

BASEBALL

Trade Excites Samuel

NEW YORK—The way New York Mets Manager Dave Johnson tells it, Joe McIlvaine, the club's vice-president of baseball operations, came to him on the team bus after a game and told him the Mets could get Juan Samuel from the Phillies for Lenny Dykstra and Roger McDowell.

"He told me to think about it," Johnson said. "I said, 'I don't have to think about it. Do it.' That's how much I wanted to make this deal."

It was difficult to tell who was more excited about the trade, completed June 18, Johnson or Samuel, who said, "I picked up 15 games in one day."

Actually, he picked up 10½ games in the National League East standings, going from the last-place Phillies, who were 12½ games out of first place at the time, to the third-place Mets, who were two games out.

But it wasn't just the climb in the standings that excited the 28-year-old Samuel. It was the atmosphere he found on his first visit to Shea Stadium as a member of the home club.

"It was nice to have these fans on my side," Samuel said June 19 after a whirlwind first day as a Met, in which he met his new teammates, faced the New York media in a news conference, did



Juan Samuel

a number of television interviews and played a game against the Montreal Expos.

Samuel went 0 for 3 in the game, but he walked, stole a base and scored a run in the fourth inning of a 5-3 Mets victory. He received a standing ovation when he led off the first inning, then brought the crowd back to its feet when he hit a Kevin Gross pitch to the wall in left field, where it was caught by Tim Raines.

"I had a lot of fun tonight," said Samuel, who seemed to have a smile on his face throughout the day. "It was different and great."

Samuel also appreciated that his Mets debut happened to coincide with Dwight Gooden's 100th career victory.

"I'm glad I don't have to face him anymore," Samuel said. "It's impressive playing behind him."

Samuel played center field, and Johnson said that's where he'll remain most of the time.

"I might bring him into the infield occasionally," Johnson said of the two-time All-Star second baseman, whom the Phillies moved to the outfield this season. "Having him here gives me a lot of different possibilities, all of which I like."

Samuel could play second base, with rookie Gregg Jefferies moving to third base and Howard Johnson from third to shortstop. That would enable Mookie Wilson to play center field.

"The most important thing is that Sammy will provide some professionalism to this club, and that may have been lacking," said the manager. "I met with him before the game and told him to be aggressive and not change a thing. He's the kind of player who plays hard all the time and doesn't take anything for granted. I thought the ball club was a lot more energized with him on it."

While the Mets' players indicated they would miss Dykstra and McDowell around the clubhouse, they also think Samuel will help them offensively.

"It's a good move," said Darryl Strawberry. "Sure, everyone misses Lenny. I do, too. But this deal had to be made. We needed the shakeup. With Sammy here, I think we're on our way to another division title."

DAN CASTELLANO



Milt Thompson



Willie McGee

Thompson a Lifesaver

ST. LOUIS—Where would the St. Louis Cardinals be without Milt Thompson?

"We'd probably be where we are, but farther out," said Manager Whitey Herzog.

What Herzog meant was that the Cardinals still probably would have been in fourth place in the National League East on June 21, but much more than three games off the pace.

Thompson was acquired from Philadelphia last December for two reasons. One was that Herzog wanted him to push either Vince Coleman or Willie McGee for a starting job. The other was that he was a good pinch-hitter.

Oddly, Thompson was hitless in his first seven at-bats as a pinch-hitter. But he had a regular job because of two injuries (rib cage and wrist) that have sidelined McGee for most of the season.

Thompson, whose batting average had dipped no lower than .278, had 12 hits in his last 31 at-bats through June 20 to raise his average to .294. And after stealing just three bases through June 2, Thompson added eight more in the next 18 days.

"I've finally got him where I make him run," Herzog said. "And he's really run well. He's stolen on three pitchouts already."

"I always did like his swing and his aggressiveness at bat. But I see some things with him that maybe are a little better than I anticipated. I'm impressed with his acceleration when he goes to get the ball (in the outfield)."

Thompson, who underwent arthroscopic knee surgery last September, traced his improved running to having the brace removed from his right knee in late May.

"I think (the brace) was sort of

a crutch," he said. "I just took it off and started running. I think it was slowing me down a little bit."

Thompson expected to be the Cardinals' fourth outfielder when he came to St. Louis.

"I knew I'd get some playing time," he said, "but I didn't know how much. Whenever you get an opportunity to play, you have to take advantage of it."

Since McGee quite possibly won't return until after the All-Star break, Thompson is the Cardinals' center fielder.

"I'm taking it one day at a time," he said. "I'm not trying to look ahead too much. But I'm definitely happy that I'm here."

McGee, frustrated by his inability to play—his left wrist was placed in a cast on June 19—couldn't look too far beyond one day at a time, either.

