

Viridon Billed as Star to Outshine Moon

Flychaser, 23, Can Throw, Run--and Swat With Power

Missourian, Obtained From Yankees in Slaughter Deal, Even Rated Favorably With Mays as Consistent Clonter

By JACK HERMAN

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.

The odds against a club coming up with the rookie of the year in successive seasons are almost prohibitive, but the rebuilding Cardinals conceivably might achieve that grand-slam if young **Bill Viridon** lives up to his glowing press notices.

Last season the talented Wally Moon took himself and the front office off the spot marked "x" with a brilliant campaign at the plate, in the field and with daring base-running. Enos Slaughter had just been traded away and the fans demanded somebody's scalp.

Now, with the spring training period closing and the new season about to open, **Viridon** is being compared favorably with Moon—in some comparisons he is given the best of it—and is being touted as the heir-apparent to Moon's rookie-of-the-year honors.

Whether the powerfully-built **Viridon** is "another Moon," only he will be able to prove. But he is confident of his ability in a quiet-spoken way and hopes the Redbirds are in no big hurry for a quick payoff.

"Last year, in training with the Yankees on the other side of town," the good-looking youngster explained, "I went 0-for-22 before I got my first hit in an exhibition game."

Naturally, he doesn't expect a drought of such proportions to strike again, for when he reported to the Rochester Red Wings, as part payment in the Slaughter deal, he immediately went to town.

"As soon as the Yanks broke camp," **Viridon** recalled, "I was assigned to Kansas City with Mel Wright and Emil Telling (other players who figured in the Slaughter transaction)."

"Then, the day before the season began, while I was packing my bags at Charleston, W. Va., for a trip to Louisville, Manager Harry Craft of Kansas City told me I was going to Rochester. It came as quite a surprise."

Cards Demanded Viridon

Wright joined the Redbirds last season for what turned out to be a brief fling. Telling no longer is in the Cards' system. But **Viridon**, a player the Cardinal brass insisted be included in the deal, is likely to be a bird of another color.

Manager Eddie Stanky was so impressed with **Viridon's** "potential" this spring that on March 29 Stan Musial was shifted from the outfield to first base and **Bill** was installed in center field, with Moon moving from center to left and Rip Repulski from left to right in a parade of the Redbirds' tentative "1955 varsity."

Did he experience any trouble acclimating himself at Rochester last year? "No, I started hitting at the outset of the season," **Viridon** noted, "and except for maybe a week, led all the way."

His .333 average was the International League's best, three points better than Elston Howard compiled for Toronto to earn a promotion to the Yankees.

It's largely on last season's performance—the .333 mark, 22 homers, 28 doubles and 98 RBIs—that old baseball heads rely in comparing Moon and **Viridon**.

At 25, Moon is **Viridon's** senior by two years, but in 1953, his last year in the minors and also at Rochester, Moon hit ten fewer homers, four fewer two-baggers and drove home 37 fewer mates.

Not only impartial judges, but Harry Walker, who managed both prize prospects before sending them to the parent club, and fellow players believe **Viridon** can do '55 what Moon did last summer.

Neighbor of Preacher Roe

Stanky's shift of Musial to make room for **Viridon** in the outfield offers impressive evidence of the Cardinal skipper's favorable estimate of **Bill's** potentialities.

In fact, Stanky believes that **Viridon**, who is a neighbor of Preacher Roe back home in West Plains, Mo., "has all the requisites of another Moon."

That means "he can run, throw and hit with power."

Stanky isn't concerned that all the ballyhoo **Viridon** is receiving will turn his head or inflate his hat size.

In Stanky's book, if a player like **Viridon** has what he describes as "character," he'll take the publicity in stride. With the help of specs, **Viridon** has

Flyhawk Always Had Desire to Play in St. Louis Stadium

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — When **Bill Viridon** reaches St. Louis, following the Redbirds' barnstorming trip northward, he'll realize a life-long ambition: To play in Busch Stadium, or, as it used to be known, Sportsman's Park.

"I've walked by the park," he said, "while visiting friends in St. Louis, but I've never been inside, even as a fan."

During the winter, **Viridon** stopped off at the park offices, only to find everyone had gone home early for the day. It was a Saturday.

developed a smooth style and does not overstride.

