

Pirates Must Wait and See On Old Ailments, Old Age

By CHARLEY FEENEY

BRADENTON, Fla.—The challenge facing Chuck Tanner in 1981 is his biggest since he became the manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates before the 1977 season.

Tanner inherited a contender from the late Danny Murtaugh and the Pirates were in the thick of the race late in both the 1977 and '78 seasons. In 1979, Tanner and the Bucs went all the way to the world championship.

Now the Pirates are coming off a third-place finish in the National League East. They won 83 games in 1980 and they lacked their old September punch.

Although optimism prevails in spring training, once reality sets in the Pirates may not shape up as contenders.

The pitching is suspect. There are questions about the physical condition of many starters. And some regulars are reaching the age where their futures are questionable.

Tanner must try to mold a contender during spring training. He must make decisions on several pitchers. He must decide on his backup players. If all goes well during the exhibitions, Tanner should be able to put a good lineup on the field in April. The question then will be: Can the Bucs remain healthy through the next five months?

Can Willie Stargell, age 41, play 100 games?

Can Dave Parker return to his 1979 form, when he won his second consecutive batting championship and was named the N. L.'s Most Valuable Player?

Stargell and Parker underwent arthroscopic surgery on their knees last fall. Stargell says he is ready for the long grind.

Parker?

"I won't know how strong the knee is until I play," he said. "I've been lifting weights, but I haven't been doing much running. I haven't really tested the knee."

Second baseman Phil Garner played the last two years with a constant ache in his right shoulder and last reports indicated that Garner's shoulder wasn't 100 percent.

Shortstop Tim Foli had all sorts of leg problems last sea-

son and third baseman Bill Madlock underwent postseason surgery on his thumb. Center fielder Omar Moreno had surgery on a finger that bothered him the second half of 1980.

The Pirates' team physician, Dr. Joe Coroso, and trainer Tony Bartirome may be the most valuable people in training camp.

Tanner is aware of the problems. He will cope. That's his style. He sees only rainbows.

"We have the potential of a winning ball club," Tanner said just before he put the pitchers and catchers through their first workout at Pirate City.

"There isn't a club in baseball that doesn't have some type of problems," Tanner said. "It's not supposed to be a cakewalk. I don't think any club is capable of running away in the East Division. The Phillies are the champs and they are the team to beat. Montreal came mighty close the last two years. The Cardinals have improved. The Mets and Cubs won't be easy. They never have been."

Tanner could have one unhappy pitcher on his staff. Jim Bibby, a 19-game winner last year, has been unsuccessful in his efforts to renegotiate his contract.

Pete Peterson, the Bucs' executive vice-president, says he is not in favor of renegotiating contracts.

"I don't try to renegotiate with a player after he has an off-year," Peterson reasoned. So why should he renegotiate when the player has a big year?

Another starting pitcher, John Candelaria, is in the final year of his contract. So are Garner, Madlock and catcher Ed Ott.

Pittsburghers: Mike Easler, the Pirates' most productive batsman (.338 average, 21 homers, 74 RBIs) in 1980, signed a multiyear contract shortly before going to salary arbitration. . . . Easler and Lee Lacy opened camp as the favorites to share the left field job, but if Bill Robinson has a big spring he could emerge as the opening-day left fielder and backup first baseman to Stargell. Robinson, 37, had problems with an Achilles tendon last summer.



Dave Parker . . . Waiting game.

No Joy in Mets' Camp—Just Plenty of Woes

By JACK LANG

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.—Another season, another reason for making whoopee? Eddie Cantor obviously never heard of the New York Mets.

As they enter the 20th year of their existence as one of the league's most successful (though not recently) franchises, there is not much cause for making whoopee in their camp.

The Mets start the spring campaign with a bunch of question-mark arms, the usual big hole at third base, an overcrowded outfield, an aging first baseman in the first year of a three-year guaranteed contract and, most importantly, still without a bona fide 25-homer, 100-RBI man.

Manager Joe Torre, starting a new two-year contract; did wonders with last year's team for three months. But injuries decimated the team the last six weeks of the season and there have been few replacements to fill these gaping holes.

Notably missing last year were a consistent winning starter and a homer-RBI man.

Mark Bombardieri, a rookie, was the big winner with 10.

Craig Swan, Pat Zachry, Ray Burris and Pete Falcone could not match that. Except for Falcone, most of them spent a good part of the season on the disabled list.

A comeback by Swan is necessary if the Mets are to rise above fifth place. The Three Million Dollar Man has been in Florida since early February, throwing three days a week. But he has not yet thrown above 70 percent of capacity and probably will not until late March. Swan hopes to pitch the opener in Chicago April 9, but that's iffy.

Burris is gone to Montreal. Zachry is healthy again and Randy Jones is the import from San Diego who brings new hope to the staff. If the little lefthander, the 1976 National League Cy Young Award winner, can regain even a portion of his old form, he could be a tremendous tonic to the staff. All the Mets gave up to get Randy was John Pacella, whose claim to fame was that he lost his cap on virtually every pitch.

