

Ferguson Thinks His Way to Stardom

By ROSS NEWHAN

LOS ANGELES—Joe Ferguson is the first Dodger to wear No. 13 since Ralph Branca.

That's right, Bobby Thomson's Ralph Branca, a man who visits Dodgertown each spring, puts an arm around Ferguson's back and says:

"Son, you've got to get rid of that number, it's very unlucky."

Ferguson smiles sympathetically at Branca and shakes his head. He has worn 13 since Little League when the taller kids got the higher numbers. He wears it as the Dodgers' most exciting power hitter since Frank Howard, a home run threat on a club that did not expect to have one, and all-star candidate, a catcher to compare with Johnny Bench. Sparky Anderson, the Cincinnati manager, made the comparison himself.

"I rate Ferguson as the best young power hitter to come into the National League in some time," said Sparky. "No one will ever be the defensive catcher Bench is, but Fergy can be that type of hitter."

THE 26-YEAR-OLD Dodger sat by his locker and analyzed the comparison.

"To be mentioned in the same breath as Bench is an awfully nice compliment," said Ferguson, "but he's who he is and I'm who I am. We each do things that the other doesn't."

"I don't believe, for example, that I'll ever be the power hitter he is. I have to hit the ball where it's pitched and wait until the pitcher comes to me before I swing for a home run. Bench is capable of pulling everything."

Ferguson has pulled no punches through the first two months of 1973, providing Bench with an unheralded challenge for the National League's home run and RBI lead.

Through 41 games Ferguson had driven in 33 runs, hit nine homers and was batting .298. He had driven in at least one run in 22 games and had not gone more than two games without an RBI.

This is a young man who says that hard-headedness was the reason he never hit more than 16 home runs during five minor league seasons.

HE CREDITS OSSIE VIRGIL and Tommy Lasorda for changing his mental and physical posture at the plate, making him an aggressive hitter who does not overswing, a thinking hitter who does not overthink.

This is the young man with the strength of a power hitter, but not until last year did Ferguson begin to draw upon that power, employing his size in an aggressive manner that would seem natural.

Joe Vance Ferguson is 6-2 and 200 pounds. The back is that of a blacksmith.

"I had always swung hesitantly, I had always been afraid of striking out," he said, reflecting on his development.

"I think it was a combination of a lot of things. I was hard-headed. I lacked concentration. I was actually late in maturing physically. I mean, I was 5-9 in high school and only six feet when I played basketball at University of Pacific.

"PEOPLE KEPT TALKING about aggressiveness, but I couldn't picture it. The first step was a change in my stance, the second was a change in my thinking."

And the catalyst was the September performance of Steve Yeager, a skilled defensive catcher who joined the Dodgers from Albuquerque in August, had only one hit in his first 34 at-bats and then batted .375 during the final month.

"Yeager's performance left me more or less at the crossroads," said Ferguson. "I knew I'd have to have a big spring to take the job away from Steve. I went to winter ball intent on becoming a new hitter."

The theories that Lasorda had preached to Ferguson at Albuquerque were implanted by Virgil in Venezuela, where he powered 19 homers and set a league record with 63 RBIs in 81 games.

Once an upright hitter who had difficulty getting at the low pitch, Ferguson's stance was changed so that he could go to the opposite field while not diminishing his power when he got a pitch he could pull.

"THAT WAS THE KEY," he said. "Whenever I want I can show the pitcher that I have the ability to hit the ball the other way. Given that capability, I've immediately put the pitcher on the defensive."

"That is the whole basis of my confidence and aggressiveness. I hit major league pitchers in Venezuela and I don't think anybody in this league has good enough stuff to

get me out consistently.

"If a guy was capable of making his pitch every time, he'd be in a higher league. And if he doesn't want to pitch to me, I'll take my walk. With our team I'm just as valuable on first."

"Selectivity is the difference between aggressiveness and overswinging. So is being a thinking hitter, but it takes time to find out about concentration and patience."

"EVERYBODY HAS THE capability to think, but a hitter can't afford to overthink. His decisions must be made before the pitch is made, not when it's on its way."

Ferguson would seem on his way to a banner season, but he has not set goals.

"I don't even want to know what I'm hitting," he said. "I wish they wouldn't put the averages on the scoreboards. You look up and see yourself hitting .300 and you tend to become complacent. Besides, hitting isn't my primary function."

"The Dodgers' basic strength is still in its pitching staff and if I don't do the job defensively, I'm not going to stay in the lineup no matter what I hit."

Ferguson was an outfielder initially. Lasorda suggested he become a catcher three years ago.

"The organization was in need of catchers," explained the Dodger coach, "and here was a guy with a tremendous arm and the hands of a basketball player."

DEL CRANDALL TAUGHT Ferguson the rudiments while the former Milwaukee catcher was managing in the Los Angeles farm system.

"I had done everything else in baseball, including some pitching in college," said Ferguson, "so the challenge was okay with me."

"Besides teaching me how, Crandall convinced me of its importance."

"You're going to be a good hitter, a guy who'll get a lot of home runs and RBIs," he'd say. "But think of your catching as the most important thing you do for the club."

