

Pop's Protests Proved Prod for Pearson

Dad Had Fear Albie Would Fail to Stick

'But Today No One Happier Than I Over Success,' Says L. A. Star's Father

By BRAVEN DYER
LOS ANGELES, Calif.

"I tried to discourage Albie from attempting to become a major league ball player.

"There were two reasons for this. In the first place, I was afraid that he would get hurt. He's only five-five you know and never has weighed 145 pounds.

"In the second place, and I think this was the more important reason, I didn't think he could make good. . . . and like most people close to Albie, I felt that not making good would break his heart."

Albert Pearson, father of the smallest player in the major leagues, was speaking about his only child, the 139-pound outfielder with Gene Autry's sparkling Los Angeles Angels.

Albie's dad was an athlete himself. I have good reason to remember him because it was my job in the early 30s to run a prep program called the Junior Olympic Games for the Los Angeles Times. Albie's papa won the divisional championship by an all-round display of good athletic speed and dexterity.

Same Size as Son

Today, at 48, he is the same height as his son (5-5½) and weighs only half a dozen pounds more. The outfielder's current poundage is 139, "but I'm down a little now because we eat only two meals a day during spring training" is Albie's comment.

Well, ten years after he broke into Organized Ball at San Jose (California), it is apparent that Pearson, Sr., was unable to discourage the dynamic little picket from shooting for the moon.

"And nobody is happier about it than I am," said papa, "unless it's his mother. Naturally, we're as proud as can be; we just didn't want him to set such a high goal and then experience such disappointment as hits so many boys in baseball."

Albie is quite philosophical about that now.

"It just made me work all the harder," is the way he explained how he felt about his parents' hopes.

Handicap an Asset

"Ask any little man in sports and he'll tell you the same thing. . . . it's a handicap, of course, to be small. Another angle, it's an asset because you just can't afford to let down, ever. It's just like they say in golf . . . you've gotta keep your eye on the ball all the time," Albie said.

Incidentally, when his baseball career ends, the fiery little flychaser wouldn't mind being a golf professional. Some of his links opponents say he's that now. Albie has been in the 60s many times and wins most of the tournaments he enters for active diamond men.

Pearson doesn't say so, but I have an idea he'll be disappointed if he doesn't have a better year than he did last season. Most players would be glad to settle for the record Albie compiled in 1962—but not Bill Rigney's roving center fielder.

"The only way to play any game is to try to get better each time you play it," is his philosophy.

Last year, he led the American League in runs scored with 115, was eighth in walks with 95, twelfth in



TWO OF THE BRIGHTEST jewels in the Angels' crown—Ed Kirkpatrick (left), 18-year-old catcher, and Albie Pearson, star center fielder. Naturally, the subject was batting.

times at bat with 614, eighth in stolen bases with 15, twentieth in hits with 160 and fortieth in total bases with 216. In addition, only four men appeared in more games than Albie, who was one of four Angels to play 160.

If what he's done in spring exhibitions is any accurate measuring stick for things to come, Albie will have a better year this season.

Entering the final stages of the exhibition campaign, he was the team's leading hitter (.367) just as he was for the regular season in 1961 with his .288 average.

He led in runs scored with 14, hits with 22, total bases with 32, two-base hits with four, triples with two, stolen bases with three and had fanned fewer times than any of the regulars.

"How do you explain your fine start?" Pearson was asked.

Swinging at Strikes

"I'm not swinging at so many bad pitches," was his answer. "I've learned to be more patient and swing only at the ones that I think are good pitches. No, the expanded strike zone hasn't hurt me at all. As a matter of fact, I think it has helped because I'm watching more closely for what I think are good pitches.

"The wonderful weather in Palm Springs helped me, too. I think our entire team is in great shape. Then, rooming with Bo Belinsky has helped me, just as being Ted Kluszewski's roomie two years ago did. They keep a serious little guy like me loose and that's good for you. You can't be too tight, you know.

"I honestly think I should be a better fielder this season. I know that playing in Chavez Ravine last year helped me a lot. You see, the year before that we were in Wrigley Field at Los Angeles. Jumping from that small

Li'l Albie Big Man to His Missus

LOS ANGELES, Calif.—Albie Pearson may be the smallest player in the majors, but he looks big to his wife, Helen. "It may be because I'm so small myself," she said, "or it could be that he's such a great guy, such a terrific scrapper on the field, that everything he does looks big to me.

"He's never been self-conscious about his size," Helen continued. "His father named him for Albie Booth, the famous little football star at Yale, and it was an apt choice.