All organization men, including scouts and managers, are high on the strong-armed boy from the town of 5,000 that's approximately 100 miles southeast of Springfield, Mo.

Stanky, however, goes more by what Harry (The Hat) Walker says of **Viridon** than anyone else, because "the manager knows his players the best," according to Stanky.

Those with whom four-eyed **Bill** has played know him well, too. Tony Jacobs, the Red Wings' relief specialist of the past two seasons, who also is trying to nail down a berth with the Cards, was quite emphatic in his praise of **Viridon**.

"He made so many great plays last year," Jacobs remarked, "it's tough to pick one out over the others. He's a helluva player and if it weren't for politics, he would have been voted the International League's most valuable player, too."

Could Be Rookie of Year

Jacobs declined to elaborate, but politics or no, **Viridon** ran second to Howard while Jacobs himself was named the I. L.'s most valuable pitcher in '54, after appearing in 61 games in relief for a new league high.

Jacobs, a 145-pound bantam pitcher, played with Moon the last few weeks of the '53 season at Rochester, after being purchased from Springfield, Mass. "And I think **Viridon** is the better all-around player," he insisted.

He concluded his thesis on his favorite topic—**Viridon**—by declaring that "**Bill** can't miss. He has a good chance to be one of the top rookies of the year—if not the best."

Apparently all pitchers, if they're on the same club, that is, feel rather strongly about **Viridon**, a six-foot, 180-pounder. Larry Jackson, another ex-Red Wing in the Cardinal camp this spring, carried his comparison even further.

Jackson chose baseball's No. 1 figure, Willie Mays, as a yardstick for **Viridon**. Having pitched against the Giants' meal ticket in the Puerto Rican winter league, Jackson felt qualified to say his piece.

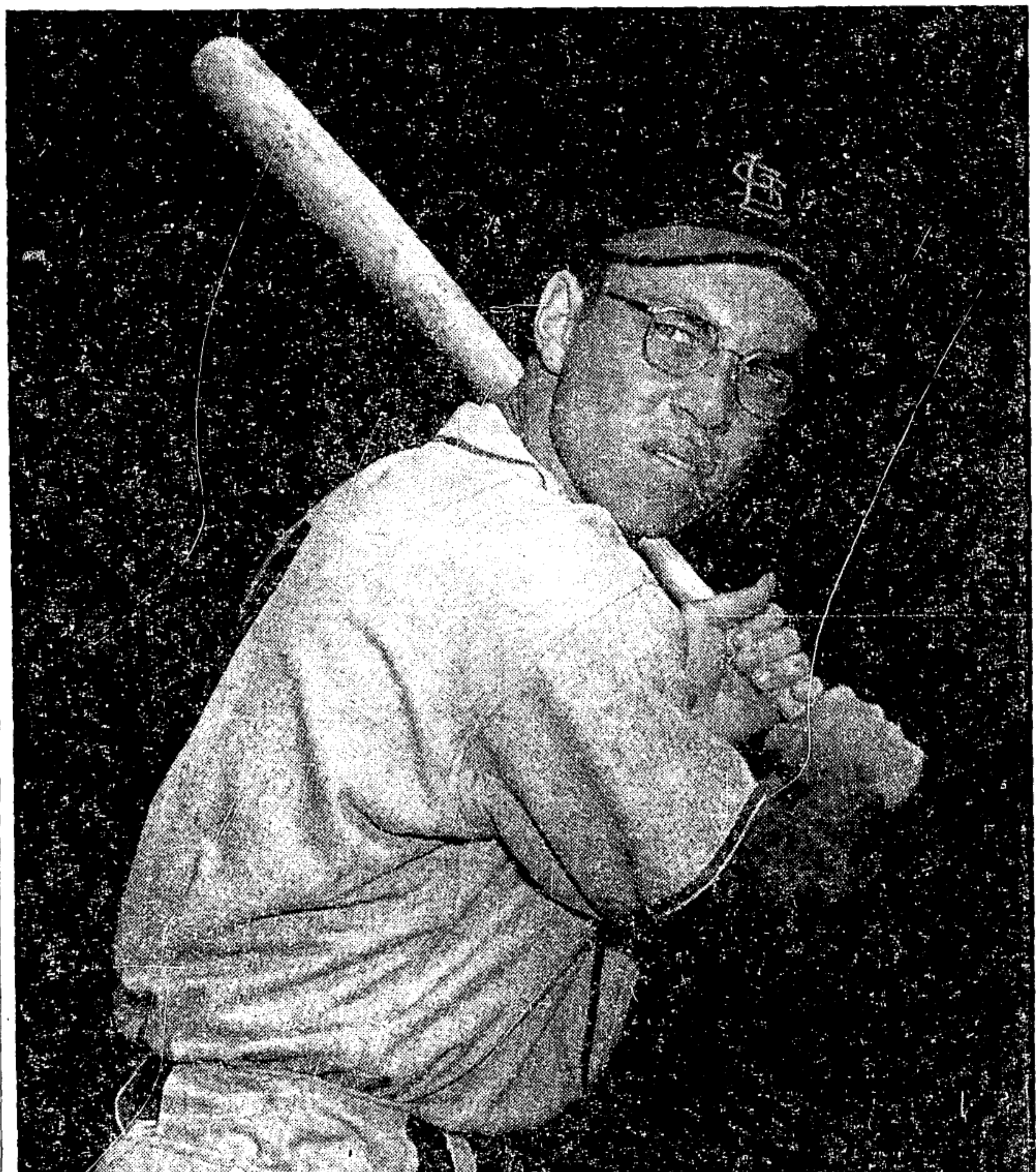
"I say Mays has more power, but **Bill** will hit with power more consistently," Jackson commented. "Maybe not this year, but give him a couple of years under his belt, like Mays has."

