

CHANGING

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"If the pitchers give Clark fastballs, he's going to hit a lot of homers. If they walk him, then Winfield is going to have a very big year. Either way, we come out ahead."

A.L.'s Grass Fields, Shorter Fences Appeal to A's Newcomer Parker

By KIT STIER

PHOENIX—Dave Parker was sweating beneath a warm Arizona

sun. He stood behind a batting cage watching Bob Welch master a forkball under the direction of Oakland A's pitching coach Dave Duncan.

"He (Welch) has been here two weeks and he is already trying that tricky American League stuff," said Parker, a 15-year major league veteran, as he walked away from the cage shaking his head. "He's a good pitcher though, a good pitcher."

While Welch spent his first nine seasons in the majors firing fastballs for the Los Angeles Dodgers, Parker was elsewhere in the National League—with Pittsburgh for 11 years and Cincinnati the last four—making life miserable for the likes of Welch.

While Welch becomes acquainted with A.L. hitters this season, Parker has to get used to a new position as well as new pitchers.

"There will be some adjustments," said the 36-year-old outfielder who has been ticketed to play left field for Oakland after being a right fielder for the Pirates and Reds.

"Playing left field is the big thing, plus learning the patterns they are going to pitch me," Parker said. "Other than that, it's still baseball."

The A's aren't worried about the six-time National League All-Star (and 1978 Most Valuable Player) adjusting to the switch in leagues. Parker's .297 career average, plus 273 home runs and 1,190 runs batted attest to his ability to hit. But

Parker underwent surgery on his left knee last winter, and keeping him healthy is a concern.

A's coach Bob Watson, a career .285 hitter in his playing days with Houston, Atlanta, Boston and the New York Yankees, knows about switching leagues. Watson said there were three areas in which Parker would have to adapt—pitching, umpires and ball parks.

"Three quarters of the parks in the National League are symmetrical (artificial) turf fields," Watson said. "American League parks have their own characteristics with those little nooks and crannies."

Parker's eyes light up when he thinks of the short porches in right field in places like Detroit, New York and Baltimore.

"Now that's attractive; there are much better dimensions in this league," said the lefthanded power hitter, who hit a moon shot onto the roof of Tiger Stadium in an exhibition appearance with Cincinnati last summer.

To take advantage of the A.L. stadiums, Parker said he may have to change his hitting style just a touch.

"My theory on hitting is still seeing the ball and attacking it," Parker said. "I may spread out my stance and add an ounce and a half to my bat."

Parker figures A.L. pitchers will approach him by throwing off-speed deliveries away. He also noted that the pitching styles in the two leagues have grown more similar in recent years, that the National League has a ball circuit it

once was.

"I am going to try to hit the ball the other way with the dimensions here," he said.

Watson agreed with that strategy.

"If I was pitching to Dave Parker, I would want to get him off the plate inside and then throw him a lot of crap outside to keep him off balance," Watson said. "If I was Parker, I'd take the hard stuff up and in because it's usually not a strike. Then I'd try to go the other way with the next pitch."

Batting in the power-packed A's lineup should be to Parker's advantage. Who is the opposing pitcher going to challenge? Parker? Jose Canseco? Mark McGwire? Carney Lansford? Don Baylor? Terry Steinbach?

"Since Parker is the big guy on the block, they may want to mess with him," Watson said.

Lansford and Baylor will help in another way. They have spent their entire careers in the American League and will be able to give Parker a good education on the pitching styles he'll face.

Probably the biggest adjustment Parker must make will be in the outfield.

A's Manager Tony LaRussa opted to move Canseco back to right field and give Parker a look in left, a position he has never played.

"I thought about it long and hard," LaRussa said after finally deciding to move Parker into left. "There were a couple of factors. First, and right at the top, was his willingness to do what is necessary. Second, there is no reason a player of his ability can't make the change. There will be less wear and tear."

The move appeals to Parker.

"I've grown accustomed to diving to my right," Parker said. "Now, I've got to grow accustomed to diving to my left."

"I don't think it is something I can't do. It's somewhat of a challenge. I take a lot of pride in what I do on defense and I'll do a lot of the extra stuff, such as taking balls after practice and during batting practice."

There are those who would suggest that Parker took the first step on the downside of his career last year in Cincinnati. His average dipped to a career-low .253 and he hit 26 home runs and drove in 97 runs.