Take your satisfaction from that, not your offensive totals."

Refinements in Ferguson's style are still being made by Chris Cannizzaro, the Dodgers' reserve catcher. The pair confer before and after every game.

"We have the type staff that makes it easy on a young catcher," said Ferguson. "They're mature, always thinking, always around the plate. I have confidence in my arm and I'm generally satisfied with my progress."

Ferguson's progress delights Manager Walter Alston, of course, but he is also concerned about what is happening to Yeager.

Alston considers the two his club's best young catchers since Roy Campanella and John Roseboro.

YEAGER, HOWEVER, was displaced by Ferguson's big spring and catches only when Joe requires a rest.

Ferguson's rest isn't really a rest. He simply moves to an outfield position.

"It's more of a matter of keeping Yeager sharp and Fergy's bat in the lineup," explained Alston.

Ferguson's bat has been such that he already has more RBIs than three Dodger catchers (Cannizzaro, Duke Sims and Dick Dietz) totaled last year prior to Yeager's arrival.

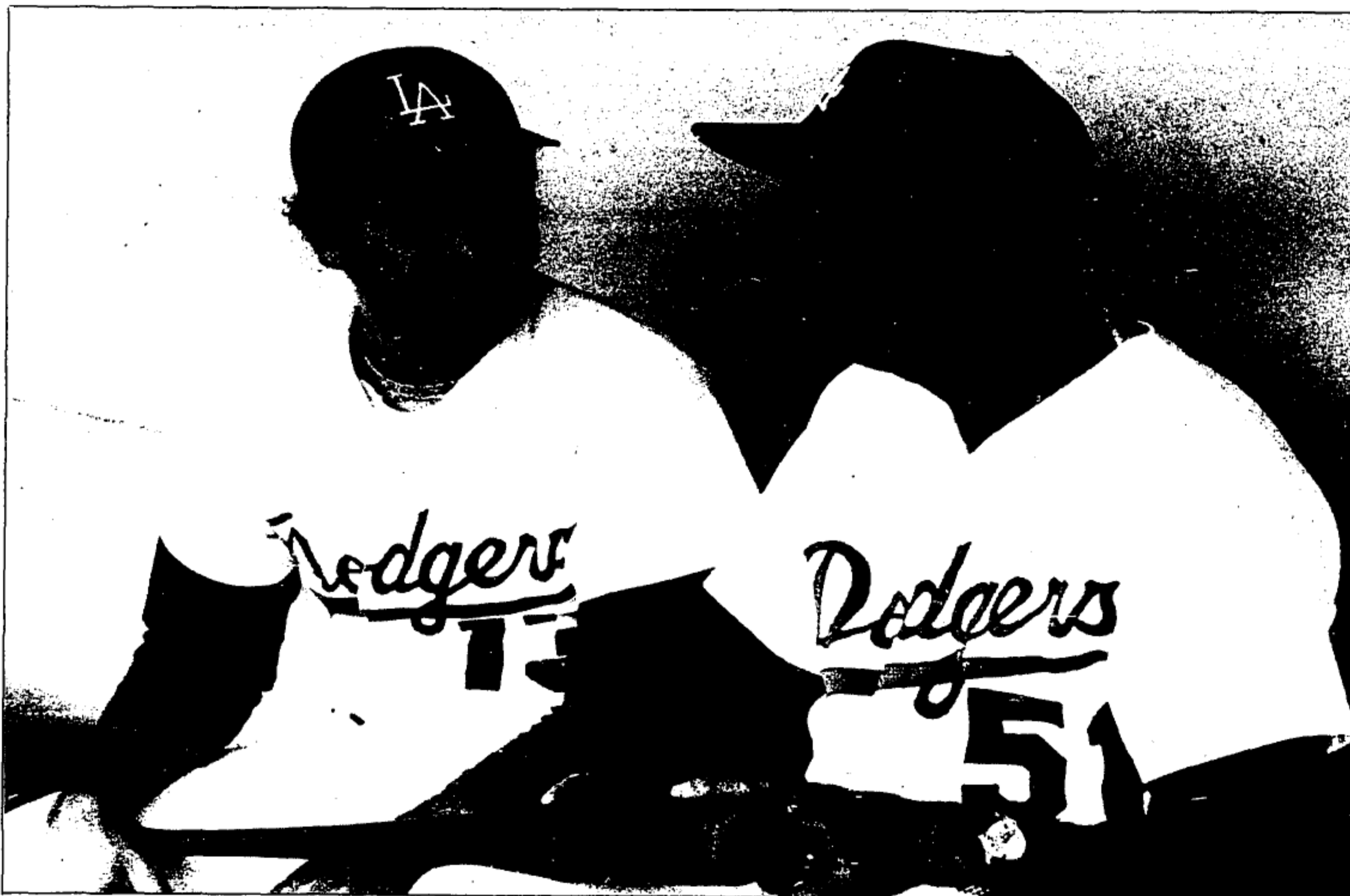
Born in San Francisco and raised in the Bay Area, a Giant fan who hated the Dodgers, Ferguson went to UOP on an athletic scholarship after rejecting a draft by the Baltimore Orioles as a high school senior.

