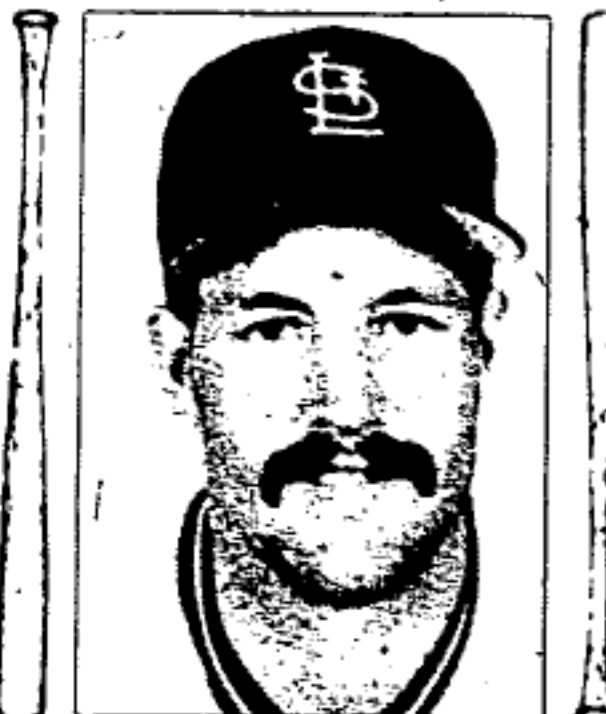


N.L. EAST

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS



Todd Worrell

Manager Whitey Herzog's answer was predictable when the matter of the St. Louis Cardinals' most indispensable was broached.

"Jack Clark," Herzog said. Since the player in question still must be on that team's roster to qualify for the designation "most indispensable," Herzog then mentioned Ozzie Smith.

But for all the brilliance of the Cardinals' self-made superstar, Herzog believes the Cardinals have the second-best defensive shortstop in the National League on their bench in Jose Oquendo. So Smith would not necessarily qualify as "most indispensable."

Herzog turned his attention to his 1-2 bullpen punch of righthander Todd Worrell and lefthander Ken Dayley, who complement each other as well as any pair in the league. After some hesitation, Herzog called Worrell the player he could least afford to lose for a long period of time.

In his first two major league seasons, he had 69 saves, including 33 in 35 chances as the Cards won the pennant last year.

For most relievers, there are bad times to go with the good and off years to go with the great, but Herzog doesn't think the 28-year-old Worrell has reached his peak.

"As he goes along, he should learn to pitch better," Herzog said. "I mean in pitching to spots and getting better with his slider."

There is no room for the faint of heart in the short reliever's job nor for the manager who would summon him.

"The manager and the pitcher better not have any doubts, or you've got the wrong guy in there," Herzog said.

With Dayley's comeback from serious elbow surgery, Herzog rarely has to use Worrell for more than three or four outs in a game.

That was similar to the manner in which Herzog used Bruce Sutter, but Herzog will use Worrell in hopelessly lost games if he hasn't had enough work. Sutter didn't want to pitch in such situations.

"Bruce never wanted to pitch unless the game was on the line. He didn't think one inning would do him any good," Herzog said. "With Todd, sometimes you have to put him in there so he doesn't get too strong."

Said Worrell, "It's very difficult to find someone who can be consistent over a long period of time in the short relief role. You can name them on one hand—the guys who are the stoppers in the National League. There aren't a whole lot of teams who have a guy like that. Even New York, as good as they are, they'll split the duties between two guys."

"It's a job that isn't easily filled. When you find a guy who can do that, it's an asset to your team. If you lose a guy like that—over 162 games—you're definitely going to see a difference."

Historically, relievers have had difficulty pitching for more than two or three good seasons in a row. Worrell is two for two so far.

and he knows why.

"Looking back on my career, as short as it is, a lot of my success and the reason I've been consistent is directly related to Whitey," he said. "It's very important for a manager to know how to use a guy out of his bullpen even when things aren't going well."