Jackson also pointed out that velvety-smooth **Viridon** faced a tougher task crashing the Cardinals' strong outfield of Musial-Moon-Repulski than Mays did in trying to win a spot for himself in the Giants' 1951 outfield.

But to paraphrase a tired cliché, all these baseball folk can't be wrong, can they?

Walker, for instance, says "**Viridon** was the No. 1 minor league player last year. He excels in every phase of the

Redbirds Unwrap Class Rapper



BILL VIRIDON . . . Brightens Cardinals' Picture for 1955 Campaign

Kahn, Coach at Rochester, Boosts Viridon Over Moon

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.—According to Lou Kahn, catcher-coach with Rochester the last three years, Outfielder **Bill Viridon** is a better player than the Cardinals' Wally Moon, who was voted Rookie of the Year in the National League last season. **Viridon** played at Rochester last year and Moon was there in '53.

Describing **Viridon** as "a better player in every respect than Moon," Kahn said: "He'll easily out-field, out-throw and out-run Moon, and I feel he'll out-hit him, too. He's a great ball player; he won't choke up in the majors, either, if they gave him the full chance."

tured kneecap and a wrongly-diagnosed break in his ankle.

Still feeling his way as a pro player in '51 with Norfolk, **Viridon** underwent X-ray treatment for his injured ankle which, according to hospital attendants, indicated a break.

With his leg in a cast, **Viridon** was summoned to New York by the Yankees and there Dr. Sidney Gaynor, the club physician, learned that the "break" was just an old bone chip. When the cast was removed, **Viridon's** leg was as good as new—or when he was a one-man track team in high school back home.

All **Viridon** did as a prep star, with energy to burn, was run the 100 and 220-yard dashes, throw the shot, pole vault and anchor the relay team. If they would have let him, the slight but growing youngster, who was born in Hazle Park, Mich., probably would have handled the concessions, too.

In one meet in the South Central Association, **Viridon** registered four first-place finishes and led the relay team to another tape-breaking victory.

Between his junior and senior years in high school, **Viridon** matured from a

145-pounder into a solid 165-pound athlete and then added five more pounds, a figure he kept until reporting to Rochester. Since then he has been a robust 180-pounder. "Eddie wants me at 185," **Viridon** explained. "I guess he feels I'll be stronger with that added weight."

With his speed and abandon on the bases, **Viridon** should help keep the Cardinals moving quickly from base to base. Last year, their 63 stolen bases represented the league high, after they pilfered a total of only 18 the year before.

Grateful to Walker

And Moon was largely responsible for that accomplishment. Wally swiped 18 bases, or just three fewer than the entire Pittsburgh club stole in '54. That's another target for **Viridon** to shoot at.