"I was a midget (5-9) pitcher then," he said, smiling, "and I felt I'd be better off with a college education."

As a thin, 6-0 playmaking guard, Ferguson started on the two UOP basketball teams that reached the NCAA regionals, losing first to Texas Western and then to UCLA.

He was the Dodgers' seventh selection in the 1968 free agent draft.

Now he is a write-in candidate for the All-Star Game, a man whose No. 13 seems unlucky only to opposing pitchers and a former Brooklyn righthander named Ralph Branca.



JOE FERGUSON gets some batting tips from an expert source. Dodger coach Dixie Walker, who was a Dodger hitting star and a favorite of the fans in the 1940s, when the club was in Brooklyn.

Dodger Boo Birds Tied Into Knots by 'Ropes'

By BOB HUNTER

LOS ANGELES—It was only a couple of years ago that Bill Russell, a strawberry blond as wholesome as his native Pittsburg, Kansas, was listed as a Dodger outfielder.

Walter Alston, after sizing up the lithe, young speedster at Vero Beach, commented, "He might be our best outfielder, but I think he can become a great infielder."

Russell was eyed clinically by all the coaches and brass, with Al Campanis, vice-president in charge of player personnel, predicting:

"If Russell can hit .250, he'll be an All-Star shortstop."

Last season, "Ropes," as he is

called in the clubhouse, replaced Maury Wills when management dedicated itself to youth in the final half of the campaign.

DESPITE SHARING generously in the epidemic of errors that engulfed the rookies, Russell impressed Wes Parker to this extent:

"When Ropes has played his last game, he'll be recognized as one of the best-fielding shortstops baseball has known."

This season again started as a rocky road for Alston's young infielder but, quite suddenly, Russell found himself after an unusually abusive verbal beating from the hometown fans.

When he did, the entire team

performed an abrupt turn-around and, from 7½ games back, opened a 12-game home stand May 22 just two behind.

HE HAD NOT made an error on the previous junket, in which the revived Dodgers averaged more than 11 hits a game to win six of nine and scramble into contention.

"Give Monte Basgall credit," insisted Campanis.

The Dodger coach had worked for hours, days, months with Russell in the Arizona Instructional League, in the minors, at Vero Beach and at Dodger Stadium before games.

But it was in a room in the Chase Hotel on the club's first visit to St.

Louis that Russell blossomed into the shortstop they said he would be.

The boo-birds just had finished pecking him apart in Los Angeles so, after conferring with Alston, both Campanis and Basgall asked him to come to their room.

THERE, FOR several hours, Basgall reviewed the techniques of balance, with a shuffle step to help his throwing, and shorter strides to smooth his fielding.

The change bordered on the dramatic. It was obvious Russell walked out of that room a major league shortstop.

"It was simply a matter of him getting his confidence," said Basgall, who shrugged off any of the credit. "When his throwing came, his fielding came."

Russell conceded the booing, which caused Sparky Anderson to poke a sharp verbal blast at the Los Angeles fans, had disturbed him.

"People kept telling me not to let it get me down, but for a young player, that's an impossibility," explained Ropes.

"YOU HAVE two choices, to fight it, or let it get you down."

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Houston Schoolboy Hurler Touted as Top Draft Choice

By JACK LANG

NEW YORK—David Clyde, a lefthanded Houston high school pitcher, was the almost unanimous choice to be the No. 1 pick in the annual free-agent draft, when THE SPORTING NEWS conducted an informal poll among major league farm directors.

The Texas Rangers, with first pick in the annual June 5-6 session at the Americana Hotel here, made no secret of the fact they intend to select the homegrown product.

Praise of Clyde's ability from major league scouts was lavish.

"His curve is outstanding," said veteran Pittsburgh scout Howie Haak, regarded as one of the top judges of young talent. "His fast ball is better than a great many pitchers in the major leagues today."

"IN FACT, it is my opinion that this boy could pitch in the major leagues right now."

Texas is expected to draft and sign Clyde immediately. It is anticipated he will start his pro career in the majors.

The addition of Clyde would give

the Rangers some of the outstanding free-agent prospects of the last few years. As the Washington Senators, they drafted both Pete Broberg and Jeff Burroughs and in a recent deal obtained Steve Dunning from Cleveland.

The farm directors polled agreed almost to a man that this year there is an outstanding crop of young infielders. Many are expected to go in the first or second round.

AMONG THE TOP prospects are several shortstops, including Pat Rockett, Robert E. Lee High School, San Antonio; Mike Heath, Hillsboro High School, Tampa; Ed Creech, Mercer University; Rube Yount, Woodland Hills High School, Calif.; Tom McMillan, University of Jacksonville, and Johnny LeMaster, Paintsville, Ky.

Randy Scarberry, pitcher from the University of Southern California, is also expected to go early in the first round.

The same for Ted Farr, a catcher out of Shadle Park High School in Spokane, Wash. He may be the

best young catcher in the country.