Bearing scrutiny is Tim Leary, the former UCLA star who was the outstanding pitcher in the Texas League last year. General Manager Frank Cashen would like Leary to have a year in Triple A.

A lot will depend on how much Rusty Staub can

play and where. First base is the logical spot and the only one Torre has mentioned for the 37-year-old veteran. But what if the Mets go through with the John Stearns-for-Jason Thompson deal with California? That would bring the Mets the big bat they need, but what would Torre do with two slugging first basemen in a league that doesn't use the designated hitter?

The outfield situation should also prove interesting. Lee Mazzilli says he has been assured he will return to center, a bit of acreage he calls home. But Mookie Wilson may be the best center fielder on the team. He has a so-so arm, but may have to play right if the Mets can't unload Steve Henderson and have to keep him in left.

Meanwhile, Joel Youngblood, who has a better arm and more power than most of them, sits on the bench waiting for his turn to play somewhere.

Metscellaneous: Torre says he has his doubts about Swan being ready for the opening of the season. . . . Ex-Mets outfielder Cleon Jones has been hired as minor league batting instructor. He'll be with the big club in Florida, then stay on to work with the kids.

Expos Have High Hopes for Raines in Sunny Florida

By IAN MacDONALD

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—The Montreal Expos chose Valentine's Day to announce the signing of outfielder Ellis Valentine.

This should hardly be construed as the revival of the love affair between the Expos and their controversial right fielder. The Expos are waiting to see whether the big Californian is ready to flash his full potential.

The signing of Valentine to a one-year contract assured Manager Dick Williams that all of his regulars were in the fold for the start of spring training.

The Expos have shifted their training headquarters to what they hope will be a sunnier clime in southern Florida after eight years at Daytona Beach. It is, of course, only coincidence that most members of the Expos' board of directors, including Chairman Charles Bronfman and General Manager John McHale, own real estate in the area.

There'll be some inconveniences because there wasn't time to build everything at the complex adjacent to that of the Atlanta Braves. Both teams will use Municipal Stadium for exhibition games.

In the West Palm Beach area, the Expos will have a better exhibition schedule, with numerous teams head-

quartered nearby.

The newly built clubhouse is first class, but the Expos do have to skirt the Braves' main diamond to get to their relatively small practice area. Since West Palm Beach is new to most of the players, many are staying at the team's hotel headquarters, 10 miles away on the main state highway.

The main issue at the camp will be who plays left field. Last year's regular, Ron LeFlore, took his league-leading 97 stolen bases and 95 runs scored to the Chicago White Sox for big bucks.

Rookie Tim Raines will be given every opportunity to win the left field spot. However, the 21-year-old speedster who was named Minor League Player of the Year by THE SPORTING NEWS never has played the outfield.

Originally, the Expos had hoped to have Raines play left for Escobido in the Dominican Winter League. But league rules forced Raines to play his regular position, second base.

Should Raines fail to do the job in left, Warren Cromartie could take over. Cromartie played left before the acquisition of LeFlore. Cromartie played 162 games at first base last year, but the Expos have veteran Willie Montanez for that post.

Raines will lead off if he makes the starting lineup. Williams admits that "if Raines doesn't make the team, the loss of speed (LeFlore) will be critical."

Asked if Raines might beat out Rodney Scott, a valuable .224 hitter, and force Scott into a battle with veteran Chris Speier at shortstop, Williams said: "If Raines beats out Scott at second base, we'll have an active Hall of Famer. Scott is the best defensive second baseman in baseball."

While batting .354 at Denver, Raines set an American Association record with 77 steals. However, in a brief stint with the Expos the 5-8, 165-pounder had only one hit in 20 at-bats.

Expos: Stan Bahnsen, who lives in nearby Boca Raton and commutes to camp, is associated with the plush Laver's Delray Racquet Club and has invited members of the Expos party to be his guests at the club. . . . Pitcher Bill Gullickson, who fanned 18 in one game for a rookie record last year, was the first Expo in camp.

The Expos reached into the free-agent market and signed veteran righthander Ray Burris February 18. The 30-year-old Burris (7-13 with the New York Mets last year) signed a one-year contract and figures to compete for a starting job with the Expos.

missing," he said. "Also, being on base and creating the opportunities for runs. I accept it as a challenge. After going through difficult times, I know better times are ahead.

"I'll be 26 (March 12), and I'm on the uprise. I want to be considered a complete player."

His teammates already consider him that.

"He's an everyday player who combines power with speed," Gooden said. "If I'm on the other team, I have to plan my entire pitching game around him. That's the way I face the Phillies when (Mike) Schmidt's in the lineup. If he's not in the lineup, a pitcher feels like he's at an advantage going in.

"Without Darryl for an entire year, our chances of winning would diminish."

"It's amazing to me what Darryl's capable of doing," said Wally Backman. "He's capable of 50 home runs and 50 stolen bases. That's not easy. You need breaks. But he does have the ability."

"If Darryl's out of the lineup, we could get by for a few days," Mazzilli said. "But then it starts to affect how others in the lineup are pitched to. After a week, we'd miss him terribly."

