

# Hough's Knuckler Almost Hit Proof

By GORDON VERRELL

LOS ANGELES—Dodger Manager Tommy Lasorda calls his crack relief pitcher, Charlie Hough, "my Hope Diamond."

And for a good many of his summers in the big leagues, whenever it came to talking about Charlie Hough, that's about all anyone did. Hope.

The reason was the uncertainty of his specialty, the knuckleball, a pitch so baffling that it fools everyone—the batter, the catcher, even the pitcher.

So far in 1977, however, there has been nothing uncertain about Hough.

HE WORKED IN 13 of the Dodgers' first 20 games, figuring prominently in nine of the 17 wins with three victories and six saves. In his first 28 innings, he allowed just five earned runs and had a 1.61 earned-run average.

There is a question, though, and that's just how often can he work?

"His arm aches and his back hurts," admitted Lasorda, "but he can pitch every day."

He might have to. It has been said that on days when Hough's knuckler isn't dancing, then nei-

ther will the Dodgers. That's because the rest of the bullpen—Al Downing, Mike Garman, Elias Sosa and Stan Wall—showed a combined ERA of 5.85 (13 earned runs, 19½ innings) through the Dodgers' first 21 games. Downing was the best of the rest with one run in 4½ innings.

Hough became No. 1 in the bullpen last June, even before the departure of Mike Marshall to Atlanta. He had the finest season of his seven in the majors, appearing in 77 games, winning 12 of 20 decisions and posting a 2.20 ERA.

THAT MIGHT be just a hint of what is yet to come.

Said Don Sutton: "He's going to break all of Marshall's records before he's through."

Hough has made gradual progress since his first taste of the big leagues in 1970. The two things he credits for his improvement are control and confidence.

"I didn't have any idea where the pitch was going when I started throwing it," he said. "That came with experience. As for confidence, I know now that if I louse up a game for some reason, I'm still

going to be back out there the next night."

Hough wasn't always a knuckleball pitcher. In fact, he wasn't always a pitcher. He started his professional career as a third baseman. It was Lasorda, then a manager in the club's minor league organization, who convinced him to try pitching.

LATER, AFTER hurting his arm, he tried the knuckleball, with the urging of Lasorda and scout Goldie Holt.

"Without a knuckleball," said the 29-year-old Hough, "I'd be punching tickets at Hialeah Race Track."

Interesting, in his first major league game, he got out of a jam by striking out Willie Stargell with the bases loaded. On a fast ball, yet.

In San Diego on April 26, he entered a game in the ninth inning with runners on first and second, no one out and the Dodgers leading, 4-1.

The batter was George Hendrick, a man to whom Hough never had pitched. He threw nothing but knucklers and got Hendrick on a pop-up. Next was Doug Rader, a

man he'd pitched to often, and he ended the game by getting Rader to ground into a double play—on a fast ball.

