

# MVP Murphy Stays Humble

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—Incredible. Dale Murphy is still the same.

The first Atlanta Braves player to sign autographs at spring training? Dale Murphy.

The only Brave to pay his way back to Atlanta for a Georgia Hall of Fame banquet? Dale Murphy.

The most humble, unpretentious Brave? Still Dale Murphy.

Now the National League's Most Valuable Player and the fourth highest paid player in baseball history, Murphy brings to this spring-training camp the same enthusiasm and innocence he brought to his first camp in 1975, when he was a 19-year-old minor league catcher instead of an All-Star center fielder.

This is vintage Murphy:

• Although coming off a phenomenally productive 1982 season, Murphy reported to camp five days early "because I have so much room for improvement . . . and it always takes me an extra week to get my swing back."

• He flew to Atlanta between the first and second workouts to attend the Hall of Fame banquet "because it's an honor that they want me there."

• As he stepped into the batting cage for his first swing of the opening workout, Murphy spotted a reporter, grinned and asked, "What's up with Herschel?" He was referring to Herschel Walker, the University of Georgia running back who dominates headlines in the state.

Somehow, a Most Valuable Player award and the accompanying hoopla should change a person, shouldn't it?

"I don't feel like a different person or a different player," Murphy said. "I just feel like the same old guy coming to spring training."

"I think something like being Most Valuable Player of the National League doesn't sink in until you're not playing. Other guys had MVP years, but they weren't on teams that got the recognition we did. It's kind of a hard feeling to describe. It's a great honor, but it's hard to look at yourself and say, 'I'm the most valuable player.' I can't do that."

The winter after an MVP summer, Murphy said, "was pretty much like most off-seasons."

He got no calls about commercial endorsements and solicited none. "Nothing has come up," he said, "and I haven't looked for anything like that, really. If it happens, it would be a nice thing, a compliment, great. But I'm not disappointed it hasn't happened."

He attended more banquets than usual, but as always, only those that did not interfere with family life. "We had our third boy in December, so with two kids and (wife) Nancy pregnant, I cut off a lot of stuff," he said. "I had a lot of opportunities to go places right after last season, but I mostly stayed home until our son was born. In January and February, I attended a few banquets. I wanted to do that. When people want to honor you, you want to accommodate them if you possibly can."

Even when he went to Piedmont Hospital with Nancy for the delivery of their third child, he was treated as a familiar face, not an MVP-type celebrity. "Oh, they're getting used to us coming there," Murphy said. "It's our third son in three years, so it's no big deal at the hospital. They just see us and say, 'Here come the Murphys again . . . must be having another baby.'"

Murphy, his wife and three sons are now in West Palm Beach. He arrived just as early this year as last, when he was coming off a .247, 13-homer, 50-RBI disaster of a season.

"I'll probably come down here early every year until my kids are in school and can't come with me," he said.

"I feel like every spring is starting over. We started last year optimistically, and I think this year we're optimistic again. We realize we can play well. The thing to remember is that we need to improve and we can improve."

