

# LOOPING THE LOOPS

By J. G. TAYLOR SPINK

## Keeping Reins on Reindeers on Base Paths

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.



Buddy Rosar

Warren (Buddy) Rosar of the Athletics, who established a major league record by catching 117 games last year without an error, is going to be in tip-top shape when the season opens. Buddy already is in West Palm Beach, an early arrival before the official opening of Connie Mack's spring training camp.

At 32, Rosar is a veteran of three All-Star games and three different major league clubs. On the face of his remarkable record of 117 straight games without an error last season, there is some basis to the claim of his admirers that he is the best maskman in the majors.

Connie Mack, who holds to that opinion, bases his rating of Rosar on the catcher's team value, his handling of pitchers and his throwing. There are no statistics on how many stolen bases were charged against Buddy last season, but regular observers at the A's games say the figure was less than 20. And Buddy gets his men without calling for pitchouts as protection!

Keeping traffic under control on the basepaths is one of baseball's interesting studies, and Buddy, following a close study, knows all the angles.

Rosar served a long apprenticeship under Bill Dickey on the Yankees when the latter was baseball's top catcher, and Buddy learned to look for certain signs that tipped off a base runner's thoughts. It is the job of a base runner to keep a runner from stealing against a pitcher as well as just trying to beat a throw from the plate, following a pitch.

### Dickey's Tips From Bench

"You can often tell when a runner is about to take off for second by merely watching him," Rosar began, in explaining his technique in cutting down boys with larceny in their hearts. "Sometimes he leans forward; if he is a rookie, he becomes fidgety and takes a lead too soon. You can tell these things much better from the bench than when you are catching.

"When I was with the Yankees, Dickey and I had a certain signal that we used when a runner gave himself away. If Bill was catching, I would holler out, 'Give him a drink, Bill.' That's not the exact signal, but it was something on that order, something that had nothing to do with the game and would not cause any attention. And Bill would 'p me off in the same way when I was working behind the plate.

"The New York club was one outfit that knew its stuff when it came to reading the opposing team's signs. Art Fletcher and Earle Combs, the coaches, were masters, too, at calling pitches and relaying them to the hitters. Joe Gordon was a terrific hitter on a called pitch, especially in the late innings with the score close. He could hit a long ball that broke up many a ball game.

"Maybe the reason for Joe's slump last year was that he wasn't getting those pitches, or maybe he missed Fletcher and McCarthy. . . . He's one of the best base runners in the American League. Cleveland will be a team to watch on the bases this coming season with George Case and Gordon on the same club.

### "Rizzuto Also Good"—Rosar

"It's a tossup between Case and George Stinweis as to which is the best runner in the loop. One is faster and the other gets a better jump on the pitcher. Another clever fellow at getting away on a steal is Phil Rizzuto of the Yankees.

"The White Sox have three top men on the paths in Don Kolloway, Thurman Tucker and Luke Appling. Luke has slowed down, but he's a smartie. Joe Kuhel is in the same class. And when the score is close in those late innings, you've got to get Mickey Vernon or he'll take that extra base. Joe DiMaggio is like Vernon—he doesn't steal much, for he's too valuable to risk injury, but in a tight game he can really go for that extra sack.

"Both DiMaggios—Joe and Dom—are among the best base runners in the game. And there's a fellow named Johnny Pesky with the Red Sox who bears plenty of watching when he reaches first base. Smarties like those fellows don't often give themselves away. You study base runners for their

### Rosar Tabs Joe DiMaggio

#### Top A. L. All-Round Star

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—Joe DiMaggio has the greatest all-round ability in the American League, but Ted Williams is easily the best hitter, in Buddy Rosar's book.

"I have never seen any pitcher fool Ted," said the A's star. "Remember that any time a batter goes to the plate the law of averages is working against him. Sure, Ted has missed pitches and popped others up, but they didn't fool him.

"I don't think he'll change his style of hitting, even if they could throw nine men on the left side of the infield. He isn't paid to hurt and hit singles. The Boudreau shift may have bothered him, but he'll make them change yet. I never saw Ruth or Cobb, but Williams is the best hitter I've ever seen and he's a swell guy, too. I've studied Ted. He has perfect technique at the plate and the best pair of eyes in baseball."

little habits and tricks, but mainly a catcher can break up a steal or a hit-and-run play or a run-and-hit play by watching every factor in the game.

