Clark back into the lineup during a series in Houston, he told him, simply, "We need you."

"What's going on with Will is that water seeks its own level sooner or later," Baker says. "The bigger the game, the better he plays. He's been that way his whole life. Why would he change?"

—LARRY STONE

he says. "Frank Thomas is only 25. I feel sorry for all the younger managers because they're going to have to catch his act for a long time."

"He reminds me of Willie McCovey. Big, like McCovey, but wider."

Sparky talks about Thomas at every opportunity.

"What I like about him is he's steady," Sparky says. "He doesn't have big flashy days, like the guy with St. Louis." The reference is to Mark Whiten. "(Whiten) hit four home runs and drove in 12 runs in one game. They won 15-12. I'd throw that out. That doesn't mean anything."

"One day is all that it was. I call them 'dream days' for agents. But Thomas is a dream for the ballclub. He builds up his numbers day by day. It's like watching a sky scraper go up. One floor at a time."

White Sox batting coach Walt Hriniak, an old pro, usually is reluctant to talk about star players but makes an exception on Thomas.

"Frank has a chance to do things that are really exceptional," Hriniak says. "He uses the whole field, hits home runs, walks and hits for a high average. And he loves the pressure. What more can you say?"

Perhaps equally remarkable is Thomas' knowledge that he must not be overly impressed by his press notices. Soon after he joined the White Sox, he took a strip of tape, penciled the initials D.B.T.H. and fastened it above his locker. It stands for "Don't Believe The Hype."

During the last three seasons he has batted .319, with 97 home runs and 352 RBIs. That's not hype. That's fact. ◆

Jerome Holtzman is a columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

Not .400; above average

By JAY GREENBERG

No pendulum swings with an arc more precise than does John Olerud.

"In almost every aspect of hitting, John's on the mark," says Larry Hisle, the Toronto Blue Jays' batting coach. "He is perfectly balanced. His center of gravity between his two legs is ideal. He rocks back a couple of inches, according to the book. He gets a large push off the back leg."

"He rotates the lower half of his body, the part that enables him to hit for power, perfectly. His bat path to the ball is exactly where it should be. The rotation should be stopped when he makes contact and he does that well."

Subjected to such stringent quality control, the balls come off the American League batting titlist's assembly line in uniform line drives. Outside pitch to left, inside pitch to right. Over the plate, over the pitcher's head. "It's not a matter of if," Hisle says. "It's where."

Certainly the Jays never suffered much anxiety about the "when" part. A franchise that has won five division championships in nine seasons obviously has identified more than its share of prospects, but it has encountered few inevitabilities such as Olerud. When the



Slow foot, fast bat: Because he lacks footspeed, Olerud never believed he had a shot at .400.

rest of baseball found two good reasons not to lift the bat off its shoulders to draft and sign such an obviously gifted player, the Jays kept fouling off pitches in 1989 until they got their man.

Not that Dr. John Olerud, a dermatologist and former minor league catcher, and his wife, Lynda, ever threw the suitors any curveballs. John Jr., like the Sr., is as straight as an Adirondack and as level as one of his swings, so when he maintained he was going to play his final year at Washington State, most clubs bought it.

Of course, most wanted to believe Olerud, too, because it saved them a decision. Five months before the Jays risked a third-round draft choice on Olerud, he had collapsed while jogging during a WSU workout. When tests failed to identify a problem, Olerud resumed physical activity, but a colleague of Dr. Olerud urged him to find a doctor who would look further. Olerud went to the University of Washington Medical Center, where an X-ray taken from another angle finally showed an aneurysm.

Olerud, a strapping 6-5, 210-pounder, wound up in bed looking like a 21-year-old Don Zimmer, but before the six-hour operation, he was hardly shorn of hope. While brain surgery may not be as difficult as making out a good Padre lineup, it's a little more complicated than soaking a blister in pickle brine. Nevertheless, Dr. H. Richard Winn was reassuring all along that Olerud's aneurysm, which stood a 50-50 chance of suddenly killing him if not removed, was in a much more reachable place than most Dennis Eckersley sliders.