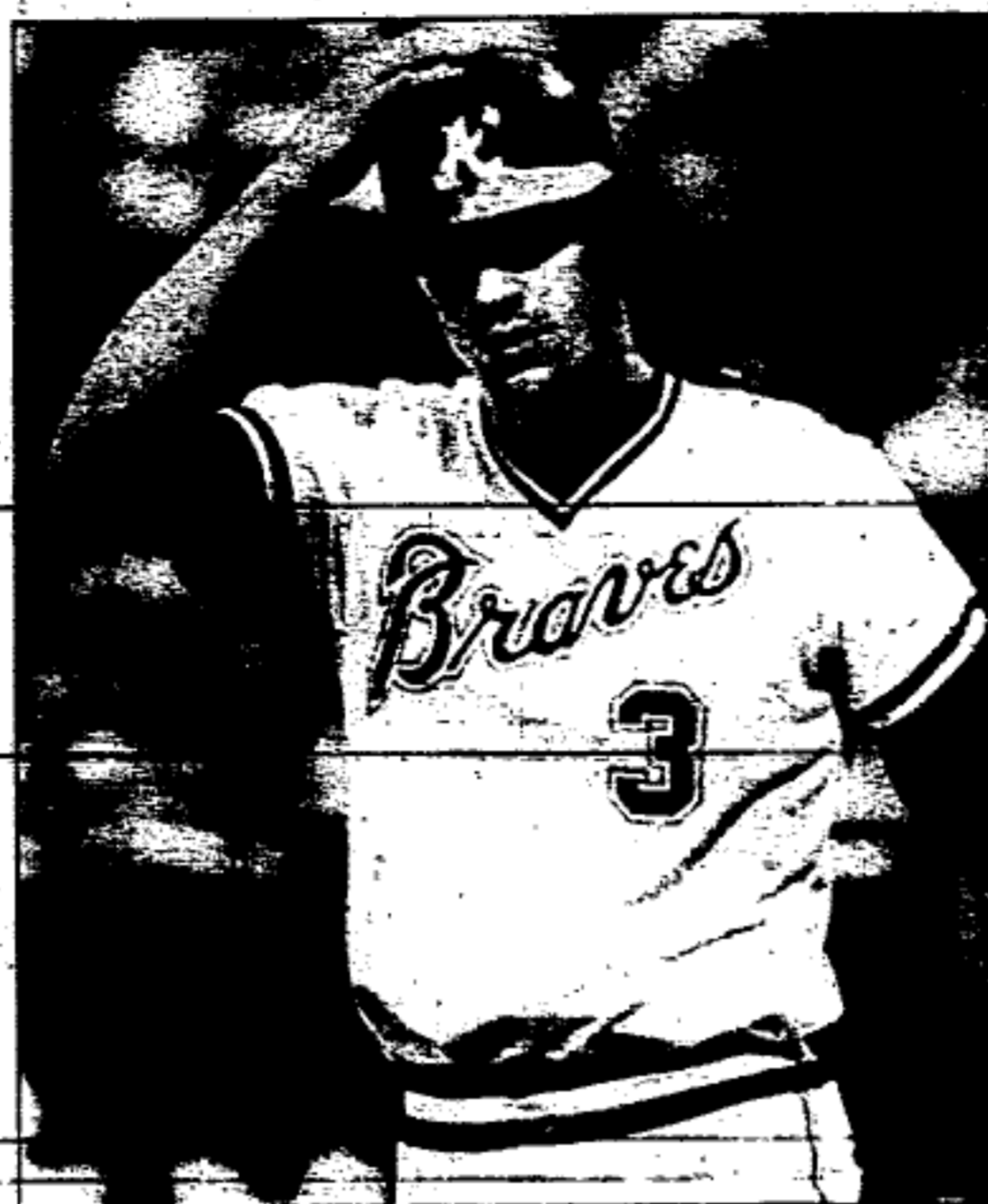
How can Dale Murphy improve on a season that produced a .281 batting average, 36 home runs, 109 RBIs, 23 stolen bases and a Gold Glove in center field?

"Consistency is the thing with me," Murphy answered quickly. "When I look at the last month of last season, well, that was an inconsistent time for me. My average dropped way off, I could improve on that. How many times did I strike out last season (134)? I'd like to cut down on that. And I know it's going to be another close race."

Already, Murphy is excited. "As excited," he said, "as when I came down here as a rookie and stayed in the batting cage so long I got real bad blisters on my hands."

Wigwam Wisp: Pitcher Tommy Boggs, sidelined most of last season with a slight tear of the rotator cuff in his right shoulder, says he experienced no pain during the winter. "I just want to take it kind of slow and a couple of weeks before the season, I'll be able to say if my arm is sound," he said. . . . Bob Horner weighed in at 216 pounds after his first workout of spring training. . . . Pitchers Rick Mahler, Rick Camp and Tommy Boggs lost almost 50 pounds among them over the winter.

TIM TUCKER



Dale Murphy . . . A humble hero.



## Scioscia Sent Back To Basic Training

VERO BEACH, Fla.—The first day in camp, Mike Scioscia caught 62 pitches in a row before dropping one. The next day, he caught 88.

"When he gets to 100," said Los Angeles Dodgers Manager Tom Lasorda, "I'm buyin' him a gold watch."

It's doubtful that Scioscia ever will see the watch—not that he won't catch 100 pitches. It's just that when it comes to paying off bets, Lasorda is the original artful Dodger. The Dodgers plan to reestablish Scioscia as the catcher he was two years ago and they're doing it one step at a time, beginning at square one: catching the ball.

"Mike developed some bad habits last year, so we're going back to the basics," explained Lasorda. "He was in the wrong position to catch the ball, so he had trouble throwing out runners, and he had too many passed balls."

Says Vice-President Al Campanis: "We were disappointed more with his receiving than we were his hitting (Scioscia hit only .219 in 1982 after hitting .276 the year before). He's an excellent signal-caller, he's excellent at tagging runners, but we've got him on a program so he can improve all areas of catching."

Scioscia will catch 100 pitches every day of spring training, practice his glove work and his release throwing the ball. He'll also work with weights, jump rope and spend 15 minutes each day on a punching bag.

A punching bag?

"It's to improve my hand speed," Scioscia said of the drill concocted by trainer Bill Buhler. "I had a bone bruise on my catching hand last year, I was catching the ball all wrong and it led to so many bad habits."

The Dodgers weren't convinced that Scioscia could overcome these bad habits, so, over the winter, they made a pitch for another catcher. They tried to pry loose Tony Pena from Pittsburgh. Then they went for Texas' Jim Sundberg during the winter meetings, a deal that was completed, then aborted when the Dodgers and Sundberg couldn't get together on a new contract.

That deal still is simmering, but Scioscia isn't concerning himself with rumors.