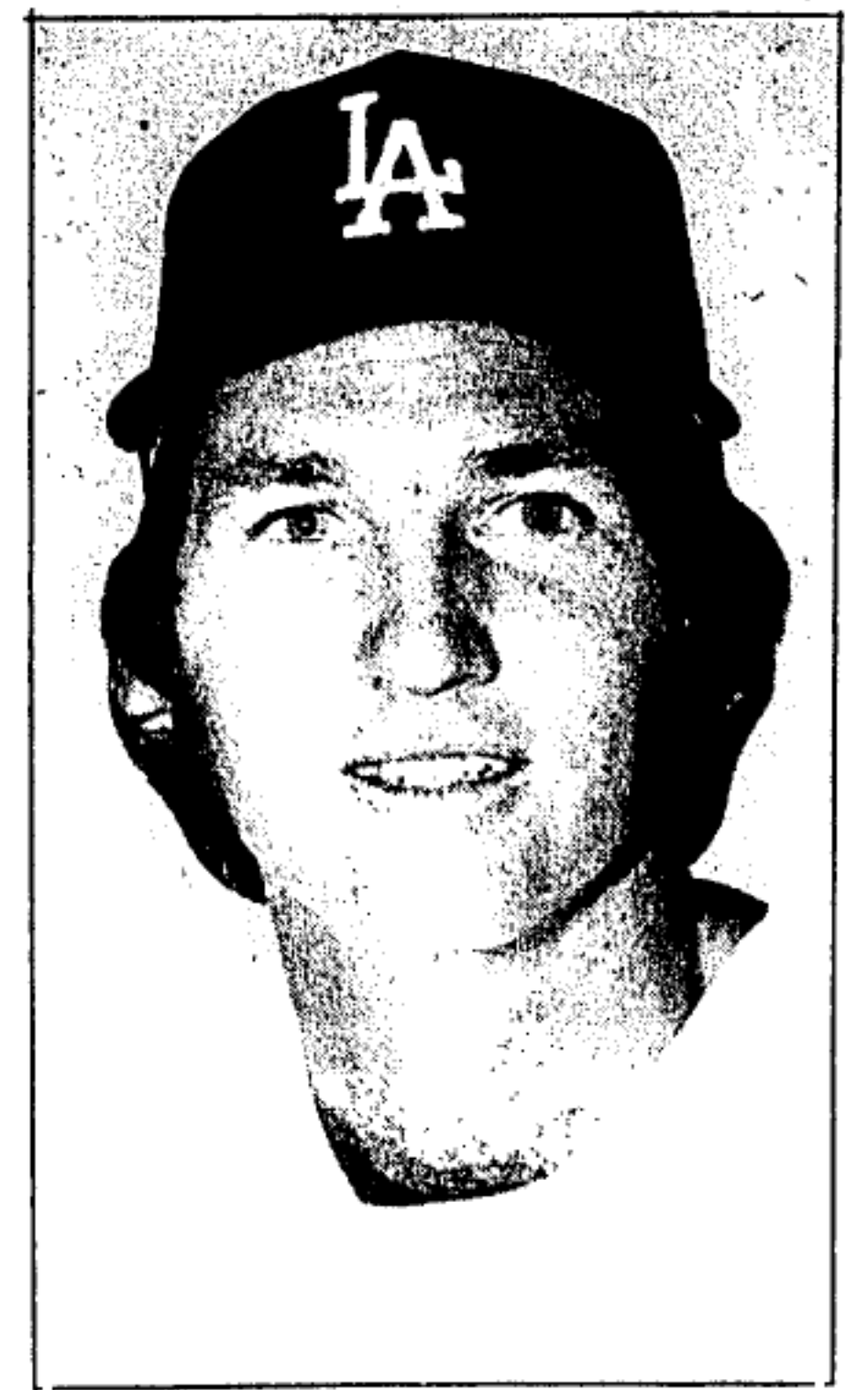
THREE NIGHTS later, in Dodger Stadium against the Expos, he appeared in the eighth inning with the Dodgers ahead, 2-0, runners on first and third, two out and Tony Perez—"the toughest hitter for me to get out"—at the plate.

He went to 1-and-1 on Perez, then tossed a knuckler high and inside that caught Tony's bat for a strike. He then caught Perez looking at strike three to get out of the inning and preserve the win for Tommy John.

"The biggest strike," said John "was the one that hit Perez' bat." Lasorda disagreed.

"The biggest strike," said the manager, "was the one Perez took with two strikes on him."

DODGER DOPE: The Expos ended the Dodgers' eight-game winning streak, 6-2, May 1. . . . The Dodgers still were batting .301 after their loss to Montreal. . . . The Dodgers won 15 of 18 games against the West. . . . Rick Monday and Montreal Manager Dick Williams had a shouting match in the fifth inning



Charlie Hough

May 1. Monday grounded out, but caught his spikes in the dirt as he started toward first. On one knee in the batter's box, he said Williams shouted obscenities at him from the dugout. Williams denied it. "I didn't like him when I played for him," snapped Monday, "and this only intensifies my feelings."

# Yanks Find Super Leadoff Hitter by Accident

By PHIL PEPE

NEW YORK—It was a move made out of desperation. Eight defeats in their first 10 games had left the Yankees at the bottom of the A. L. East. All that talent, all those high salaries, and the Yankees were dead last.