See, when you know the background, Olerud seems a lot less out of nowhere than from a mad scientist's laboratory. It's wilder than science fiction to see someone identified as so special through his formative years turn out so completely without pretense.

Four years into his major league career Olerud still looks like he's going to start crying if Roger Clemens comes inside, but those doleful eyes can read the worry lines in the pitcher's forehead from 60 feet away. Yeah, he may still look like a kid, but Olerud has always been very mature for his age with a bat in his hand.

"When a guy is pretty much under control mentally and physically, it's just a matter of time until things work themselves out," Jays G.M. Pat Gillick says. The Jays used Olerud as a D.H. in his first full season, then made room for him at first base when they sent Fred McGriff to San Diego in the astoundingly successful deal that brought Robbie Alomar and Joe Carter to Toronto.

Physical laws rarely have failed Olerud when he swung early in counts, but in his first three full seasons, he too often forgot. Nice guy that he is, he had always figured that hitting 0-2 was the only way to make it fair for those college pitchers. In the majors, he wound up waiting for something the pitchers knew better than to throw at 0-2.

This year he started swinging from the first pitch of the first exhibition game. By August, he still hadn't stopped. In the 52 seasons that have transpired since Ted Williams was the last man to hit .400 for a season, only George Brett and Olerud have been over that mark in August.

Olerud was so remarkably sane during the chase that one suspected that Dr. Winn had performed a two-for-one: the clot and a lobotomy. Olerud believed all along that his utter lack of footspeed made .400 an impossibility, so he didn't build the quixotic goal up in his mind. Instead of becoming caught up in being all-time, Olerud concentrated on one at a time. "If you keep thinking about (hitting .400), you start thinking, 'I've got to have two hits tonight,'" he says. "I don't want to go up there thinking about not making outs. I just want to try to hit the ball hard every time up." He became either tired or human in September.

He finished at .363, with 200 hits, 54 doubles, 24 homers and 107 runs batted in. A little short of his eventual destiny of 1.000 maybe, but still pretty good for a man with no pulse. ◆

Jay Greenberg is a columnist for the Toronto Sun.

The wait is finally over

By BILL BROWN

John Kruk sits by his locker three hours before the game with a cigarette and coffee while he tries to locate all of the incidental costuming — the Lycra pants, elastic sleeves, knee pads, ankle guards and shin protectors — that must be worn or affixed underneath his uniform.

His body language sends a warning: Bad Johnny is in a foul mood. The lower-back strain that will keep him tied to the bench for this game, the final date of the regular season, could linger throughout the postseason and he knows it.

"It's not a weight thing," he growls. "It has nothing to do with my weight. Nix that angle right now."

"It took me eight years to get here, so only death will keep me out of the lineup in the playoffs. It's a back thing. You never know. I could wake up feeling fine tomorrow. Then again, I might not wake

Baseball



Rookie John Olerud is displaying poise and patience at the plate in his role as Toronto's DH.

No Rookie Jitters for Olerud

By NEIL MacCARL

TORONTO—There are a number of things about John Olerud that make for an interesting story. His 1989 surgery to remove a life-threatening brain aneurism, the fact that he excelled as both a pitcher and hitter at Washington State and his donation of \$50,000 to set up a scholarship fund at the school come immediately to mind.

For the moment, however, people are talking about just one thing when it comes to the 21-year-old Toronto Blue Jays rookie: his disciplined hitting.

For some rookies, lack of patience is a problem. But not for Olerud, who had eight walks and just seven strikeouts in April. In fact, he may be too patient.

"I have always been one to get into the count a bit. That's the way I'm used to hitting," he said. "But I know I can't afford to get behind in the count.

"I'm patient, but if anything, I'm not aggressive enough. That's something they've talked to me about."

Added Jays batting coach Gene Tenace, "He's pretty intelligent and he handles (things) extremely well. I'm not telling him to start swinging at the first pitch, just to look for a ball he can drive, and if he gets it, to be aggressive, don't waste a room-service fastball.

"He has tremendous mechanics. He uses the whole field and hits the ball where it's pitched."

General Manager Pat Gillick was quick to jump on the bandwagon in praising Olerud.