### Run-and-Hit and Hit-and-Run

"There is a difference between the run-and-hit and the hit-and-run," Rosar paused to explain.

"Joe Cronin, also Jimmie Dykes when he had the men, are strong for the run-and-hit. On this one the batter has a pitcher in the hole, and the base runner is stealing on the pitch. On the hit-and-run the runner isn't stealing. The RH is a bigger gamble, for the hitter is trying to drive the runner around to home and score him.

"These are two plays that a catcher has to study close if he is to avoid a lot of stolen bases. Where do you find the tipoff? You have to watch four . . . and that's where a catcher needs a confederate on the bench to help him. On some clubs, the manager flashes the signal to the first base coach to relay to righthand hitters and to the third base coach for lefthand hitters. That's the way the Yankees under Joe McCarthy did it.

"On other clubs like Washington, the third base coach gave the signals to all the hitters. You watch a base runner getting a signal from the batter for the hit-and-run. If he is inexperienced, he frequently quits looking at the batter after a certain sign has been given to him, and you immediately deduce what that sign was and that something is afoot. If the runner has speed, and the club plays the run-and-hit a lot, and it's early in the game and the pitcher isn't in a hole, you can call for a waste pitch, a high fast ball outside. That's the easiest pitch to get away.

"If the batter takes a swing at the pitch, you know that the hit-and-run was on—if he doesn't and lets it go by, you know that it was the run-and-hit. A batter who gives the hit-and-run and doesn't try to bother the catcher with at least a swing at the ball is not a good team man.

"One of the best team men in the American League and one of baseball's most underrated stars is Tommy Henrich of the Yankees," continued Buddy. "When Tommy is in a slump, that's when you have to watch for him to pull something. I caught his hit-and-run sign last year, not from him but from the base runner, and it saved us a game.

"Henrich is the kind of a player who'll give himself up anytime to help his club. That's why his average is really a lot better than it looks on paper. And when he's not hitting those

# Steve Slyly Opens Door for Richard to Get in Some Early Raps at Camp



Virgil Trucks

Steve O'Neill

Dick Wakefield

By H. G. SALSINGER

LAKELAND, Fla.

Conversation heard in the lobby of the New Florida Hotel the other day:

Steve O'Neill—"How about you taking a workout?"

Dick Wakefield—"I have been working out."

O'Neill—"Doing what?"

Wakefield—"Playing golf, handball, squash and things like that, and walking."

O'Neill—"Walking where?"

Wakefield—"From here to the corner."

O'Neill—"I know. From here to the Elks Club. Did you walk back or call a cab?"

Wakefield—"No, I didn't call a cab. I walked back."

O'Neill—"That was fine. Now, how about running. Have you done any running?"

Wakefield—"Why no, not exactly."

O'Neill—"Had a bat in your hand?"

Wakefield—"Yes."

O'Neill—"I mean recently?"

Wakefield—"Just last week."

O'Neill—"Where was that?"

Wakefield—"At Rudy York's farm."

O'Neill—"Did you have to go to Rudy York's farm to get hold of a bat?"

Wakefield—"I didn't go there for

that. I just stopped off there to see Rudy. He's got a den with a lot of pictures and things and a pile of bats and he was showing me the proper swing and all that. Diz Trout and his wife and two kids got there soon after I did and there was York and his wife and their three kids, and Diz and his wife and two kids, and Rudy and me and a couple of other fellows. I can't think of their names right now, but Rudy keeps them on his place so he's always got somebody to go fishing and hunting with."

### Rudy a Busy Guy

O'Neill—"What kind of a place has he got?"

Wakefield—"Oh, a regular farm. You know, a house and barn and couple of sheds and a couple of cottages where those two fellows live that he goes hunting with. And cows and pigs and chickens, and things like that."

O'Neill—"And don't forget the bats."

Wakefield—"Yes, the bats. And he's got 30 suits of clothes, most of 'em brand new, that people in Boston gave him last year. And he's got six bolts of woolens that he got in Boston from admirers and he's going to have them made into suits for himself and wife. He went to a

tailor at Cartersville, lives, in Georgia near where he lives, but I guess the tailor didn't understand just how Rudy wanted 'em made so he's going to another tailor."

