

# Roenicke Fitted for Big Bird Role

By KEN NIGRO

BALTIMORE—Earl Weaver likes to break in a first-year player gradually, no matter how effective that player proves to be over a season. It matters not if the guy is King Kong or Gary Roenicke.

Roenicke was the Baltimore Orioles' big surprise a year ago, hitting 25 home runs, driving in 64 runs and finishing with a slugging percentage of .508 in his first full season. When he wasn't hitting, he found other ways to reach base—walking 61 times and being hit by pitches 12 times. In addition, Roenicke played all outfield positions for Weaver, who fancies a player who hits home runs and carries a lot of gloves.

But the Orioles' manager was somewhat selective with his righthanded slugger. While Roenicke appeared in 133 games, he started only 110 and he batted only 376 times.

This, Weaver says, will change because Roenicke has been once around the league and has seen most of the pitchers. No longer will Gary be spotted against certain righthanders.

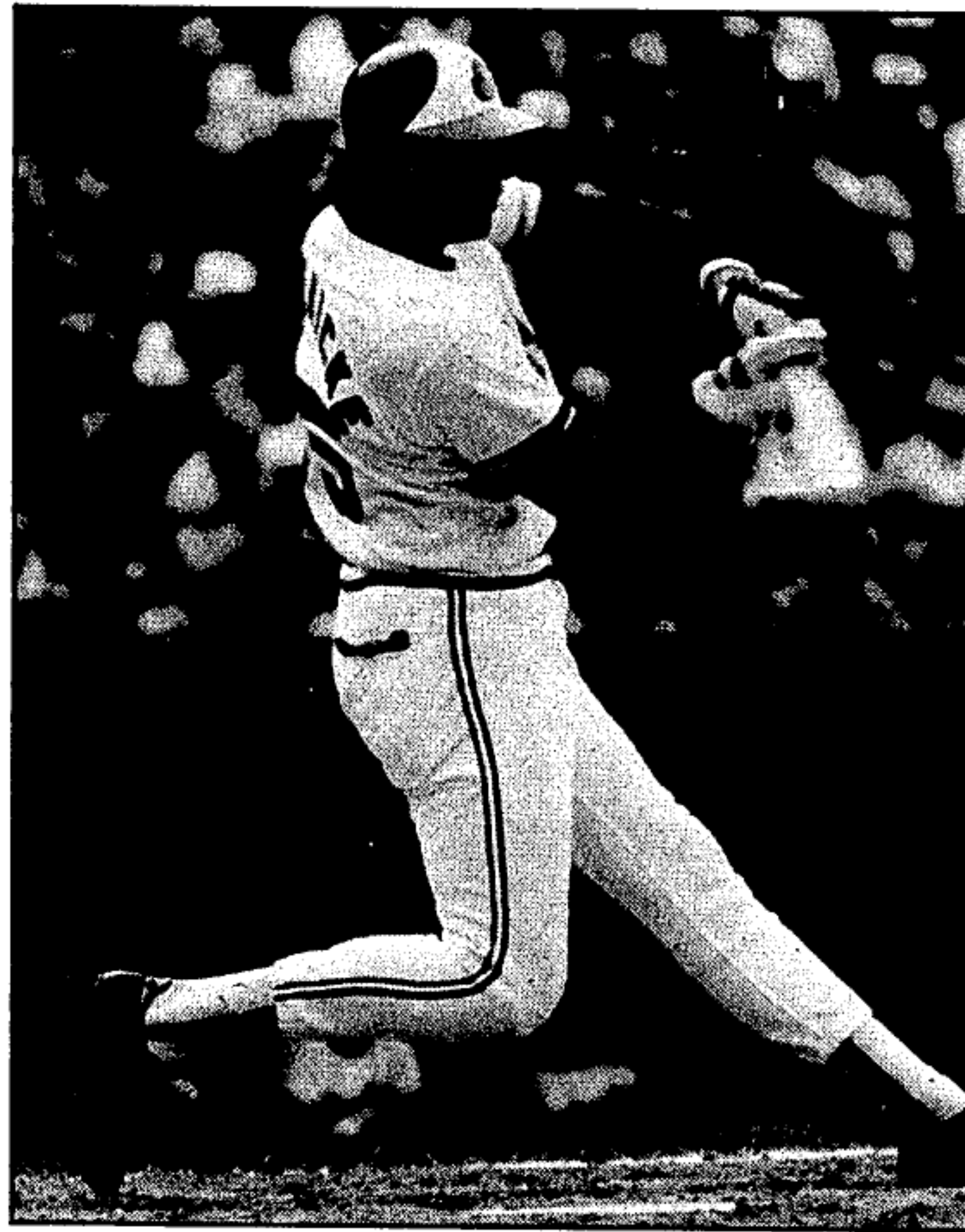
For the most part, Roenicke will be the Orioles' left fielder every day. That is, of course, if Gary keeps hitting homers.

