

# Dodger Destiny in Four Hands

By GORDON VERRELL

VERO BEACH—Steve Garvey complained recently that the Dodgers had done precious little over the winter to plug the gaps left by departed Tommy John, Lee Lacy, Bill North and Jerry Grote, saying flatly, "We're not as strong as we were last year."

Dodger Vice-President Al Campanis argued the point, saying that with the addition of Andy Messersmith, Gary Thomasson, Derrel Thomas and Von Joshua, the Dodgers are indeed as good as they were in 1978, when they won a second straight National League pennant, and, maybe, he said, even a little bit better.

That's debatable.

Messersmith, of course, is the key. With Thomas, a versatile athlete who can play at second base or in center field with exceptional skill, the Dodgers certainly have eased the losses of Lacy and North. And Thomasson and Joshua should help balance what has been largely a right-handed-hitting lineup.

But can Messersmith, 0-3 with a 5.37 ERA last year, make up for the loss of John, 17-10 and 3.30?

**THE DODGER BRASS** seems to think so, giving the 33-year-old righthander a two-year contract after only one 15-minute workout at Dodger Stadium.

If—ugh, that word, if—Messersmith has completely recovered from a series of injuries (surgery and a broken collarbone in the last two years), there's little reason to doubt that he can at least pitch regularly in the rotation. Since winning 20 and 19 games his final two years with the Dodgers (1974-75), Messersmith was only 16-18 the last three summers with the Braves and Yankees.

And by his own admission, it will be some time before he even hopes to regain his touch.

"I'm throwing very well, but I'm not 100 percent yet," said Messersmith. "Don't forget, I haven't even faced a batter since last July."

As for the losses of Lacy and North to free agency and Grote to retirement, the Dodgers must replace 13 home runs—all by Lacy—and 59 RBIs. Lacy batted .261 and hit

five of his 13 homers as a pinch-hitter. North batted .234 and, though he drove in only 10 runs in the five months he was with the club, he drew 65 walks, roughly one every five times to the plate, which was by far the best ratio on the club. Grote batted .271, but went to bat only 70 times.

Thomas certainly will fill the defensive voids left by Lacy and North, but his .227 batting average last year was the lowest in his seven-year big league career. He cited his contract squabbles with the Padres as the major reason for his poor showing in 1978. All of that, he maintained, is a thing of the past now that he has a five-year contract.

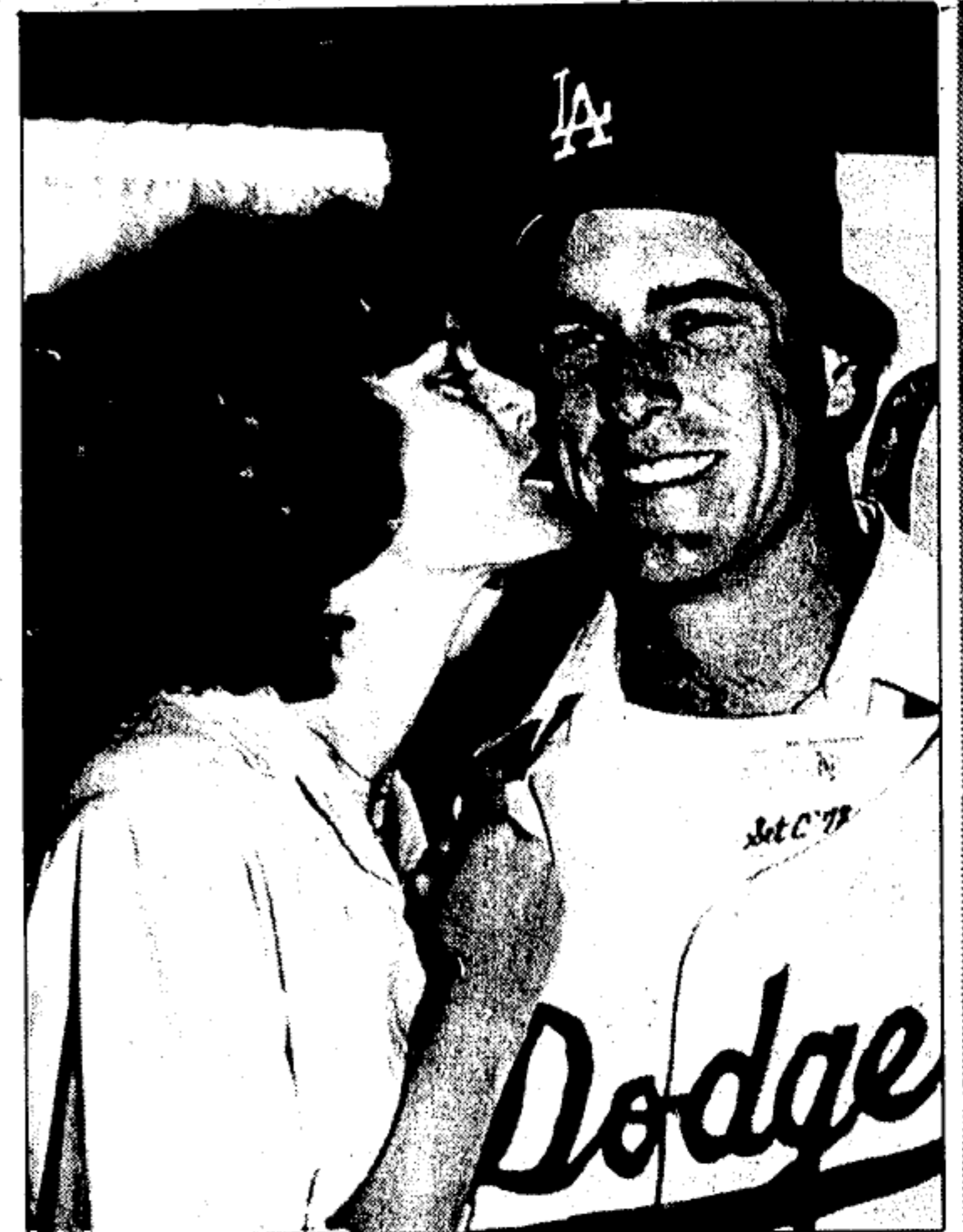
**THOMASSON AND JOSHUA**, both outfielders, undoubtedly will be utilized as pinch-hitters, at least to begin with.