One of the finest first base prospects around is Glenn Tufts of Raynham High School in Bridgewater, Mass.

ALL FARM directors polled are anxiously waiting to see if Dave Winfield, a tremendous athlete at the U. of Minnesota, is drafted. Dave already has been selected by three pro clubs in other sports.

The 6-6 outfielder-pitcher who plays football and basketball as well as baseball, was picked in pro basketball by the Atlanta Hawks of the NBA and the Utah Stars of the ABA. Green Bay tabbed him in the football draft.

However, the fact that Marvin Milkes, former major league general manager, is acting as Winfield's agent has kept alive the interest of baseball clubs.

Marvin's first love is baseball and he could persuade the boy to turn down the other offers and try baseball.

But will a club risk a high draft choice without the assurance of signing the boy? That's what makes the case intriguing.

Smokey Proud of Russell-Lopes DP Combo

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"Then I had some help. Great help. Most of the mail from the fans said they had faith in me, and still were behind me."

With Russell, whose ground coverage and throwing arm are unexcelled, emerging as the hub of the infield that had rookies Ron Cey and Davey Lopes on either side, Alston observed:

"I think our second base combination covers as much ground as

any in the league."

That, coming from the Quiet Man, is a large tribute, especially since both are former center fielders and since, as recently as last year, Lopes could not turn the double play.

While the club's faith in Russell has been monumental, so has his response.

After making 32 errors last season and nine in the first month of 1973, he committed only one in the

next stretch of 16 games, emerging as the "captain" of an infield that averages only 24.2 years of age.

ON HIS RIGHT was Cey, the 43rd Los Angeles third baseman (in 15 years) who seized the opportunity of Ken McMullen's back injury to take over the swinging-door position, and the 5-9, 185-pounder looks as though he'll be the incumbent for a long, long time.

Although Cey, as a newcomer, had been intensely scouted by the opposition, especially Cincinnati, he knocked in 13 runs and boosted his average to .290 on the successful junket, earning National League "Player of the Week" honors for the period between May 14 and 20.

Ironically, the only other rookie ever to win the NL's weekly award was another Dodger, Lee Lacy, who shared honors with Willie Stargell during the week of July 3-9 in 1972.

ON RUSSELL'S left was Lopes, another candidate for Rookie of the Year recognition, who has stolen 17 major league bases without ever being thrown out, and who rocketed into the NL batting lead with a .371 average.

Joe Ferguson, who just misses qualifying as a rookie, had nine homers and was in second place in the ribbie column, only two behind Johnny Bench.

Dodger Notes: Tom Lasorda, who managed him in the minors, to Cey: "I'll tell you, Penguin, you and Fran (Ron's beautiful wife) are the greatest mismatch of all time. You're ugly and she's beautiful. You're dumb, and she's smart." . . . Quote from Sparky Anderson: "Right now I rate Joe Ferguson one of the best young power hitters in the league." . . . The brass was weighing one more deal before the June 15 deadline. . . . The big bridge game on the plane rides pits Walter Alston and Jim Gilliam against George Culver and Monte Basgall. . . . Manny Mota, just completing his first book, which will be printed in Spanish as well as English, will open a restaurant in the Dominican Republic.

Success story: Alan Blum, once the teen-age president of Willie Davis' New York fan club, is about to graduate from the Emory University of Medicine in Atlanta, and also is the editor of the school's excellent newspaper. . . . The Dodgers have a slick 9-2 TV record.



BROEG & BASEBALL

By BOB BROEG

Let's Honor the Old Spear-Carriers

ST. LOUIS—In baseball's annual salute to nostalgia, capped always by Hall of Fame Day at Cooperstown August 6, the Dodgers came up this time with an idea for a novel reunion.

On June 3, prior to a game with Montreal at Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles is honoring its annual Oldtimers' Day players who have unusual accomplishments.

For instance, Dizzy Dean, last National League pitcher to win 30 games in a season . . . Johnny Vander Meer, the only pitcher with consecutive big league no-hitters . . . Carl Hubbell, who won 24 National League games in a row and also struck out five straight in an All-Star Game . . . Casey Stengel, the only manager who won five straight championships.

Lefty Grove, who had a 31-4 record for the Philadelphia Athletics one year . . . Joe Medwick, the National League's most recent Triple Crown winner . . . Johnny Mize, who hit three homers in a game a record six times . . . Walt Dropo, whose 12 successive hits share the major league mark . . . Roy Face, who won 17 straight games in relief one season . . . Don Larsen, the only man ever to pitch a perfect game in the World Series . . . Mickey Mantle, baseball's mightiest switch-hitter . . . Whitey Ford, who has won more World Series games than any other pitcher.

Stan Musial, who holds more records than any living player . . . Don Newcombe, winner of the first Cy Young Award . . . Walter Alston, first manager ever to lead the Dodgers to a world championship . . . Dale Long, who hit home runs in eight consecutive games . . . Babe Pinelli, the umpire whose last called strike of his career sealed Larsen's perfect performance . . . Bob Feller, who pitched three no-hitters, including one on the opening day of a season . . . Bob Nieman, who hit home runs his first two times at bat in the majors . . . Rocky Colavito, who hit a record-tying four home runs in a game, and . . .