Despite his steady one-for-three batting pace at Rochester last season, **Viridon** had an occasional slump. And he is particularly grateful for Manager Harry Walker's eagle-eye observations. "Once he spotted that I was holding the bat too far back, behind my ear," **Viridon** remarked, "Another time, I was crouching too much and Harry noticed it and helped put me on the right track again."

Like his fellow townsman, Preacher Roe, who enjoyed unusual success against the Cardinals while pitching for Brooklyn, **Viridon** says, "I usually hit better against Columbus (Redbird farm) than against any other club," while playing for Kansas City.

And it was Johnny Keane, now manager of Omaha's Triple-A American Association club, who, as Columbus pilot, is reported to have advised the Cardinals to "grab **Viridon**."

Cognizant of the big build-up he's received, **Viridon** hopes "I can do what everyone says I can and not disappoint them." If he lives up to his Paul Bunyan-type ballyhoo, he's a cinch to keep the rookie-of-the-year honors in St. Louis this year.

Old War Horse's No. 9 Now Carried by Card Colt Virdon

Bill Better Than Repulski, Jablonski, Cunningham, Moon, Says Harry Walker, Who Managed All of Them

By RED BYRD

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.



Bill Virdon

They gave **Bill Virdon** a famous Cardinal number—9—when he checked in at the spring training camp of the Redbirds. And if he'll only live up to the rich praise heaped upon him by former teammates and opponents, he'll really make 'em remember Enos Slaughter.

It's the Country Boy's number that was issued the 23-year-old bespectacled rookie when he checked in, apparently only an interesting coincidence because Butch Yatkeman, veteran equipment manager, explained that old uniforms and spring training numbers were temporary. Ken Boyer, for instance, has Gerry Staley's 14 because Butch figured the new third baseman and former pitcher were about the same size and rangy Frank Smith momentarily has No. 5, big Steve Bilko's over-sized refuge from a tent and awning company.

It is, though, romantic happenstance that **Virdon** has Old War Horse Slaughter's uniform, if only momentarily, because the kid has had terrific billing. By contrast, Wally Moon, highly-regarded 1954 freshman who became National League Rookie of the Year, virtually was unheralded.

Dropping in from DeLand, Fla., where the Cardinals again pitched a minor league camp, Harry Walker, Rochester manager, extolled **Virdon**, pointing out that the West Plains (Mo.) boy was a better ball player for him than Moon.

"Virdon," said The Hat, "undoubtedly is the best player I've ever managed." And Walker, it must be remembered, sent up Rip Repulski, Ray Jablonski and Joe Cunningham, for instance, as well as Moon.

Walker said, going further, that in his judgment the six-foot, 180-pound **Virdon** was the top minor league player of 1954.

"Excels in Every Phase of Game"

"He excels in every phase of the game," the former Cardinal and Phillies' star said of the outfielder who won the International League batting championship with a .333 average, belting 22 homers, 11 triples and 28 doubles while driving in 98 runs. **Virdon** then walloped the ball at a .340 clip in the tough Cuban Winter League.

"He's the nearest thing to Terry Moore I've ever seen," said Walker, who understudied Moore, the master, with the Cardinals. "He's a great defensive outfielder with a fine attitude and, what's more, he's a good hitter with power, a fast man and strong-armed."

Harry said he was impressed particularly by the competitive spirit of the athlete obtained from the Yankees in the Slaughter deal last spring.

"He's the kind of boy," Walker went on, "who rises to the occasion, a fine hitter in the clutch. Several times last season he'd be up there with a man on third, one out, and a pitcher would be trying to keep him from getting a good ball to hit. But **Bill** wouldn't settle for a base on balls. He'd manage to get a good enough piece of the ball to bring in the runner from third."

Comparing **Virdon** and Moon, the Rochester skipper tabbed Wally as a better base-runner with more baseball instinct, polish and finesse. **Bill**, he said, can hit harder more often, is a bit faster and has a defensive shade, too, as well as a stronger arm.

Faszholtz Also Puts in Plug for Bill

Another Rochester observer, Jack Faszholtz, pitcher and divinity student hampered by sniffles that made him miss Manager Eddie Stanky's opening workout, also put in a strong pitch for teammate **Virdon**.