"I'm going to play Roenicke as much as I can," Weaver said. "I still might take him out against certain righthanded pitchers but we've got to get him between 500 and 600 at-bats. Who knows, he might hit 35 or 40 homers if he comes up that many times."

Roenicke, 25, agrees he has graduated from the platoon class but he's not so sure about his manager's arithmetic.

"I'm looking forward to playing every day and I think I've earned it," said Roenicke, who was a first-round draft choice of the Montreal Expos in 1973. "Also, I think with me in there, we'll have a stronger team because it gives us a bigger lift off the bench with guys like Pat (Kelly) and John (Lowenstein) and Benny (Ayala). But I don't know about the homers. I figured if I played a lot last year, I might hit a homer every 20 at-bats. Instead, I got one every 15 at-bats. I think I would have a good year this year if I could hit 25 homers again and have 80 runs batted in."

Staying healthy was a bit of a problem in 1979. Roenicke was hit in the face by an errant pitch from White Sox reliever Lerrin LaGrow and 25 stitches were needed to



Gary Roenicke... Platoon class graduate.

close the wound.

"I was taking batting practice four days after I got beamed," Roenicke recalled. "Frank (coach Frank Robinson) got me to do it that soon. He knew a lot of guys who got hit in the face and went down the tube and I think he felt it was important for me to get back in there. I also felt I should start playing as soon as possible because I was starting and I didn't want to lose my job."

Roenicke also credits Robinson with helping him become a solid defensive player last year when he led the Oriole outfielders with 10 assists.

"Frank did an outstanding job in spring training last year with all the outfielders," Roenicke said. "All of a sudden, everything came into place for me defensively. I was originally a shortstop and played third base before switching to the outfield in 1975. I remember I always used to misjudge balls and it wasn't until last year that I was a good outfielder."

Roenicke was acquired from Montreal in 1977 along with Don Stanhouse and Joe Kerrigan for Rudy May, Randy Miller and Bryn Smith.

"We knew about Roenicke on the basis of reports from a scout, Bob Zuk," General Manager Hank Peters recalled. "Zuk originally signed Gary and was very high on him."

Now, Weaver intends to find out just how high Roenicke can go.

**Bird Seed:** Roenicke played in only two of the first four games because of food poisoning and not platooning. . . . The Orioles won two of their first five games and Jim Palmer captured both. Palmer apparently is on the verge of agreeing to an extension of his contract, so he's in a good frame of mind. . . . Dennis Martinez remained on the disabled list with torn fibers in his biceps muscle and Scott McGregor's elbow continued to hurt. With these two out, Dave Ford got a start in Chicago and pitched well for four innings. Then he lost his control and was yanked in the fifth. "I've never seen Dave walk three straight batters before," said pitching coach Ray Miller.

The Orioles drew a record 50,199 to their homer opener. . . . Ken Singleton hit a home run in the first game Mike Flanagan pitched, which was not unusual. Singleton hit 15 of his 35 homers with Flanagan on the mound last year.

Former owner Jerold C. Hoffberger still has not paid that \$2,500 fine that was imposed on him by Commissioner Bowie Kuhn when Hoffberger permitted Maryland Governor Harry Hughes to throw out the first ball in last year's World Series. Ironically, all three were on hand for the home opener and Hughes again threw out the first ball. "Perfectly legal," the Commissioner said. But as to when or whether Hoffberger would ever pay up, Kuhn replied, simply, "No comment."

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