O'Neill—"He must be pretty busy, what with looking after the farm and having visitors and giving you batting lessons."

Wakefield—"He's busy all right. He's so busy that he hasn't had time to sign a contract. He hasn't even read it. He says it can wait. I guess he's the only Boston player that hasn't signed."

O'Neill—"Well, let us go to the park and you show me what you showed Rudy and what Rudy showed you about batting."

Wakefield—"Training doesn't start till next week."

O'Neill—"For you it starts today. You need plenty of practice."

Wakefield—"He recalled his .268 average last year and he didn't come up with anything about portal-to-portal."

O'Neill—"I'll get somebody to pitch to you."

Wakefield—"Who?"

O'Neill—"Virgil (Trucks) will do the pitching."

So to the park they went and engaged in the first workout of the year.

long drives, he is the best hit-and-run man on the Yankees.

"A good base runner watches the type of deliveries made to the batter," said Rosar, warming up in his discussion.

"Few pitchers in the majors have a perfect delivery to keep runners glued to the bases. Some pitchers tip off their delivery to the plate by moving their feet first before throwing; others lean their shoulders or head forward.

### Henshaw Wizard With Half Balk

"Lefthanders have a natural advantage in watching a runner on first, but the two cagiest pitchers I've handled in the American League, at that, were righthanders, Mel Harder and Spurgeon Chandler. Roy Henshaw, the little lefthander who has retired from the game, had the best motion to first I ever saw. It was a half balk. He used to throw his leg in the direction of first base, and if the runner took much liberty he was picked off."

Rosar mentioned these pitcher weaknesses, adding that a pitcher with a lazy motion was easy meat for a runner, to point out that a catcher must also know his pitcher to be set to throw when the runner discovers the flaw in his delivery.

"I've made throws to second base when the runner wasn't 30 feet away," said Rosar. "In fact, the runner had

the base stolen while the ball was still in the pitcher's hand.

"But in baseball, it doesn't pay to take anything for granted. That runner might stumble or overslide the base, and if you didn't throw, you would miss an opportunity. It pays to throw to protect yourself and your team, even though it may seem you don't have a chance."

On a hot day, Buddy related, Mack's pitchers have orders to throw frequently to first base, especially with runners like Case, Rizzuto, Stinweis or other speed merchants on the bag.

"It may be boring to the fans to watch a pitcher keep driving a runner back, and making him hit the dirt," he explained, "but it sometimes wears a runner down, and takes that little edge away from his start. If a runner can start right off, he has a big margin in his favor. Our pitchers throw over to first base as often as they can with dangerous runners."

Rosar believes he is a 50 per cent better catcher today than he was five years ago, and he asked us to pass on the credit to an expert glove-maker, Harry Latina of the Rawlings Mfg. Co. in St. Louis.

"There is a flock of players in the American League who owe a lot to Harry Latina," said Buddy. "I'm one and Rudy York is another. He made a first baseman's mitt that did wonders for Rudy's fielding. He made a glove according to the way the player

wants it, and he advises others by look at their hands as to what type glove they should use.

### Uses Small Mitt

"In the glove Latina made me I catch the ball in front of my web. The glove has its pocket right there in front, there is little padding in the tip of the glove and not too much near the web. It is a small glove, but it has a perfect pocket for me. With it I can handle bounce balls, sliders, rollers and bad breaking fast balls with one hand and that makes it easy.

"I could play first base or the outfield with that glove. Harry comes spring training and makes the rules of the clubs. I like this glove, a pocket here . . . and it should have a pocket here . . ." And Latina takes his tools and re-makes that particular glove.

"One day in St. Louis, Billy Van was talking to Latina. Billy was giving a great job for the fielders, he said, 'but you took 30 points off batting average.' . . . Many of the marvelous backhanded stabs of drives you see in the outfield these are due to Harry Latina's art in glove making. And he also owns a piece of Buddy Rosar's fielding record."

## The Sporting News

Trade Mark Registered  
Published Weekly by THE SPORTING NEWS  
J. G. T. Spink, President, 2012-18 Washington  
Avenue, St. Louis 3, Mo. Entered as second  
class matter February 13, 1904, at Post Office,  
St. Louis, Mo., under the Act of March 3,  
1879. Subscription price \$8 one year; \$4.50  
six months; \$2.50 three months.