

Otis Would Rather Switch Than Fight

By MIKE MCKENZIE

FORT MYERS, Fla.—The deed is done. Amos Otis resides in left field. Willie Wilson roams in center.

The switch of the two had been talked about for four years. And Otis' disdain for the move had stained sports pages for the same period.

But Otis no longer is fighting. "You can't beat the system," he said.

But he still is biting.

"They say Wilson is the fastest man in baseball. It doesn't take a genius to figure that out. But if he runs 100 feet to catch a ball, I'd just have to run 50 to catch the same ball. So what's the problem? We both get the job done.

"The big question I had is, why do they wish to switch?"

Another Otis favorite is to explain how he can take a shorter lead off first base than Wilson, yet steal second base standing up more often.

And a final barb: "I know I will hit the cutoff man, head high, with one, big, beautiful bounce. My arm is strong . . . and accurate."

The rap on Wilson has been that sometimes he throws to the wrong base or misses the cutoff man.

Last year, he earned a Rawlings Gold Glove in left. The time seemed ripe early in the season to leave him in center, where he opened because Otis was injured. But when Otis returned, the Royals held a substantial lead in the A.L. West and Manager Jim Frey said he didn't want to "upset anybody" with major changes.

"Anybody," obviously, meant Otis.

Now Otis appears bent on not showing his true feelings. "I'm going to show them they can't get next to me," he said. "There didn't need to be a problem in the first place, if they would have handled it differently."

Otis traced his displeasure to having read about former Manager Whitey Herzog's plans to move him to left several years ago. "It was in THE SPORTING NEWS," he said. "Like, I had no choice. I balked. Willie wasn't ready for center. After eight years of loyalty, I thought they should have talked to me about it."

Otis was quoted as demanding more pay, or that he would rather change teams than positions. He repeated the stance later when Herzog talked about moving him to first base, an experiment that crashed in spring training.

For two seasons, Otis figures, he warded off defensive change with his offensive output: 325 hits, 134 runs, 186 RBIs, 62 stolen bases. But he missed the first 39 games last year after being hit on the hand by a pitch from an automatic machine during the late-spring player walkout.

"I never really got my timing and eye back until the playoffs and World Series—when all the money players go," he said.

Because his average dropped to .251 and his statistical production of the previous year was cut in half, Otis believes he is being farmed to left before his time. "I had an off year, and it's the last year of my contract, so they have the leverage," he said. "I was the first to admit a long time



Amos Otis . . . Accepting fate.

ago that Willie is going to be a great one. "But they put me between a rock and a hard place. I've got no choice—do it, or ride the bench, and I've played too

long for that. I just wish they had shown me some kind of respect."

In any discussion on the topic, Frey hastens to remark how the change is not a slur on Otis' ability. "He's still a great outfielder," Frey said. "It's just time to put Wilson where he belongs."

What difference will the move make?

Otis played a deep center, Wilson will play shallow. "Willie can outrun his mistakes," said General Manager Joe Burke. "There's some truth to what Otis says. With his super sense and stronger arm, he could play center a few more years.

"But it's a waste of a couple of year's experience Wilson can be gaining." Otis will turn 34 this season, while Wilson is only 26.

Otis came to camp with a request to play every inning of every exhibition game. "I don't want a lot of conversation, just a lot of playing time and to be left alone," he said. "That's the best way I can play."

"They haven't shown much confidence in me" after 11 years of loyalty because they won't give me a better contract. I'm not asking a million, and I want to finish up in Kansas City. So, I'll just have to have a good year and see what happens.

"I'm not worried. I'll be the best left fielder in baseball if I can, and I think I can. Only thing I can't do is swim."

Royalties: MVP third baseman George Brett remained in Kansas City to recuperate from his recent hemorrhoidectomy. If the recuperation period goes as planned, Brett will return to the Royals' camp March 14 and miss the team's first five exhibition games. . . . Pitching ace Dennis Leonard had to leave camp March 6 when his father-in-law died in New York City. Leonard was expected to miss a week to take care of funeral arrangements.