"He is unusually disciplined for a young guy," the G.M. said. "His knowledge of the strike zone is quite phenomenal."

Although Olerud compiled a 17-0 record as a pitcher with Washington State as a sophomore in

1988 (he also batted .464 with 23 homers and an .876 slugging percentage that season), he opted not to pursue a pitching career in the majors. Instead, he decided to stick with first base.

The Jays, though, have Fred McGriff at first, so throughout April, Olerud toiled mostly as the club's designated hitter. That isn't exactly what the Jays had in mind for him, but they needed someone who could improve on their 1989 DH numbers (a cumulative average of .216 with eight home runs and 55 runs batted in, the worst totals by any club.)

"We would have liked to avoid it if we could," Gillick said of using Olerud at DH. "(But) he's got a good temperament. He doesn't get too rattled."

Tenace agrees that Olerud has what it takes to be an effective DH.

"I hated the DH (personally). I couldn't get into the flow of the game," Tenace said. "It takes a special individual. You've got to have a good mental attitude."

Olerud, perhaps betraying his pitching background, said he spends his time on the bench between at-bats watching how the pitchers work on hitters, what pitches they throw in given situations.

"(And) if I'm going to be up the next inning, I take some swings on the tee outside the clubhouse to get ready," he said.

Manager Cito Gaston said he had no problem using a rookie in the designated hitter spot.

"He's a real calm type of individual," Gaston said. "I don't think it's going to bother him."

In April, at least, Olerud didn't seem bothered. He hit .250 for the month with five RBIs. He also had two home runs, the first (his first as a major leaguer) a 427-foot drive against Baltimore's

Pete Harnisch on April 18. A security guard retrieved the ball for Olerud after that blast.

"It's going to my dad," he said, referring to his father, also named John, who was an All-America catcher at Washington State in 1965.

Speaking of Washington State, the school certainly was grateful for the younger Olerud's gift of \$50,000 to establish a baseball endowment fund. The fund was named in honor of F.C. (Bobo) Brayton, who is in his 29th season as the Cougars' baseball coach. Olerud contributed the money as part of the contract he signed with the Jays last summer.

It was while he was at Washington State in 1989 that Olerud underwent surgery to remove the brain aneurism that threatened not only his career, but his life. He collapsed after a workout January 11 and was diagnosed as having a subarachnoid hemorrhage. On February 27, he underwent the delicate brain surgery.

Olerud bounced back from the operation quickly and even managed to finish out the season with the Cougars, batting .359 with 30 RBIs in 27 games and compiling a 3-2 pitching mark in six appearances. He was drafted by the Jays in June, but didn't play a game in the minors. Instead, he rested, then was added to the Toronto roster in September and got eight at-bats for the Blue Jays.

After bypassing the minors last year, it now appears Olerud won't have to play there at all—not soon, anyway. Even when major league rosters had to be trimmed to 25 after the first three weeks of the season, there was never any question that Olerud would stay with the Jays.

"The players like him," Gaston said of Olerud. "And they believe in him as much as I do."

A.L. EAST

Future for Sveum Is Up in the Air



Paul Molitor's return to the Milwaukee Brewers has left Dale Sveum wondering what kind of future he has with the team. Molitor was activated from the disabled list April 27, leaving Sveum as the utility infielder. "It doesn't look good on this team as far as playing in the near future," said Sveum, who missed all of 1989 while he recovered from a broken leg. Molitor and Gary Sheffield are ahead of Sveum, at second and third, respectively. Edgar Diaz has been a pleasant surprise while filling in at shortstop for the disabled Bill Spiers. That leaves Sveum out of the starting lineup. "I'll accept whatever job they want me to," he said. "I'm not going to sit around and pout. I think this is a helluva ball club and I'd like to stay here right now." In the future, however, Sveum said he may look into other options, especially if he proves he can return to fulltime duty. "I'm not in a position (now) where a lot of teams would take a chance on a guy who missed a whole year," he said.