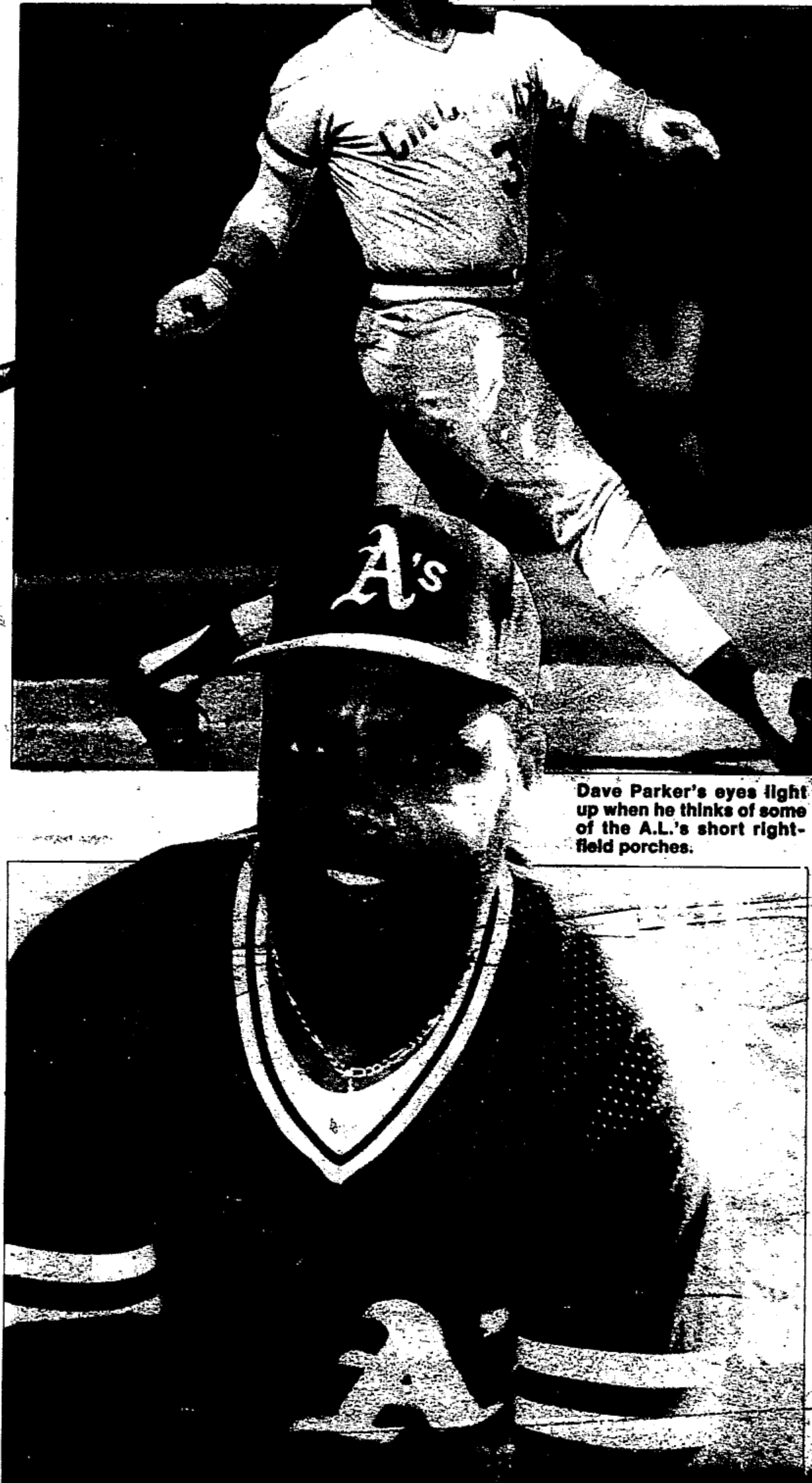
Parker counters by saying that he probably should have had knee surgery during the season, that the only reason he played when he had bone chips floating around on the knee was because the Reds were in the race for the N.L. West Division title and had a bunch of youngsters in their lineup.

For a guy whose knee was subject to locking up at any given moment, Parker's numbers weren't all that bad.

The knee is better now. Parker can run forward, backward and move laterally with ease.

In the American League, only Minnesota, Seattle, Kansas City and Toronto play on artificial surfaces. Half the 12 N.L. parks have

Dave Parker's eyes light up when he thinks of some of the A.L.'s short right-field porches.



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