"I had a terrible month early last season, but Whitey did a great job of keeping me in there even though I was clearly having a rough time. You need to keep your stopper in a rhythm, whether he's in a good one or bad one. You can't get scared and pull him out of there and say, 'OK, I'm not going to use him now.'"

"If you give him more than two or three days off, he's not going to be worth anything the rest of the season. But with Whitey, when he commits himself to someone, he lives and dies with him."

It is not accidental that Worrell started his best stretch of pitching last year—13 straight games without allowing a run—almost to the day that Dayley returned to the roster, May 21.

"A pitcher like Ken Dayley is very valuable to a guy like me because he's the type who can give you a break when you need it," Worrell said. "He can take a lot of load off my shoulders. I've got to go out on the mound thinking, 'Yes, I'm the guy who has to stop them.' But it's nice to know there's a guy who can help you out."

Herzog takes the Dayley-Worrell duo one step beyond normal when he puts Worrell in right field if a particularly tough lefthanded hitter like Von Hayes or Keith Hernandez is at bat.

There are times when Herzog will take Worrell out of a game one out short of a save to get Dayley in against a lefthanded hitter for the final out. Worrell loses a handful of that way, but he said, "I'm not going to cry or complain about being taken out of a game. The bottom line is we win. If it takes both of us to do it, that's great."

Meanwhile, Worrell's choice as the most indispensable Cardinal would be lefthander John Tudor.

"I don't think it would have been as close as it was last year if we had had John," Worrell said, referring to Tudor's three months on the sidelines with a broken leg. "I don't even know if I would say Jack (Clark), because we won without him, too. There's no question Jack got us to the playoffs. But in the playoffs and the Series, we were winning without him."

RICK HUMMEL

NEW YORK METS



Darryl Strawberry



Outfielder Darryl Strawberry is the only Met capable of carrying the team when need be.

ing the New York Mets in 1983 and, chances are, you won't get too many of his teammates to tell you they're crazy about his mouth.

But when it comes to natural ability on a baseball field, especially the ability to hit a ball long distances, they love him.

One of the disputes in which Strawberry has been involved came when he missed two games against the St. Louis Cardinals late last June because of a bad case of the flu. Lee Mazzilli, who replaced Strawberry in the lineup for those two games, was highly critical, setting off a controversy that lasted a couple of days.

"I wanted him to realize how indispensable he is to this team," Mazzilli said this spring. "I've been around for a while, and I have never seen a player with Darryl's kind of natural, God-given talents. There's nothing in the game he cannot do. And he's the only guy on this team who can carry it if it needs to be carried."

Strawberry, who has always come across as an enigma, disagreed with Mazzilli, citing last season as an example.

"I have to disagree," Strawberry said. "Look at last September. I was playing well, yet the team didn't win. It shows you one guy can't do it."

That was the humble portion of Strawberry's personality. A day later, Strawberry was embroiled in another controversy, trying to deny statements attributed to him in an article in Esquire magazine criticizing some of his teammates.

"I believe the good Lord wanted me to go through hard times and learn from them," Strawberry said.

While he's learning how to deal with things, however, he's hitting, and that's all the Mets seem to care about.