It should be an interesting spring for the outfield. Dusty Baker, Rick Monday and Reggie Smith comprise the outfield. But what about Thomas? And Thomasson and Joshua? And promising rookie Rudy Law? And, of course, the ageless pinch-hitting marvels, Vic Davalillo and Manny Mota? Said Davalillo: "Don't forget, I can pitch, too."

So, whether the Dodgers are better than they were a year ago is certainly a point to be argued. But catcher Steve Yeager recently attempted to temper the loss of John by saying, "The Dodgers lost Sandy Koufax and managed to keep going, so I'm sure we will, too."

What Yeager overlooked, though, is the fact that after Koufax retired following the 1966 season—a year in which the Dodgers won their third pennant in four years—they plummeted to eighth place in 1967 and seventh in 1968, and didn't win another pennant for eight years.

**Dodger Dope:** Dodger announcer Vin Scully has been selected sportscaster of the year by the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association. Scully, 51, has been the voice of the Dodgers for 29 years. . . . Scully, Ross Porter and Jerry Doggett will air Dodger games over a 24-station, four-state network in 1978. The network includes 20 stations in California, two in Arizona, one in Nevada and one in Hawaii. Jaime Jarrin and Rudy Hoyos



**GARY THOMASSON** and wife Maureen like the cut of their new Dodger Blue.

will broadcast Dodger games in Spanish.

The Dodgers are reporting brisk ticket sales for the Dodger-Angel Freeway Series March 30-April 1, the first two of the games scheduled for Dodger Stadium. The attraction? It'll be Rod Carew's first-ever Los Angeles appearance as an Angel. . . . The Dodgers' season sales have passed 18,000.

# Perry Fires Pitch at Padres' Poor Defense

By PHIL COLLIER

YUMA—The Padres were among major league baseball's weakest offensive teams last season, but 21-game winner Gaylord Perry is more concerned about their defense this year.

The 40-year-old Cy Young Award winner urged a greater emphasis on defense and team play as the Padres assembled here in late February for the start of their 11th spring training camp.

"As a pitcher, I want defense," he said. "I'd rather have a defensive player out there than an offensive player. You can always bring an offensive player off the bench."

**PERRY SAID** he is concerned by what he considers defensive weaknesses among the Padres at second base, third base and center field. He is troubled because the player he rates as best suited for center field, Bill Almon, is being tried at second base, his

third infield position in three years.

He is also concerned because Gene Richards is being projected as the center fielder. Perry feels the Padres are glossing over their defensive problems and are asking the players to do the same.

"I feel it's best to be as honest as possible," Perry said. "They (outfielders) have to play better if we're going to win. They have the ability to improve. But they have to work at it."

"If they don't hustle and catch the ball, and if nobody else tells them about it, you better believe I'm going to."