You get the idea, of course, and it's a good one. But one of these days, as Bing Devine of the Cardinals was saying, ball clubs will bring back not only the championship heroes or, as in the Dodgers' case, players of singular achievement.

They'll bring back the bums, the humpty-dumpties, the spear-carriers, the who-he guys of baseball. And everybody might have as much fun or even more than the Dodgers will have or the Cardinals with their July 22 reunion of the original (1933) All-Star Game survivors and a brief contest between men who stood out in subsequent All-Star Games.

Sheehan Is a Perfect Candidate

Suppose, for instance, a club brought in such dubious-distinction dandies as my old friend, Thomas Clancy Sheehan, who had a 1-15 record with the Philadelphia Athletics—and still wasn't the worst on the staff.

Clancy roomed that season with Jack Nabors, who was 1-21. "Man," Sheehan would recall, "you never saw two guys celebrate when they won a ball game."

Sheehan, up and down with four clubs between 1915 and '26, won only 17 games. So it's obvious that the longtime super-scout of the Giants—and briefly their manager—didn't get ahead in the game by telling young players to emulate him except as a storyteller.

Sheehan, who'll be 80 next time around, doesn't hit the road the way he used to for Horace Stoneham, and it's our loss more than San Francisco's. Clancy could enliven the dullest game or dearest party.

A big, florid-faced Irishman who looked like a house detective, which indeed he'd been in Chicago, Sheehan would puff out his cheeks, raise his brows like window shades, bulge his baby blue eyes and let 'er rip.

Hired by Stoneham in 1948 as a sixth sense, the baseball gumshoe became enamored of a Milwaukee lefthander pitching just .500 ball in 1953. When the Braves wanted Bobby Thomson, hitting hero of the Giants' 1951 pennant, Clancy advised asking for Johnny Antonelli "because he can be the best lefthander in the National League."

He was in 1954, both in the regular season and World Series, as the Giants topped a surprising pennant by a remarkable four-game rout of the Indians, who had set an American League record with 111 victories.

Sheehan's eyes would brighten behind rimless glasses when he'd talk about Willie Mays as the best player he'd ever seen. And even when Juan Marichal was a rookie, Clancy could make the handsome Dominican sound as promising as his old favorite, Grover Cleveland Alexander.

Epilepsy No Match for Alex

The double-chinned old scout with the perpetually surprised look would puff up those ample cheeks, tongue packed firmly therein, and swear that Alexander's control was so good that he once fired a game-ending third strike on a 3-and-2 pitch, with the bases loaded, as he fell of the mound in epileptic shock.

One time Tall Tom faced Old Pete on a bitter cold spring day in Chicago. Sheehan took a lengthy warmup and watched in amazement as Alexander waited until virtually game time, walked out finally, threw a few pitches on the sidelines while conversing with a spectator, then flipped his glove to the mound.

Recalled Sheehan, "I say to myself, 'This time I got him.'" Then Clancy paused for dramatic effect.

Well? "He shuts me out," said Sheehan, using the disappearing present-tense discourse of the diamond.

Another time, to help him, Alexander wobbled into the Cubs' clubhouse 15 minutes before game time, roaring drunk. Happy, but soused, as Sheehan put it. Angrily, the Cubs' manager, Bill Killefer, Alex' old Philadelphia batterymate, insisted Old Pete still was pitching.

To cut a good and long story short, which wouldn't do if Sheehan were telling it here, what happened?

Clancy held up one finger with a haughty gesture. One run? "One run, hell. One hit," said Sheehan. "And Alex got the game over so fast, he was still loaded when it ended."

Guys like super-scout Sheehan would brighten any reunion of the rinkydinks who became the best with the repartee.

Like the night I saw him several years ago at old Sportsman's Park. The Giants has just defeated the Cardinals weirdly in the 10th inning when, with the bases loaded, St. Louis catcher Bob Uecker left home plate unguarded to back up first on a potential double-play grounder to Julian Javier at second base.

Javier, juggling the ball an instant, fired home for the force-out. His perfect peg sailed right across the plate and to the grandstand.

"Man and boy," I said to Sheehan, "I've never seen a game lost on that play."

Clancy smiled. "Man and boy," he said, "how many catchers have you seen whose last name begins with the letter 'U'?"

Joe Falls



(Continued From Page 2)

smoking a cigarette.

I couldn't believe it . . . because only moments earlier I was driving out to the track and smoking a cigar. Two blocks from the track—two, mind you—I snuffed the cigar out. Not only did I put it out, but I all but ground it to a pulp and then put it into the back of the ash tray and closed it tight. I didn't want the guy at the gate to know I was smoking, or that there was even a cigar around.

And there's Bettenhausen as large as life lighting up a cigarette in the middle of the pits.

JUST BEFORE coming to Indy, I was asked by the Associated Press bureau in Birmingham, Ala., to judge a sports writing contest. They sent me the stuff in the mail and one of the stories was a great piece about the conscience of an auto racing writer.