"You try to be positive. You try to work hard," he said. "But as soon as you think you've got everything licked, along comes another storm. It's like the curveball in the dirt. You know it's coming, and you miss. And you know it's coming again, and you try to lay off. But a lot of times, there's nothing you can do."

There has been unrest among some Cardinals fans because of McGee's lingering injuries. And some fans want the Cardinals to trade him and make Thompson the regular center fielder.

"I've been under the gun for two months," McGee said. "After a while, you become immune. I try to think I don't really have a problem. I could be in China. I could be in South Africa. What I've got is nothing. The good thing is that after all of this, I don't think anything in baseball is ever going to bother me again."

RICK HUMMEL

'Turning Point' For Montreal

MONTREAL—It's much too early to call one contest a turning point in a 162-game season, but the Montreal Expos' 8-5 victory over the Mets at Shea Stadium June 20 might fill the bill.

Consider that the Expos were 2-7 at Shea last year and entered the series with the Mets having lost two of three games at St. Louis and two of three to the Cubs. Then consider that the Mets beat the Expos, 5-3, in the series opener June 19, then scored five runs off Dennis Martinez in the first inning the next night.

By the time Andres Galarraga's two-run homer in the fourth inning broke up Sid Fernandez's bid for a no-hitter, the Mets had already pounded out 11 hits.

But the Expos rallied to tie the score on a two-run, bases-loaded single by Tim Raines in the eighth, then surged ahead on Raines' two-out, two-run bases-loaded single in the ninth.

"It's something I've been successful at over the years," Raines, who entered the game in a 1-for-17 slump, said of his clutch hitting. "It's something I'm comfortable with."

"I hope now we can play the way we're capable. We haven't been playing well lately. We're in a stretch where we have the opportunity to show whether we're a championship-caliber ball club. We lost two of three to the Cards in St. Louis and two of three to the Cubs at home."

"Those teams—and the Mets—are the teams we know we're going to have to beat."

Although Martinez didn't get the victory, Manager Buck Rodgers thought he proved himself a winner by weathering the Mets' early barrage.

"I spoke to Dennis on the bench after we had taken him out," Rodgers said. "I told him that come October we'll all look back to this game as one of the turning points of the season. I've never seen a man work as hard for a no-decision as Dennis did in this game."

IAN MacDONALD

Robinson's Start Toward Recovery

PITTSBURGH—The way Jeff Robinson sees it, he was lucky that his first starting assignment in almost three years came in a game that began at 12:20 p.m.

"All I could do was wake up, have a bowl of oatmeal and go get 'em," the Pittsburgh Pirates' righthander said after he defeated the St. Louis Cardinals, 7-2, June 17 for his first victory as a starter since August 28, 1984.

Robinson lasted five innings as he ended a string of 194 consecutive relief appearances. He held the Cardinals to one run on four hits, and considering that he entered the game with a 6.18 earned-run average, his spirits

were lifted considerably.

"It is tough to digest bad times," Robinson said. "We had tried everything to get straightened out, the whole spectrum."

But nothing worked. Manager Jim Leyland thinks Robinson's problems stem from Jim Gott's season-ending elbow injury, which put Robinson on the spot as the Pirates' bullpen ace.

"He's such a good competitor that he felt he had to pick up the slack," Leyland said.

"Probably a good assumption," Robinson said. "I'm the next guy down the totem pole as far as experience goes, and it was only natural that I try to do two jobs,

Gott's and mine."

But he failed at both.

"We have a lot invested in him," Leyland said, referring to a two-year contract that pays Robinson \$800,000 per season. "You don't forget guys like Jeff Robinson. When he struggles, you support him."

Robinson had thought earlier in the month that he had found his form, but then he reverted to the same reliever who had spent most of the season throwing gasoline on fires.

"Then it was like going into the 'Twilight Zone,'" Robinson said. "Strange things started happening."



Jeff Robinson

An even stranger thing happened, however, on June 17, when Robinson both started and won a game.

BOB HERTZEL

'Amphibious' Right, er, Lefty

PITTSBURGH—When Philadelphia reliever Greg Harris entered the Phillies' game with the Pittsburgh Pirates June 15, Pirates outfielder Andy Van Slyke was on third base.

As Harris walked from the bullpen to the mound, Van Slyke noticed the pitcher's glove, which is designed to be worn on either hand, since Harris can throw with either hand.

"Why does he have a glove like that?" Van Slyke asked third-base coach Gene Lamont.

Phillies third baseman Randy Ready overheard the question.

"Because he's amphibious," said Ready, who meant ambidextrous.

"Does that mean he can throw underwater?" Van Slyke asked.

BOB HERTZEL