"I can't worry about it because there's nothing I can do about it anyway," he says. "I know I can do the job, I just had an off year. I know this, I'm not going to be a backup . . . if they get Sundberg I'm not going to want to sit around three or four years until he retires. I want to play."

During the winter, Scioscia talked with his manager at Albuquerque (Pacific Coast), former major league catcher Del Crandall, and he's getting daily coaching from former Dodger great Roy Campanella.

"Crandall helped me, and Campy is, too, with my footwork and getting rid of the ball," Scioscia said.

And scout Ralph Avila—under the watchful eye of Lasorda, of course—the pitching machine each day when Scioscia takes his 100 serves.

"Get his confidence up," Lasorda whispered to Avila, "but when he gets up to 60 or 70, you better load one up . . . or you'll be buying that watch."

Dodger Dope: The Dodgers and Atlanta launched their rival-

ry earlier than usual this year when the Dodgers complained that several Braves' regulars took part in spring drills at a time when only pitchers and catchers were supposed to be in camp. "We just wanted to clarify the rules," said Executive Vice-President Fred Claire, denying that the Dodgers blew the whistle on the Braves. "We had some of our players ask if they could come in early and we told them no." Said Atlanta Assistant Vice-President Pat Nugent: "The call (to the National League office) came from Vero Beach, so it was either the Dodgers or the New Orleans Saints. . . . Reliever Tom Niedenfuer, on the loss (via free agency) of Terry Forster. "With Terry gone, I'll have to work harder this year. We'll miss Terry. He was our only real veteran in the bullpen and he taught us a great deal."

Steve Nix, one of four Dodgers still unsigned when camp opened (Niedenfuer, Mike Marshall and Ron Roenicke were the others), arrived on schedule February 22. Six last year's N.L. Rookie of the Year, had hinted he might hold out. Reportedly, he was asking for \$250,000; the Dodgers, it is believed, were offering \$100,000.

GORDON VERRELL



## Richard Confident He'll Return In '83

COCOA, Fla.—From the moment he embarked on his courageous comeback effort after almost dying of a stroke, J. R. Richard earned the respect of his peers. But the prevailing view was, "What a great thing he's trying, but how sad. He'll never make it."

The respect continues, 2½ years later. Now, however, there are whispers of, "Could it happen? Could he actually make it back to the major leagues this year?"

Whispers because such a short time ago it seemed impossible that the Houston Astros pitcher would ever walk or talk normally, much less contend for a job on Houston's 1983 roster. Whispers because nobody would dare ask more from a man who already has traveled such a long road back. Whispers because no one—not teammates, management or media—wants to put more pressure on the 6-8 righthander than J. R. has chosen to place on himself.

But here he is, spring training, 1983, in remarkably improved physical condition, throwing harder, throwing straighter and saying, "I believe I can make this club. I'm planning to make this team."

Pause now for a word of caution to Richard's many admirers. Astros officials are not counting on J. R. to be on their opening-day roster. "He still has a long way to go," Manager Bob Lillis says. But it's significant that he hasn't been discounted either.

"It may be unlikely he would start the season with us, but not impossible," Lillis says.

The club plans to give him the opportunity he has pleaded for during the previous two springs and summers, when his heart was ready, but his arm wasn't.

"J. R. will follow the exact same routine this spring as all the other pitchers, except that he'll take extra hand-eye coordination exercises," Lillis says. "We plan to start him in some intrasquad games, and we plan to pitch him in exhibition games. He's worked hard and he deserves that chance."

For those who haven't followed closely Richard's progress, 1981—the year after the stroke—was primarily a time of J. R. relearning the basics. He spent that season on the disabled list, except for September, when he was added to the Astros' roster but didn't pitch.

Then, in 1982, he agreed to pitch in the minor leagues—a difficult concession for a man so proud—but after some success at the Class A level, he was totally ineffective for Class AAA Tucson (Pacific Coast). Again, in September, he joined the Astros but with disastrous results.

Richard wanted desperately to pitch last summer, to take the critical step back. "But he was so wild it got to the point we couldn't even pitch him in batting practice unless we could find enough volunteers to hit," Lillis recalls.

Instead of giving in to the disappointment, however, as some felt he did the previous winter, Richard worked even harder during the off-season. "I didn't even go fishing and hunting," he said. "Of course, bad weather may have had more to do with that than baseball."

Under Lillis' guidance, Richard threw regularly throughout January in Houston. Most pitchers require all six weeks of spring training to reach a competitive level in April. But Richard reported to Cocoa, by Lillis' account, "with better arm strength, better range of motion and better control than he had in September. I'm impressed."

Richard credits losing weight (about 15 pounds to 241) with helping him find his old form. More, though, he credits being at peace with himself, with "being reborn during the winter. I always thought I was a Christian. But all I was was religious. Now, I've given my life completely to Christ. I can accept whatever He wants me to do and whatever happens in my career."

Richard says the stroke and its aftermath have helped make him a stronger person. He hopes others can benefit by his story and is excited about a proposed movie based on his life.

(Continued on Page 31, Column 1)