He cross-examined himself and wondered how he felt about giving publicity to a sport which takes men's lives.

That's a helluva question. I'd never thought about it like that before.

But the guy gave a great answer. He said he knew men died, but that was part of the sport. He knew it and they knew it. He said that no matter how he felt, if there were machines to drive, these men would drive them.

STILL, I WONDER about myself,

especially at Indy, where they seem to go so fast now there is no chance for these drivers to do much more than aim their cars.

I asked Johnny Rutherford about this. He was the pole sitter. He'd gone faster than any man in history and he knew what I meant.

He said, "We're going so fast now that we're into a series of controlled reactions. You really don't have time to think. You see something, you react. If you sit there and think about it, you'd be in big trouble."

"For instance, if I saw an accident up ahead of me and tried to figure out how to get around it, I'd probably pile right into it. You have to react even before your mind does."

So the danger always is there, and this year it took the life of veteran Art Pollard, who crashed during a practice run.

I HEARD RUTHERFORD on the radio the night of Pollard's death. What he said really said it all for me.

He told the radio man he felt badly about Pollard, that Art was a good driver and a longtime friend, but that he couldn't feel all that badly because Pollard knew what he was doing.

Rutherford said, "I know exactly what he wanted to do in there, and how many men can say such a thing? Remember, nobody makes us get into these cars. Nobody puts a gun to our head and says, 'Drive.' We do it because we like it. We do it because we love it."

In Dodger Book, He's Sen-CEY-tional

By GORDON VERRELL

LOS ANGELES—Third base in the National League is one of baseball's most hotly contested positions.

There's the Reds' Pete Rose, a .310 career hitter. There's the Cubs' Bill Madlock, the N.L. batting champion last season with a .354 average. There's the Phillies' Mike Schmidt, the N.L. home-run king the last two summers with 36 and 38 homers.

And there's the Dodgers' Ronald Charles Cey, the N.L. All-Star third baseman each of the last two years.

There are those who claim that Cey should not have been selected and there are just as many, if not more, who say the selection was indeed just.

Cey is neither disturbed nor overly warmed by either opinion.

"I'm not in competition with Pete Rose or Mike Schmidt or Bill Madlock or any other third baseman in the National League," said Cey, a man who hardly has demeaned the position by batting .400 in his two All-Star appearances.

"The man I'm in competition with," he insisted, "is Ron Cey."

"I CAN'T SIT AROUND and worry if Rose and Madlock get three or four hits in a game or if Schmidt hits a home run. All that does is add pressure that I don't need. I have too many things that I need to improve on as a person as well as a baseball player, to be worrying about anyone else.

"I suppose that I'll get my share of votes, but I can't worry about that and I'm sure the others aren't worrying about what I do, either."

However, the Dodger third baseman, the top slugging third baseman in the club's history—Brooklyn as well as Los Angeles—is well aware what it means to be selected to the All-Star team.

"It means you're at the absolute top of your game," he said. "You are the No. 1 man at your position in the National League. That's something. It's unique. And the only person who can say the same thing is the No. 1 third baseman in the American League."

Cey is in only his fourth full season as the Dodgers' third baseman, a position that previously was identified by the revolving door that went with it. It has been well-chronicled just how many third basemen have been paraded through Los Angeles, some for a few seasons, most for a few weeks. The Dodgers' media guide even carries a list of all the third basemen—47 in all—and it is a point that disturbs the 28-year-old Cey.

"I'm here and that's that," he once said, not with brashness, but with confidence.

NOTHING HE HAS done since becoming the regular third baseman early in the 1973 season has caused his manager, Walt Alston, to look for anyone else.

He has improved his home run and RBI totals each year, from 15 and 80 in 1973 to 18 and 97 in 1974 to 25 and 101 last year.

He has surpassed the offensive marks of past Dodger third basemen. The Brooklyn record for RBIs was set in 1939 by Cookie Lavagetto, at 87, and until Cey came along, no one hit more than the 11 home runs by Harvey Hendrick in 1928 (Dick Allen, who hit 20 homers in 1971, played at first base and in the outfield as well as at third base).

Moreover, last year only two National Leaguers—the Phils' Greg Luzinski and the Reds' Johnny Bench—bettered Cey in both home runs and runs batted in.

On top of all that, his play at third base has improved just

as his hitting has improved.