Perry says it pains him to see talent wasted. As examples of the beneficial results of his criticism, he refers to teammates Mike Hargrove, acquired from Texas, and Almon.

"Mike and I have been friends and enemies," Perry said. "I think we're friends now. When I first started playing for the Rangers, he couldn't catch a cold. I told him about it. I told him he could get better because he's an excellent athlete, and he did. He came in second for a Rawlings Gold Glove the next year."

"Mike was big enough to accept criticism and work to improve himself. He didn't pout."

Perry feels the same way about Almon. "I took ground balls with him," Gaylord recalled. "I showed him I could catch ground balls between my legs that he wasn't catching at all. He accepted the challenge. He worked hard and really improved himself. Unfortunately, they still haven't found Almon's right position—center field."

**PERRY WAS** miffed last fall because the Padres wouldn't extend his contract, which expires at the end of this season, and because they wouldn't reward him for winning 21 games and the Cy Young Award.

As spring training began, he appeared on the verge of getting a contract extension, but he also has asked for a guaranteed contract in 1980. Owner Ray Kroc reportedly has balked at that point.

"No, I haven't signed; no tractor, no truck," he said before flying to Washington, D. C. for a White House visit with President Carter a few days before spring training began here.

**Padre Pickups:** The Padres have signed one of their original (1969) players, reserve catcher Fred Kendall, who played out his option with the Red Sox last season. . . . As they headed for Yuma, the Padres' season ticket sale had reached 13,257 (1,659 full-season plans and 11,598 mini-season plans).

# Rennie's Report: 'Good as New'

By CHARLEY FEENEY

BRADENTON—If Rennie Stennett had a second chance, he would not have played baseball last season.

"It was a mistake," the Pirates' second baseman said. "But I admit if someone last spring had suggested that I sit out the season, I wouldn't have listened."

Stennett broke his right ankle in August, 1977, and less than six months later, he was working out in preparation for spring training.

He managed to play in 106 games, batting .243 with 35 RBIs. When he was carried off the turf at Three Rivers Stadium in 1977, he had a .336 batting average.

Last August, Stennett stopped playing and sat on the bench watching the Pirates make their heated bid to overtake the Phillies.

"I BECAME a cheerleader because there was nothing else I could do," he said.

Stennett developed a bone spur above the right ankle. The pin that had been placed in the ankle was removed last October. He played in the Dominican Republic during the winter and now, he says, he has it all back, his confidence and agility.

The second base job belongs to him again. He is sure he will prove that he hasn't lost the range he had before the injury.

"I did it all in the Dominican," he said. "If the ankle was going to bother me, it would have happened there. All the stiffness is gone."

Something else is gone, too. That's the pain he developed last September. He blames it on inactivity.

"I love to eat. And when I don't play, I naturally gain weight," he said.

Manager Chuck Tanner doesn't plan any special spring program for the 27-year-old Panamanian.

"**THERE IS NO** reason for it," Tanner said. "Rennie has tested the ankle and, from all the reports I have received, he's back to normal."

Stennett's improved physical status is just one reason why Tanner thinks the Pirates can overtake the Phillies in 1979.

Tanner points to an improved bench, mentioning, among others, Lee Lacy, signed as a free agent.

Lacy can play infield and outfield positions and Tanner indicates he will work the former Dodger in the outfield in the exhibition games.

"I'd like to get Lacy where he can concentrate in one area," Tanner said. "This way, it will help his throwing. I think it would be detrimental to Lacy to work him 30 minutes out in the outfield and 30 min-

utes on the infield. The throws are so different."

**TANNER** surprised people when he said that Lacy sometimes will replace Dave Parker in right field.

"I'd like to give Parker a day off every two weeks," Tanner said. "I don't think there are any 162-game players any more. Parker is great and just think how much greater he will be if he can get a rest once in a while."

It will be difficult to remove a healthy Parker from the lineup at any time during the season. Maybe Tanner will change his mind. Maybe Parker will decide he doesn't want to rest.

**Pittburgers:** Tanner said the most difficult area to figure out in the spring is pitching. "We have 14 pitchers in camp with big league experience," he said. "Somehow, there always seems to be some minor injury to a pitcher that forces some changes. If we have any pitcher with a tender arm when we break camp, we can always put him on the disabled list."

Willie Stargell, 38 on March 6, came to camp with the enthusiasm of a rookie. Willie always is one of the happiest players in camp and he makes a point of making every youngster in camp welcome. . . . Tanner says he was fortunate that Harvey Hadix was available to become pitching coach when Don Osborn was shelved by illness.