"He's very fast," said the Preacher. "He'll jump, dive, roll and do just about anything to make a catch. And all he has to do is get his hands on the ball."

Stanky, eager to get a look at **Virdon**, said he planned to play **Bill** in the March 10 exhibition opener with the Yankees. Winter league activity paid off in the first hitting drill as the In-

Stan Tops Surplus Weight Scale—Pays \$16 as Penalty

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.—Stan Musial, who earns the most, paid the most as the Cardinals weighed in under Manager Eddie Stanky's program of pre-training fitness, March 1, at the Al Lang Field clubhouse.

At \$2 a pound, the 34-year-old Musial, weighing 182 pounds instead of the 174 Stanky had outlined for him, kicked in with \$16.

Five other players contributed \$32 more as Vic Raschi paid \$10, Floyd Woolldridge \$8, Larry Jackson \$6 and Red Schoendienst and **Bill Virdon** \$4 apiece.

Because 33 players conformed to their weight limits, Stanky coughed up \$66 to bring to \$114 the steak-and-flower fund.

Stanky Harpoons Speedy Drill Pace of Bull Lawrence

By JACK HERMAN

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.



Brooks Lawrence

Brooks Lawrence, who thrives on hard work, was in the unemployed ranks of the Cardinals for the first week of spring training.

Manager Eddie Stanky took no chances with The Bull, who, after joining the sagging Redbirds the last week in June last year, became the club's second biggest winner. Only ace of the staff Harvey Haddix, with 18 victories, outshone the righthander's 15 triumphs, and Lawrence delivered his total in just a little more than half the season.

What made his performance even more startling was the fact that his 15-6 record and 3.74 earned-run figure were better than his corresponding marks in the minors before being promoted. At Columbus, the Springfield, O., athlete compiled a 6-4 won-lost record and mediocre 5.54 ERA before answering the Cards' SOS.

Then, after his busy '54 season, in which he also was sidelined for a time by a spiked ankle, received while covering first base, Lawrence suffered a stomach ulcer attack. "I just passed out one day," the broad-shouldered Brooks said, upon arrival in camp here.

The first thing Stanky asked Lawrence at the opening of the month-long training grind was: "How's your ulcer?" The 210-pound Negro pitcher replied, "I feel like I could whip a bear with a switch right now."

Nevertheless, Stanky cautioned him against overworking in the early drills. After his collapse in mid-October, Lawrence spent ten days in a hospital, receiving eight pints of blood in transfusions. "I ate baby food for two months," he said with some distaste, screwing up his face, "and had to eat six meals a day."

Now, he is more or less on a regular diet, although "I have to hold something on my stomach all the time," he explained.

Craft Spotted Virdon Using Specs While Reading Paper

ST. LOUIS, Mo.—Bob Wiesler, St. Louis-born lefthander of the Yankees, explained to Neal Russo of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch how **Bill Virdon**, the Cardinals' red-hot rookie outfield prospect, began to wear glasses on the field.

Wiesler, just before shoving off for St. Petersburg, Fla., pointed out that he and **Virdon** had been teammates under Harry Craft at Kansas City in 1953, when the Blues were in the American Association.

"**Virdon** was barely hitting over .200," Wiesler recalled, "and one day he was reading the paper in the hotel lobby when Craft walked in."

"Craft nearly fell over when he saw **Virdon** wearing glasses. He asked **Bill** if it was something new, but **Bill** told him he always used them for reading. Because he wasn't hitting, Craft suggested he wear 'em on the field, too—and you know the rest."

Transferred shortly thereafter to Birmingham, **Virdon** batted .317 in the Southern Association, went to the Cardinals in the Enos Slaughter deal and then followed with a .333 average to win the International League batting title and a 340 winter league mark in Havana.

International League hitting king socked line drives and the Pacific Coast batting champion, Harry Elliott, poled several pitches over the left field fence at Al Lang Field. Elliott, too, will be given considerable early work, as Stanky said he would go easy on Moon and Repulski.

If **Virdon** crashes the outfield, there'll have to be considered the possibility of moving Stan Musial to first base, Stanky acknowledged, because Repulski's righthanded bat hardly could be spared and Moon, after all, is a bright young star of promise.