As for Molitor, he was hoping that playing second would put less strain on his tender right shoulder. "I know it's a tough throw on the pivot, but I was putting a lot of stress on the shoulder when I try to throw from third," said Molitor. Although he missed the first 14 games with a broken bone at the base of his right thumb, he is more concerned about his chronic shoulder problem. "My thumb is going to get better," he said. "My shoulder is something I'm going to have to live with." . . . The Brewers asked irrevocable waivers on Terry Francona to make room for Molitor on the roster.

Spiers, who is coming back from shoulder surgery, was sent to Denver (American Association) on a rehabilitation program April 27. He suffered a jammed finger in his first game. . . . Billy Bates was sent to Denver when rosters were cut to 25. With Jim Gantner, the Brewers' starting second baseman since 1981, on the disabled list along with Molitor and Spiers, Bates started nine of the first 11 games at second base, but his .103 batting average impressed no one. "When I was in there, I didn't do the job expected of me," said Bates, who failed to stick in the majors for the fourth straight year. . . . After two ineffective relief appearances in two weeks, Don August was sent to Denver April 29. "He has to go down and be aggressive and get his confidence back," said Larry Haney, the Brewers' pitching coach. August, the Brewers' opening day starter in 1989, had a 12.27 ERA when he was demoted.

Bill Wegman replaced August on the roster. In three starts at Denver, Wegman was 1-0 with a 3.29 ERA. The Brewers were hoping that Wegman would fill the spot in the rotation created when Tom Filer went on the disabled list April 30 with tendinitis in his right shoulder. . . . When Paul Mirabella started against Detroit April 28, it was his first major league start since April 30, 1984. Mirabella pitched

4 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings against the Tigers, allowing seven hits and four runs. Before that start the 36-year-old Mirabella had made 118 straight relief appearances, although he had started three games in the Senior Professional Baseball Association over the winter. . . . Robin Yount became the Brewers' all-time home run leader when he hit his 209th career homer April 28, pushing him past Gorman Thomas.

Greenwell Finally Knocks in Some Runs



Mike Greenwell had 119 runs batted in during 1988 and 95 last season, but the RBIs just weren't coming for him this year. Greenwell failed to knock in a run in his first 13 games before finally pushing one across against the Angels April 26. The next night, he slammed a pair of solo homers against the Athletics, only his fifth and sixth homers since the All-Star break last year. . . . Jody Reed, who moved from No. 8 to No. 2 in the batting order April 22, responded by hitting .560 (14 for 25) with two homers and 11 RBIs in his next six games, upping his overall average to .357. . . . When Roger Clemens lost two straight starts (1-0 April 29 and 8-3 May 4) to Dave Stewart and the Oakland A's, it gave him a 1-5 record in head-to-head combat with Stewart. The losses also dropped Clemens' record to 2-8 against the A's, the only team against which he has a losing mark. Clemens is 0-4 for his career in Oakland, the only A.L. city where he has never won a game.

Catcher Tony Pena tied Toronto's Tony Fernandez for the longest hitting streak in the league this year. Pena hit safely in 15 straight games before going 0 for 4 on April 28. . . . Dwight Evans, the major leagues' active home run leader, collected No. 369 on April 28, tying him with Ralph Kiner for 33rd place on the all-time list. Evans' three-run shot off Oakland's Curt Young gave him 1,295 career RBIs. . . . Righthander Greg Harris, who had started only one game since 1987, got the call April 28 against the A's. He went five shutout innings, giving up three hits, and picked up the 12-3 victory, his second of the season.

The Red Sox placed righthander John Doherty (injured elbow) and first baseman Billy Jo Robidoux (bruised right shoulder) on the 15-day disabled list April 28. On the same day, they activated righthander Wes Gardner, who had been on the 15-day D.L. with a sore elbow, and purchased the contract of righthander John Trautwein from Pawtucket (International).

Tanana Feels Lucky To Manage 200 Wins



Detroit Tigers righthander Frank Tanana collected his 200th victory April 28 in a 13-5 decision over the Milwaukee Brewers. Tanana not only considers himself lucky to have reached that milestone, he considers himself fortunate to be pitching at all. Tanana realizes that for a while, his career was hanging by a thread—because of an alcohol problem. "I was a drunk," he said. "There was nothing a six-pack couldn't