

BASEBALL'S INDISPENSABLES

Which Player on Each Major League Team Would Be the Most Difficult to Replace?

A.L. EAST

DETROIT TIGERS



Alan Trammell

They won without Lance Parrish last year. Now they hope they can win without Kirk Gibson. But the Detroit Tigers know without whom it would be the most difficult to win.

Alan Trammell.

Without their shortstop, the Tigers would have a hole in the middle of their defense and a void in the cleanup spot, plus they'd lose the clubhouse contributions of a player who has stepped easily into the role of leader.

"If anything, the departures of other players have helped Trammell take on the responsibility of being looked up to," said Tigers first baseman-designated hitter Darrell Evans. "I don't know what else a leader is than a player who is expected to perform in a certain way and does."

Trammell's contributions start on the field. He has batted .300 or higher in four of the last eight years and won Rawlings Gold Glove Awards in 1980, '81, '83 and '84. He's also made the transition from being a pesky No. 2 hitter, expected to advance runners, to cleanup, where the assignment is driving in runs. Last year, he had career highs of 28 homers and 105 runs batted in.

"When you are talking about today's great players, he has to be included," said Tigers Manager Sparky Anderson. "There isn't anything Trammell doesn't do well."

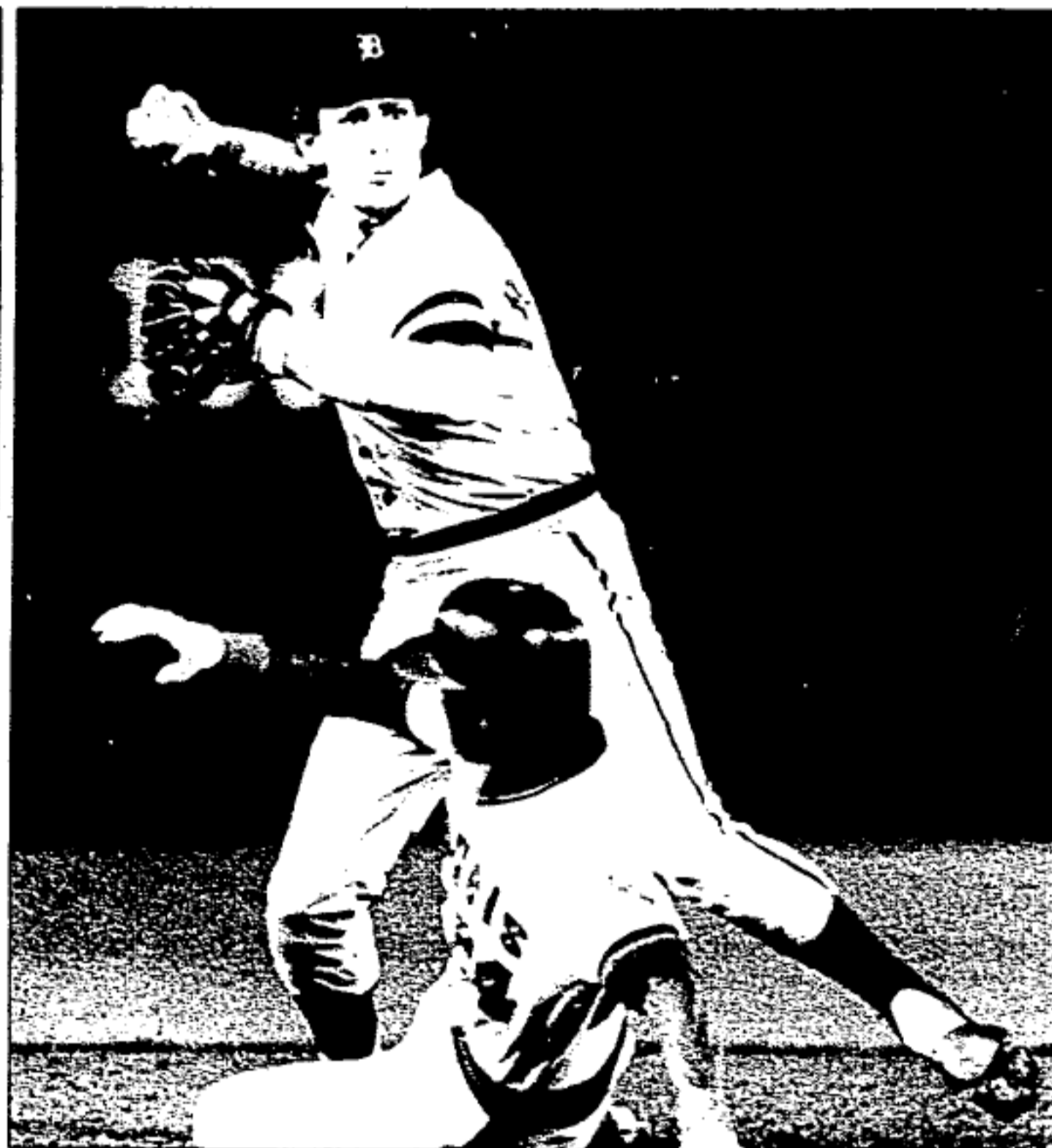
"Since I've been here, I've watched him grow and mature into a totally different player. But you have to remember that he was just a kid back then. He's a man now."