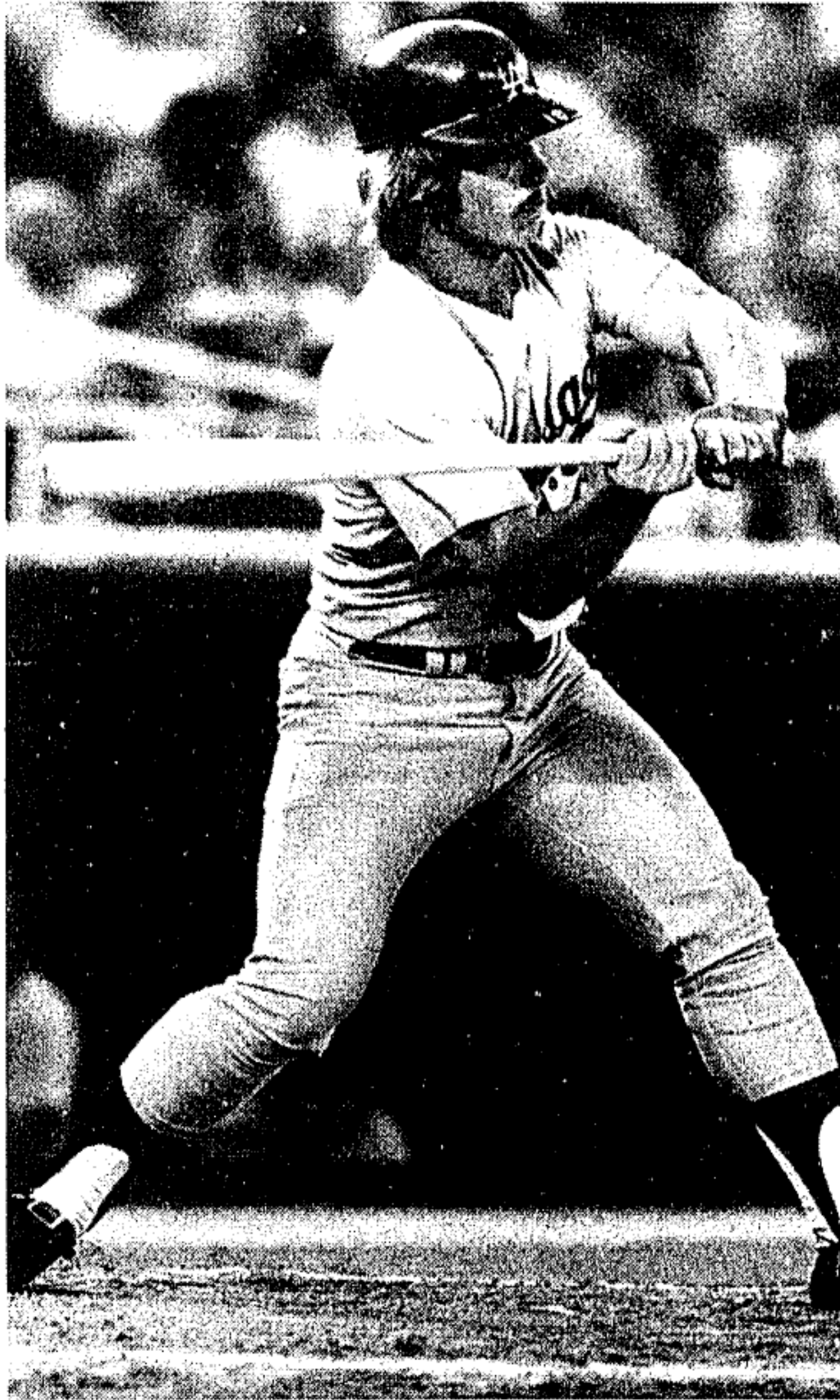
"He made more diving stops and then jumped up and threw out his man more times last year than I've seen any third baseman do in a long time," noted Alston. "I thought he was quicker in '74 than he was in '73. Last year, he was quicker than ever."

While Cey's 1975 season was indeed a banner one, he still felt the frustration of not winning.

"That's why statistics don't always tell you the total story," he said. "As well as I played last year, it's difficult to be more pleased than I was in 1974 when we won the pennant."

"But if I play as well as Ron Cey can play, I'll be satisfied. Still, I maintain that a player can have the best year of his career and not have as good of a year statistic-wise."

IT WAS AFTER THE 1974 season that Cey won another



Ron Cey . . . His Job Is to Drive in Runs

battle of sorts, this time with the Dodger management. He took his contract dispute to arbitration, the first Dodger to do so.

"If I feel strongly about something, I don't back down," he said. "Win or lose, I do what I have to do."

He won that case and then this spring an even bigger one—a three-year contract, the first Dodger with anything longer than two years.

"What it showed me," he said, "was that the club has an awful lot of confidence in me and, too, that I have confidence in them."

"I'm well satisfied, so are they and no one is unhappy. There was some bitterness after the arbitration. But not now. Peter O'Malley believes in honesty and he believes in people who believe in themselves."

Ron Cey believes in himself, and the Dodgers, too.

He didn't panic when the club got off slowly, losing its first five games and eight of its first 11.

"We might have been a little over-anxious," he said of the bad start. "We just weren't executing and we lost some games that we should have won."

"But we're playing well now and I'm happy with what I've been able to contribute."

HE CERTAINLY contributed during the Dodgers' 12-game win streak from April 24 to May 7, hitting safely in all 12 games and producing the game-winning RBI in four of them.

Against the Cardinals, May 10, Ron clouted a two-run homer in the ninth inning to account for a 4-3 victory. The next night, he belted a pair of home runs to highlight a 4-0 win. And the next night he got the game-winning blow.

"That's my job," he said, "driving in runs. It's very difficult driving in runs when there's no one on base. But the game runs in cycles. Sometimes you go several games with no one on base, then there are times when there are guys on base all the time. You can't complain when there's no one there. You just keep going out and playing the best you possibly can play."