"He's talented in other fields. He has a wonderful singing voice. He even sang at our wedding. He sang 'Because' and 'Tenderly' to me as I came up the aisle. It was beautiful."

park to the others in the league wasn't easy. Now I feel that I know my way around."

Pearson has a background of popularity that makes him a fine drawing card around the country. THE SPORTING NEWS saluted him as American League rookie of the year in 1958. Last season, he and gargantuan Steve Bilko were the most popular Angels, along with Leon Wagner. At the conclusion of spring training in Palm Springs, Albie was presented with the MVP award given by citizens of the desert spa.

He's popular with kids, mothers, fathers, other players (except rival pitchers) and just about everybody.

His beautiful wife, Helen, and their three daughters, Kim, Karee and Kandi, the youngest almost five, think he's the finest daddy in the world. They with his mother, Virginia, and dad, attended most of the spring training games at Palm Springs. Albie makes his home in Riverside, about 50 miles from the desert spa.

"I played baseball, too, you know," said Virginia Pearson, who stands an even five feet and weighs 99 pounds. "I was a third baseman with our girls' team."

Pearson's dad was a good athlete at Pasadena City College, leading the

baseball team at bat and playing in the outfield. He also played for a semi-pro team, the Alhambra Merchants, where he learned "that they don't want little men in baseball," as he tried to tell Albie. The father almost signed with Scout Ernie Johnson for the Boston Braves, but decided against it. He's now an auto salesman in El Monte, where Albie went to high school.

Happy With Home Club

No player on Gene Autry's club is happier than Pearson to be wearing his Halo cap.

"Being with the Angels is the most important step in my career," he said. "It has made me a member of the home club in my own area, where my family and I have lived for so long, and I just keep trying to help the Angels every way that I can."

That'll be plenty, whether he betters his 1962 record or not.

The mighty mite is mighty pesky up there at the plate. He says, "As lead-off batter, it's my job to get on base."

Gradually, American League rivals are becoming accustomed to looking up and finding him there.

Youngest Big Timer

Phenom, 18, Wins Spot on Angel Bench

Pilot Rig Rates Kirkpatrick as Strong Clouter—Plans to Use Kid in Pinch Roles

By BRAVEN DYER
LOS ANGELES, Calif.

The youngest rookie in the American League will be carried by the Los Angeles Angels this season.

His name is Edgar Leon Kirkpatrick and he won't be 19 until after the World's Series.

Joe Cronin's circuit is apt to hear from this teen-age muscleman because Manager Bill Rigney intends to carry him all season as utility player and pinch-batter.

"Yes, I like batting practice the best of anything," said the 190-pound Spokane-born husky who signed an Angel contract last June immediately after graduating from Glendora High School in Southern California's verdant Pomona Valley.

In his first 19 games in Angel uniform, Kirkpatrick had been to bat 27 times. Of his nine hits, one was a booming homer (first of the spring for the Angels), two were triples and two were doubles.

Which caused Rig to remark: "I like this kid. When he hits the ball good, it's a triple or double. When he doesn't hit it too good, it still falls in there."

Protected From Draft

The Angels are carrying Kirkpatrick because of the new bonus rule. He and Pitcher Bobby Darwin were signed after the new bonus rule (limiting the maximum teaser to \$8,000) went into effect. The Cherubs must keep one of the boys on the varsity or lose out to any team which puts in a claim. And only one may be shipped to a lower classification. Darwin already has been sent to Hawaii, the top Angel farm club.

Batting Instructor Joe Gordon likes Kirkpatrick's natural swing. "He packs power and I'll be surprised if he doesn't hit for a pretty good average, even in his first year."

Although he doesn't say so in as many words, Kirkpatrick will be surprised, too.

You can't call him cocky. But, for a teen-ager, he's a might confident rookie. Veteran players on the Angel roster like him, which is a tip-off that young Ed has a future.

Ribbed by Teammates

They razz him plenty when he sneaks into the batting cage out of turn, but they've welcomed him warmly as a member in good standing of Rigney's Remarkables, as some of the West Coast writers call the club which stunned the American League with that third-place finish last season.

"Of all the Angels, I think that First Baseman Lee Thomas impresses the most," said the young rookie. "He goes all out every minute.

"I sure got a thrill watching Ernie Banks when we played the Cubs. He does everything so easily. And Willie Mays is simply great. I don't think I'd ever get tired watching him."

Kirkpatrick lives in Glendora with his father, Wayne. The boy's grandfather played semi-pro ball in the Midwest.

Roland Hemond, chief of L.A.'s scouting system, and Tufie Hashem, one of the top Angel talent hunters,

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 14, COL. 2)