Trammell, 30, has never lost his boyish enthusiasm for baseball, however, nor his wide-eyed determination to improve.

"I've never seen a player who pushes himself to reach higher plateaus the way he does," said Evans. "As far as I'm concerned, he was the American League's MVP (last year)."

"Trammell reacts in such a positive way to responsibility. Some players don't want it, but he has made it look like a natural process."

It wasn't that Trammell shunned responsibility earlier in his career, but there were others, such as Parrish, who personified leadership more. When Parrish became a free



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agent after the 1986 season and signed with the Phillies, Trammell stepped into his role as cleanup hitter and his shoes as a leader.

"It's not something I consciously think about," said Trammell. "Leadership is much more what you do than what you say. I know they count on me, but I also know that I'm one to be counted on. I like the feeling that they can depend on me."

The departures of Parrish and Gibson, who signed a free agent contract with the Dodgers in February, have left their impressions on the Tigers. There are those who feel no player is indispensable, regardless of whether he hits home runs or throws strikes.

"Babe Ruth is dead and so is Cy Young," said Tigers pitcher Jack Morris. "But I think there is a major misconception of what we've done without Parrish. Yes, we won without him, but we would have been runaway winners with him."

Trammell, however, feels "there are certain players you can't lose for lengthy amounts of time." And the Tigers, in turn, feel Trammell is such a player.

"I know when he was worried about his shoulder," said Anderson, "it gave him an uncertainty which affected the way he played, and that didn't exactly make us a better team."

Trammell's career seemed to be taking a turn for the worse when he hit only .258 in 1985. He tried to conceal his concern, but a sore throwing arm troubled him.

It was a turning point for Trammell, a pivotal year for his confidence. There was no guarantee his arm would ever be as strong as Trammell wanted it to be and, despite all the offense he's given the Tigers, his defense is the cornerstone of his career.

"My defense was what got me to the majors," said Trammell. "A lot of people back then thought I would be all field and no hit, or very little hit."

Trammell's arm improved, his confidence was restored and the power of non-worry soon took hold.

"It's refreshing, especially in the off-season, to know there's no injury that nags at you," said Trammell. "It makes all the difference in your mental approach to your job."

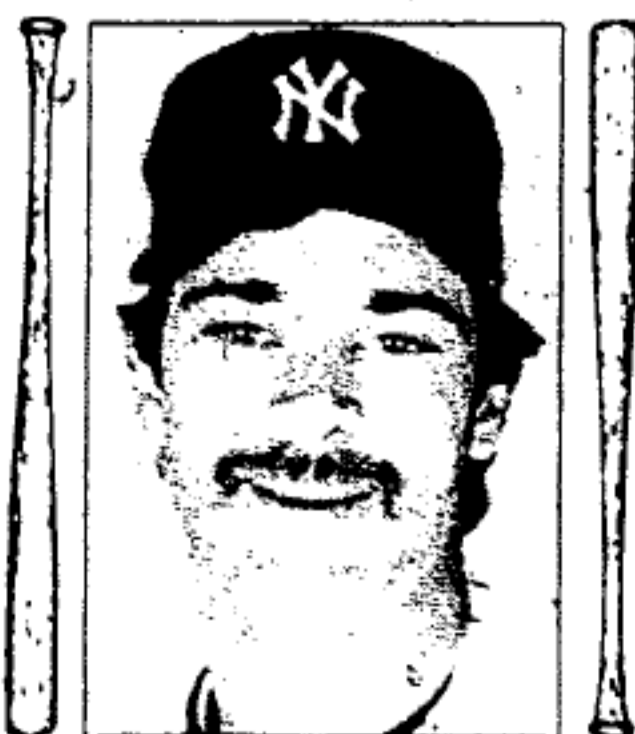
But that's the past. Trammell emerged from fretful times with the determination Evans spoke about and the overall contributions that continue to impress his manager. Not only that, but Trammell wants to play his entire career for the Tigers.