It's a case of maturing, not just for Cey, but the entire club.

"We made the mistake of watching what Cincinnati was doing the year we had the big lead and finally fell so far behind," he said, recalling the 1973 season. "That year, when we finally did wake up, we'd lost nine games in a row in September—and the pennant. Now we're just playing our own game and we're not worrying about the Reds or anyone else. Now, we're piling up wins that we can take into September with us."

DURING THEIR 12-GAME streak, the Dodgers, at times, appeared very un-Dodger-like. They were hitting home runs in bunches, seven in one game, in fact.

It might have come as a shock to some, but not to Ron. "Frankly," he said, "I've always associated the Dodgers with a hitting club, more than a pitching club. There's no doubt about it, we can put numbers on the board."

After a slow start himself, Cey again has regained the club lead in home runs and RBIs.

Again, the voting for the All-Star third baseman will be fierce and again Cey will be in the running. If he wins, fine; if he doesn't, well, he doesn't.

"I know a lot of people have said I'm underrated and all that," he said, smiling, "but I must be impressing somebody."

Alston's Chewing-Out Set Up Russell Bat Feast

By GORDON VERRELL

LOS ANGELES—Bill Russell hadn't played in a week, but he was summoned into the manager's office April 23.

Walt Alston, the manager, said it was a long talk.

Russell said it was a "real chewing out."

"It was the first time Walt and I had ever had a man-to-man talk," Russell said of the meeting. "I needed it. I needed the chewing out even though I knew I had played terrible. Sometimes you have to hear it from someone else before it really sinks in."

Russell returned to the lineup that night, went 0-for-2 and the Dodgers lost for the ninth time in 12 games, 4-3, in 11 innings to the Cubs.

But they won the next night, beginning a run of 12 straight victories, and it was Bill Russell who responded with two hits to begin a streak of his own.

IN SIX OF HIS STARTS after that Alston meeting, Russell had

two or more hits, going 4-for-5 with four RBIs May 7 against the Phillies and, suddenly, the Dodger shortstop was back among the National League's Top Ten hitters.

"I feel I have it going just as I did in '74," he said during his streak which helped the Dodgers win just one fewer than the Los Angeles record for consecutive victories. "I feel that I'm going to be a better hitter than I've ever been because my legs are stronger from all the exercising I did this past winter."

Russell was injured much of last season, playing in only 84 games, and wound up batting just .206 and driving in 14 runs—51 fewer than the year before when he helped the Dodgers to the National League championship.

"I thought Bill had been too complacent," Alston said of his talk with Russell just two weeks into the 1976 season. "I thought he came to camp thinking he had a job won, that he didn't have to work, that he didn't have to show

any aggressiveness. I told him his attitude was very wrong."

WHATEVER, RUSSELL bounded back from his poor start and so did the Dodgers.

But, Russell was hardly the only reason.

Ron Cey, after a slow start himself, strung together a 12-game hitting streak. Steve Garvey hit in 13 straight. Rookie Henry Cruz slugged three homers in two games against the Cubs. The Dodgers, in fact, went on a home-run tear as a team, belting a club-record seven in a 14-12 battle with the Cubs on May 5 and walloped 11 in the space of five games.

The streak, which was the longest in the National League since the Giants won 14 straight in 1965 and within one of the Los Angeles record of 13 in 1962 and 1965, jumped the Dodgers from last in the National League West to first, a lead they held onto for a week.

But Alston put little stock in the win streak.

"We really weren't that much better than we were when we were losing five in a row," he said. "We were getting guys to third base the early part of the season, but we weren't scoring them. Now we're getting a few more timely hits, our pitching has been a little better and that's been the difference."

"Anyway, it's the same old story. If you lose three or four in a row, everybody is down on you. If you win a few in a row, everybody figures you're going to win the pennant by 20 games."

DODGERS' DOPE: The Dodgers' 12-game streak was snapped in Philadelphia on May 8. Doug Rau's two-year win streak also ended in the same series. Rau hadn't lost since August 3, stringing together 10 consecutive wins, before he was nailed for eight runs in 4 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings by the Phils. "The way I pitched, I couldn't have beaten Bakersfield," he said after the game. . . .

Ron Cey's 12-game hitting streak ended in the same game. . . . Steve Garvey's 13-game streak, the longest of his career, ended May 10 in St. Louis. . . . In the 14-12 victory over Chicago on May 5, the Dodgers missed by one inning of becoming the seventh team in history to score in every inning. They were blanked in the ninth.

Tom Lasorda was struck on the side of the head May 4 in Chicago when a bat, being swung nearby by Bill Buckner, snapped in half. Lasorda wasn't injured too badly. He still managed to wave home nine runs from his third base coaching box in a 9-6 victory over the Cubs. . . . Don Sutton was the winning pitcher in the 14-2 win over the Cubs, only the seventh time in 23 career decisions he's whipped Chicago. But it was the fourth win in his last five decisions against the Cubs, a club he had lost to 13 times in a row.