Frazier Works Out at First, Too

However, not only must youngsters Joe Cunningham and Tom Alston be given a whirl at first, but Stanky even had hard-hitting Pinch-hitter Joe Frazier taking a defensive turn at the bag. Primarily, though, The Cobra is just insurance at the position.

Of course, in all this conjecture there must be complete realization that **Virdon** must live up to his clippings.

Redbird Chirps: Except for ill Jack Faszholtz, the only absentee from the opening workout was Luis Arroyo, Puerto Rican lefthander considered to have a good chance of making the staff, and Manager Eddie Stanky observed coldly that maybe Arroyo wasn't so interested in the big leagues, after all. . . . Annoyed at the delayed spring training start, Stanky said there would have to be longer and harder workouts to make up for the lost time. He began by having batterymen show up at 10 a.m., the rest of the squad at 11.

Detroit Will 'Process' 280 Players at Camp

'Tiger Town' in Lakeland, Fla., Adjoins Air Field; Four Diamonds Spread Out in Cloverleaf in Area

By JACK SLAYTON

LAKELAND, Fla.

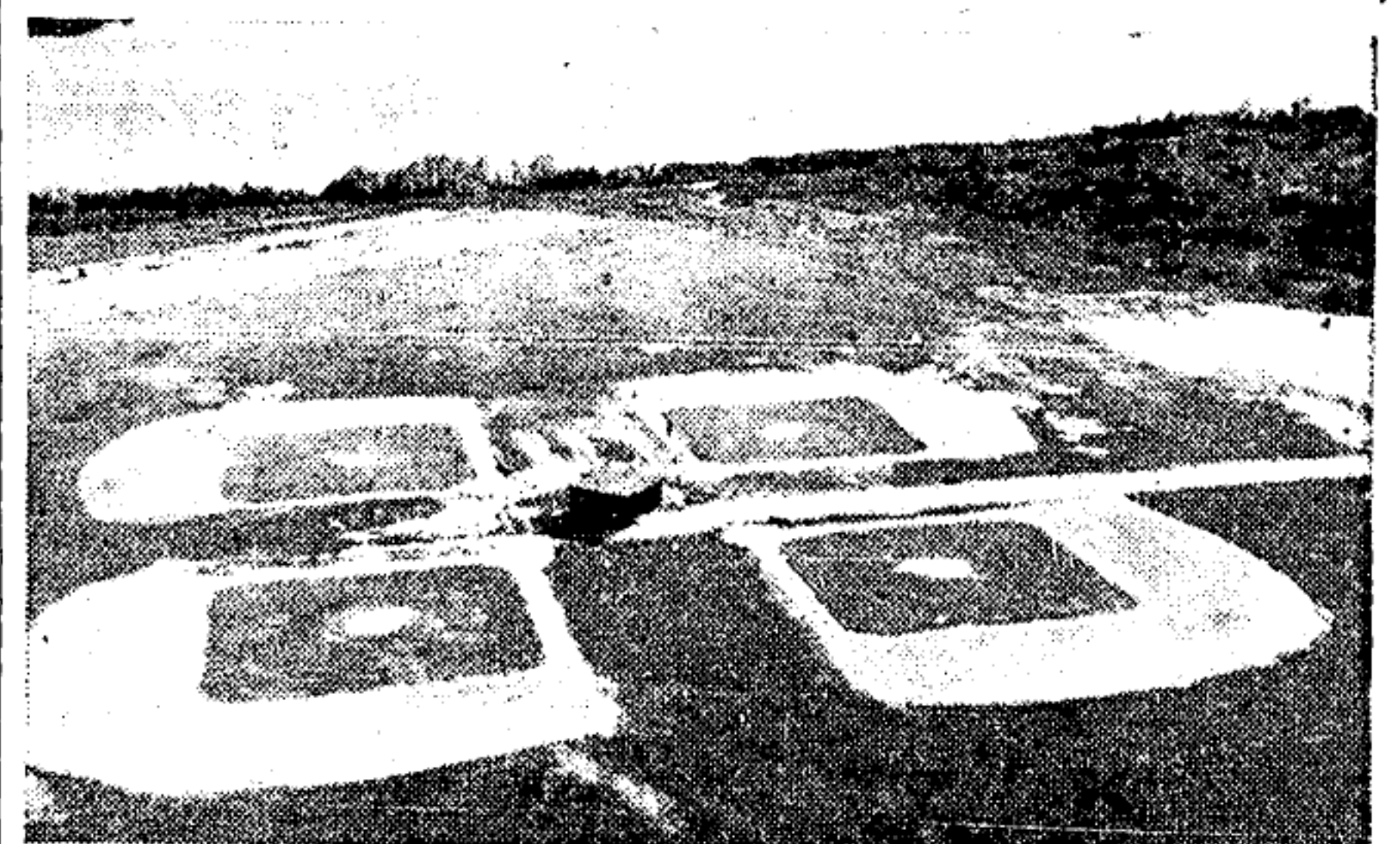
With the accent on expansion, the Detroit Tigers' farm facility at Lodwick Airport here will process more than 280 players during its two-month session.