"You know what's scary?" Backman asked. "He's capable of doing this for a long time, the next seven years at least."

And despite the efforts of a sometimes difficult New York press to trade Strawberry because of the controversies surrounding him, you can bet he'll be doing it for the Mets.

"I have no intention of trading Darryl Strawberry," General Manager Frank Cashen said emphatically. Case closed.

DAN CASTELLANO

MONTREAL EXPOS



Tim Raines

Tim Raines makes the Montreal Expos click.

Arguably the best leadoff batter in baseball, Raines is the catalyst for Montreal's offense—the player the Expos could least afford to lose.

"Without him in the lineup, it takes our offense down a notch—more than that," said third baseman Tim Wallach. "When he's (on base) we get more good pitches to hit, and he keeps pressure on the defense. With the things he does, he puts us over the top. Instead of us being an average offensive team, he makes us an outstanding offensive team."

Although Raines missed spring training and all of April as an unsigned free agent a year ago, he still led the National League in runs scored with 123 and hit .330, just four points below his league-leading figure of 1986. Raines also



Arguably the best leadoff man in baseball, Tim Raines is the catalyst of the Expos' offense.

had 34 doubles, a career-high 18 home runs and 68 runs batted in. After stealing at least 70 bases in each of his first six seasons, Raines swiped 50 last year.

Wallach had 26 homers, 123 RBIs and a major league-leading 42 doubles last season, but he attributes much of his production to Raines' presence in the lineup.

"If Rock (Raines) hadn't been there, I don't know what I would have done," Wallach said. "Rock is the one who makes this team go. He was out there a lot when I was hitting. He gives everybody in the order confidence and makes it easier for everybody behind him."

Manager Buck Rodgers is reluctant to pick one man as being indispensable "because this is a team game. But he proved the spark for us last year. We were struggling to play .500 without him."

"Certainly one man makes a difference from time to time. Tim Raines is the kind of guy on our ball club who makes a difference. He's one man who makes more of a difference."

The Expos were 8-13 when Raines played his first game last year. In dramatic fashion at Shea Stadium May 2, Raines tripled, walked and singled twice before beating the Mets with a 10th-inning grand slam.

"He's the catalyst for our offense," Rodgers said. "He's a .300-plus hitter who's capable of stealing 75 bases a year with a high percentage. He gets the base on balls, and he's also got the ability to drive home runs. In the last couple of years, he's hit the long ball."

Despite his late start in 1987, Raines was named to the All-Star team for the seventh straight year. He then collected three hits in as many at-bats, including the game-

winning triple in the 13th inning, in being named Most Valuable Player of the All-Star Game at Oakland.

Although Raines stole only 50 bases last season, he tried to steal just 55 times.

What does Raines mean to the

Expos?

"Everything," said Hubie Brooks. "Offensively, he's the story. As he goes, we go. If he stops, we stop. His hitting has improved. His running is more disciplined. I've seen his confidence grow. I think his confidence is great, and it rubs off. His level of intensity has improved in the last couple of years. And he can put a game away for us if he has to."

Is the 28-year-old Raines the club's most indispensable player?

"There's no doubt in my mind," Brooks said.

"He's a multi-talented hitter and performer on the bases and at bat," Rodgers said. "But he's much better than adequate on defense. He's made himself a good defensive player. The only drawback is he doesn't have a rifle arm. He gets a good jump on the ball, and he's always in position to make the throw. He's learned how to play the game defensively with his limited throwing ability."

IAN McDONALD

PITTSBURGH PIRATES



Andy Van Slyke

One night during spring training Andy Van Slyke found himself on a

radio call-in show back to Pittsburgh when a caller reminded him of a comment St. Louis Manager Whitey Herzog had made when Van Slyke was with the Cardinals.

"With Andy Van Slyke, what you see is what you get," Herzog was quoted as saying.

"That was one of Whitey's famous quotes over the winter," Van Slyke said. "He called me a .260 or .270 hitter, a 60-RBI man."

The words ate their way into the back of Van Slyke's mind. He didn't find them particularly inspiring. But when the caller brought them up, Van Slyke smiled.

"I'm glad the caller called and reminded me of that, because I always did feel I could do better. All I needed was the chance," he said.

The chance was given him not by the Cardinals, but the Pittsburgh Pirates, who on April 1, 1987, traded their most popular player—Tony Pena—to St. Louis for Van Slyke, catcher Mike LaValliere and pitcher Mike Dunne.

LaValliere won a Rawlings Gold Glove, Dunne became THE SPORTING NEWS National League Rookie Pitcher of the Year and Van Slyke became, quite simply, the Pirates' most indispensable player.

"The Pirates knew I wasn't a one- or two-dimensional player," Van Slyke said. "Through the course of a game there's a lot of things I can do to help a team, even if it's just cutting a ball off in the gap to keep a guy from scoring from first and we win by one run."

It is difficult to imagine that the Pirates would be one of baseball's most improved teams if Van Slyke wasn't around.

Their No. 3 hitter and center fielder established career highs in every offensive category but walks (Continued on Page 28, Column 1)

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