The Royals' clubhouse at Terry Park was ransacked and thieves got away with approximately \$7,000 worth of players' equipment from their open dressing stalls. . . . Ken Phelps, a first baseman with just three games of major league experience in five years, remained the only unsigned player on the 40-man roster. . . . Cesar Geronimo and Manny Castillo reported late to camp. They were among several players hung up in the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere, because of late approval on visas by the U.S. Department of Immigration. . . . Frank White, with an out-of-court settlement, severed his contract with agent Tony Pace of Pompano Beach, Fla. . . . Hal McRae dropped 15 pounds and grew a beard in the off-season, which he said, "will remind me every day when I look in the mirror that I'm supposed to be lean, mean and hungry."

Former Royals first baseman Pete LaCock got off to a fast start with his new team—the Yokohama Taiyo Whales. LaCock, who batted .205 in 114 games last season with the American League champion Royals, knocked in five runs with a home run, double and single as the Japanese team defeated the Chicago Cubs, 12-5, in a March 8 exhibition game in Mesa, Ariz.

Allenson's Bosox Role Has a Familiar Ring

By JOE GIULIOTTI

WINTER HAVEN, Fla.—It's getting to be the same old story for Boston catcher Gary Allenson—go through spring training as the No. 1 catcher, then watch from the bench after the bell rings in early April.

In 1979, with Carlton Fisk injured, Allenson was given the job but he got off to a poor start, fell into Manager Don Zimmer's disfavor and never made it back.

Last year Fisk didn't catch a game in the spring because of an elbow problem and, again, Allenson seemed to be the heir apparent. But the Red Sox traded for Dave Rader, Fisk recovered after training and Allenson saw only limited action.

It's a new year, with a new season on the horizon, and Allenson still is the No. 1 catcher with Fisk sitting at home mulling over his free agent offers.

Not only is Allenson the No. 1 catcher, he's the only catcher in camp with major league experience. But he knows he's likely to be on the bench when the season begins. He knows the Red Sox are trying to re-sign Fisk and are also scanning the training camps, seeking a possible deal for another catcher.

"I think the big thing in my favor is confidence," Allenson said. "I'd like to know how the Fisk situation will turn out so I can govern myself accordingly. But I won't worry about it this year."

"In 1979, I had the chance and didn't do the job early in the season, but the only reason I was in there was because Fisk was hurt. It would have been nice if I had started off well, but I didn't. This time, if Fisk isn't back, I'll be able to handle things much better.

"The change in managers (from Zimmer to Ralph Houk) certainly won't hurt me. I was hitting well last year (.357 in

70 at-bats) and still didn't get the chance to play. I can't play any less under Houk and may play more." Allenson went on.

"I don't know what will happen with Fisk," Houk said. "I haven't missed him yet. I know he's been offered a very fine contract, but if he's not with us and we can't get a first-class catcher, then I'll take a look at our young kids. Allenson is a good example. Who knows how good he can become?"

Allenson said, "I think I'm a good defensive catcher. I know there are a lot of good arms around here, but I think I'm more accurate. I've been studying the hitters for two years and that's something you have to know to be a good catcher in the majors."

A year ago, two of the game's greats—Ted Williams and Frank Robinson—put their stamp of approval on Allenson. Williams said Gary could hit big league pitching and Robinson, who managed him two straight years in winter ball, felt he could handle the chore defensively.

Sox Footnotes: Joe Rudi, obtained with Frank Tanana and Jim Dorsey in the trade that sent Fred Lynn and Steve Renko to the Angels, injured his right calf on the first day of workouts. "I think it will be all right. When I left home I thought I was close to the best condition in my life," he said. . . . Red Sox co-owner Buddy LeRoux is not optimistic about re-signing Fisk and said that his loss may not be as big a disaster as many feel. "In my opinion, no one person is indispensable," said Buddy. "Other clubs have won championships without a catcher of Fisk's caliber." . . . Carney Lansford, also an ex-Angel, experimented with glasses during the off-season and is wearing them here. The throwing of reliever Bill Campbell has been very encouraging. . . . The Red Sox promised to add instructors to their minor league system and started by naming Mike

Roarke as pitching and catching coach at Pawtucket (International). . . . The first camp casualty was new pitching coach Lee Stange, who injured an Achilles tendon while running.

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