Tiger Town, which is in its third year, will handle all ten farm clubs of the Tigers, including Idaho Falls (Pioneer), which took spring training last year in Lodi, Calif. However, Detroit this year has done away with its California training camp and all clubs owned and affiliated with Detroit will train at the airport facility.

Tiger Town is the only training camp where students are being taught flying at one end while players learn the intricacies of baseball at the other. The airport is operational, including a flying school. There are no scheduled flights but private and commercial craft use it daily. All ball's hit on the runway are ground-rule doubles.

Because of the different opening dates of the various farm clubs, the teams will not be there all at the same time.

Little Rock, Ark., of the Class AA Southern Association reported last week-end and will depart late in the month. Augusta, Ga., the new Tiger farm in the Class A Sally League, is also slated for an early departure, as is Valdosta,



AIR SHOT of Tigers' minor league training layout at Lakeland, Fla., permitting action on four diamonds simultaneously.

Ga., of the Georgia-Florida League, and Durham, N. C., of the Carolina League. Buffalo of the International League will spend almost six weeks in Lakeland. When the Bisons are not training at Tiger Town, they will play exhibition games at Henley Field, about a mile from Tiger Town.

Other clubs expected besides Idaho Falls include Panama City, Fla., of the Alabama-Florida; Terre Haute, Ind., of the Three-I; Jamestown, N. Y., of the Pony, and Greenville, Miss., of the Cotton States.

The camp is supervised by Jimmy Campbell, assistant farm director of the Tigers. Campbell said the increased number of players has resulted in expanded facilities being made available in the second barracks. He stated about 280 players would be processed and with the scouts, managers, coaches and press, 325 persons would be housed at Tiger Town. Last year 200 players trained here.

Instructions in Morning, Games in Afternoon

John McHale, Detroit farm director, said the training routine this year will include the use of movies. Standard films on fundamentals of the game and each position will be shown to the farmhands. Otherwise, the daily drills will follow the pattern which proved so successful in the past. The players will be instructed by the various scouts and coaches in the Detroit system in the morning sessions. Intra-squad games and exhibitions will be played in the afternoons. Lakeland is in the center of minor league training, with some 40 clubs conditioning within 100 miles of the Citrus City.

Four diamonds are laid out in a cloverleaf pattern with a one-story first aid room and viewing stand in the middle of the four diamonds. Besides the diamonds, a large net-enclosed batting cage is located near the dressing room.

Players receive a box lunch, served outside the dressing room, but eat their two other meals in a large cafeteria. Recreation rooms are available in each barracks, and a large game room adjoins the cafeteria.

The business offices are at the corner of the "Rec" building with a special conference room including blackboards listing all players and the clubs to which they belong.

As in the past, the Tigers are keying their training schedule and routine to the player, his needs and his ability. Players will be moved according to their ability and their club affiliations prior to training will be not binding.

The facility was reconstructed by the City of Lakeland and the Detroit Tigers. During World War II it served as a training base for foreign flyers and later the U. S. Air Force. It is located about two miles north of the center of Lakeland.

Florida Base for Big League Bengals



THIS IS the Detroit Tigers' training base—Henley Field—in Lakeland, where the American League club has drilled since 1934, except for three World War II years.

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