"That's my dream," he said. "I have no intention of going anywhere."

Detroit couldn't be happier.

TOM GAGE

NEW YORK YANKEES



Don Mattingly

Mike Pagliarulo was asked to contemplate a New York Yankees lineup without Don Mattingly.

"I don't know," said the Yankees third baseman. "It's kinda scary, isn't it?"

"I can only think back to two years ago when we played the Red Sox the last weekend of the season and (Wade) Boggs was hurt for them. We beat them four straight, but it wasn't the same. Their lineup just didn't have the same mix to it. Everything kind of falls into place for them when Boggs is in there. It's the same as what Donnie means to our lineup."

It is the measure of the man that Mattingly can be viewed as an indispensable man in a lineup that includes Rickey Henderson, Jack Clark and Dave Winfield.

Certainly, Clark demonstrated how indispensable he was in his three years as the lone long-ball threat in the run-and-gun lineup of the St. Louis Cardinals. Henderson, with his sheer all-around offensive might as a running catalyst and home run threat, makes the Yankees go. And Winfield, who followed up five consecutive seasons of at least 100 runs batted in with 97 in 1987, would surely leave a gaping hole if he was removed from the offense.

So what sets Mattingly apart in this galaxy of stars?

"I don't know if there is anything," Mattingly said modestly. "I don't look at myself as being indispensable—not because I can't do those things other guys do. It's just that there are so many players here who are vital. What I do give this team, I think, is consistency. I'm one of those guys you can count on every day during the course of the season, and you need that."

Mattingly is the consummate hit man, a .331 hitter for his 4½ seasons in the majors. But he's also had more than 100 RBIs in four straight seasons, 30 or more homers in each of the last three seasons and he led the American League in doubles from 1984 to 1986.

Then there is Mattingly's defense. He's won three Rawlings Gold Glove Awards and last year led A.L. first basemen in fielding percentage for the fourth consecutive season.

"It's not just a matter of making fewer errors, it's the way Donnie plays first base," said Pagliarulo. "Nobody gets to as many pop flies down the line as he does. Nobody makes the play in the hole as often and as smoothly as he does. Nobody plays as heads-up out there as he does."

Mattingly, who takes considerable pride in being a complete player, credits Quinton Merkle, his high school coach back home in Evansville, Ind., for teaching him the fundamentals.

"It amazed me when I first turned pro to see how many guys didn't know how to play this game," Mattingly said. "I mean these were top draft picks, taken way ahead of me. They had great tools, yeah, but they didn't know how to play. I mean, I thought everybody knew how to play. When I got out of high school, I knew the fundamentals, the hit-

and-run, hitting the cutoff man, all those things. I was taught well.

"I've always been taught that defense is as important as hitting. When I played the outfield, I couldn't run, but I learned how to get a good jump on the ball to compensate for that. You try to make all the plays you can make."

There is no aspect of the game in which Mattingly has not excelled, including long-ball hitting. Last year, he equalled one major league record by homering in eight straight games and broke another by hitting six grand slams.

In his first four complete seasons (at least 110 games), Mattingly hit 119 homers and drove in 483 runs. By comparison, Babe Ruth had 177 homers and 521 RBIs, Lou Gehrig 110 homers and 492 RBIs, Joe DiMaggio 137 homers and 558 RBIs, and Mickey Mantle 108 homers and 380 RBIs in their first four full seasons.

"The fact is," said Pagliarulo, "there are dangerous hitters in this game, but only because they hit the ball out of the ball park. In Donnie's case, the danger with him is everywhere. I know this, if he's taken an 0-for-5 in a game, I know he's the guy I want up there at the plate with the game on the line in the ninth inning."

BILL MADDEN

TORONTO BLUE JAYS



Ernie Whitt

It is circumstances rather than statistics that make catcher Ernie Whitt the Toronto Blue Jays' most indispensable player.

It would be difficult to replace George Bell, the American League's Most Valuable Player last year. But the Blue Jays have a flock of young outfield prospects and could always platoon a couple of veterans as designated hitter.

Shortstop Tony Fernandez is another top performer because of his Gold Glove defense, his hitting (.310 and .322 the last two years) and his base stealing. But at least young Manny Lee would be a quality replacement.

Reliever Tom Henke led the A.L. with 34 saves last season, but he's the stopper in a well-stocked bullpen.

But the loss of the 35-year-old Whitt, even for a couple of key series, could spell disaster. Plain and simple, the Jays lack an experienced righthanded-hitting catcher to platoon with him.

Toronto began spring training with less catching experience than