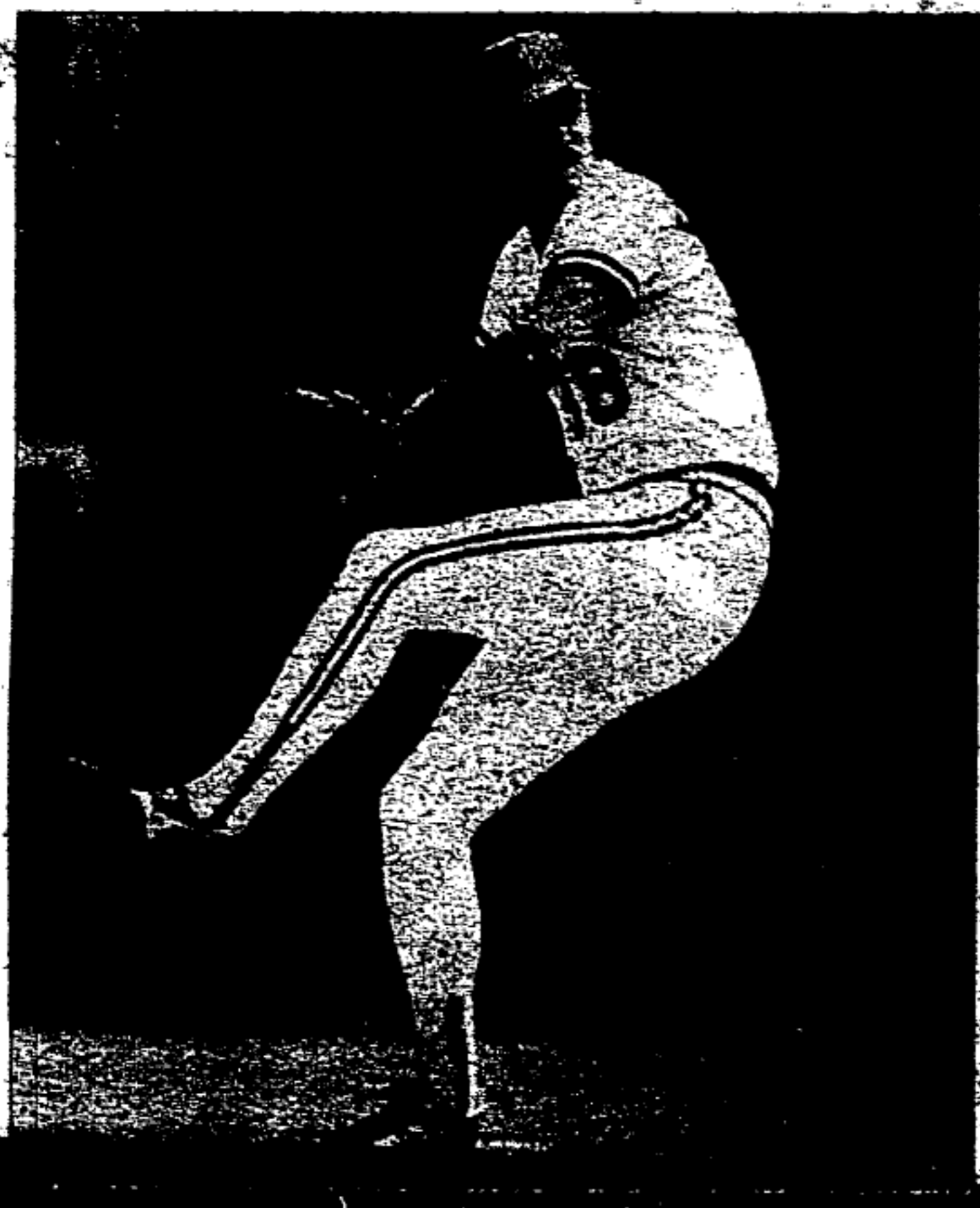
Last season, after a mediocre start, Strawberry caught fire after Manager Dave Johnson inserted him into the cleanup spot July 20, dropping Gary Carter to sixth. Both Strawberry and the club took off. The team, 49-42 at the time of the switch in the batting order, went 43-28 the rest of the way to finish 92-70. Strawberry hit safely in 17 of his first 20 games after the switch, batting .345 with seven home runs and 15 runs batted in.

He finished with the best season of his career—a .284 batting average, 39 home runs, 104 RBIs and 36 stolen bases. Not only did he become a member of the 30-30 club (home runs and stolen bases), he established club records in home runs, slugging average (.583), total bases (310), extra-base hits (76) and runs scored (108). He was a starter for the National League All-Star team for the fourth year, the first N.L. player to do that in his first four complete seasons.

"Last year just scratched the surface of Darryl's abilities," Mazzilli said.

When pushed, Strawberry reluctantly accepted the fact that his absence from the Mets' lineup would create the biggest void, bigger than the loss of Keith Hernandez, Gary Carter or Dwight Gooden.

"I guess the home runs would be



two major league seasons.

ured his share of controversy since join-