Frustrated by the poor start, the lack of hitting, Manager Billy Martin turned to a trick he used to shake the Tigers out of a slump when he managed in Detroit. He put nine names in his hat and Reggie Jackson stuck in his hand and pulled out a lineup.

It might be mere coincidence that with his new lineup, Yankee bats began to light up, and they went on to win six straight, 10 of their next 11 games. They probably would have started to hit anyway.

WHAT IS MORE than just coincidence, what is a very fortunate accident, is that the first slip of paper Jackson pulled out of Billy Martin's hat had on it the name "Randolph."

That made Willie Randolph, normally the No. 8 hitter, the leadoff batter in Martin's hunch lineup. It might have made Willie Randolph the Yankee leadoff hitter for the rest of the season, and maybe for many seasons to come.

The statistics make it a very real possibility that Randolph might have replaced Mickey Rivers as the permanent Yankee leadoff man.

In his first 11 games at the top of the Yankee lineup, Randolph went to bat 53 times, 45 officially. He had 14 hits for a batting average of .311, also three doubles, one triple, one home run and six RBIs.

BUT THE STATS that make him so valuable as a leadoff man were 12 runs scored and an on-base percentage of .396, made possible by eight walks in 11 games. By startling contrast, Rivers walked only 12 times in 137 games all last season.

Randolph's patience at the plate, coupled with Rivers' tendency to slash away, makes it likely Randolph will remain on top and Rivers will drop down in the lineup. Mickey's RBI potential (he had 67 as a leadoff man last year) is another reason for the move, one which Randolph would welcome.

"I feel comfortable batting leadoff," Willie said. "I've always batted at the top of the order. I like it there. It's much easier to hit up there than it is at the bottom."

BESIDES BEING a patient hitter, Randolph has a good sense of his own strike zone for one so

young (22). He can bunt, he can steal (37 last year), he is a tough man to strike out and he can swing the bat.

Because of his good batting eye and the big bombers that follow him in the order, Randolph figures he will get better pitches to hit.

"The pitchers have to throw strikes," he reasoned. "They don't want to walk me with all those good hitters coming up."

Sometimes the determination not to walk a hitter makes a pitcher try too hard. That's when walks result. Also Randolph's ability to lay off bad pitches not only will increase his walk total, but also will give him a better selection of pitches to hit.

RANDOLPH'S offensive skills may be considered merely a

bonus. The Yankees wanted him mostly for defense and he has more than pleased them on that end, giving them the kind of second base play that merits comparison with all-time Yankee greats like Tony Lazzeri, Joe Gordon and Bobby Richardson.

His range and his ability to turn the double play and to hang in there in the face of flashing spikes stamp him as one of the great young second basemen in the game.

In a recent game against Seattle, Willie made a diving catch to take a hit away and turn it into a double play, the kind of play that could only be called miraculous.

"Aw," said Martin, an old second baseman of some reputation himself, "I would have been

standing in front of the ball."

In case you don't know Martin, he was only kidding.

YANKEE DOODLES: Catfish Hunter came off the disabled list and pitched vs. the Angels on May 4, the first day he was eligible. It was his first appearance since opening day. . . . Gabe Paul was released from the hospital and was recuperating at his home in Tampa. He did, however, manage to use the telephone to become involved in the deal that brought Mike Torrez to New York. Torrez was late reporting, missing one start and being the center of a mystery. He was home in Montreal, where his wife, Danielle, had suffered complications after birth of their first child, Iannique Michael John Torrez.

# Chisox' Big Park No Paradise for Zisk

By RICHARD DOZER

CHICAGO—Don't give Richie Zisk any of that business about home-field advantage. He doesn't take to that theory at all. As far as the new White Sox slugger is concerned, there's no place like the road.

Zisk and his fellow White Sox were back to open their first long home stand of the season on the weekend. When Cleveland came to town to get things started on Friday the 13th ("Anti-superstition night," Bill Veeck called it), Zisk was trying to clear his mind of more things than bad-luck omens.

He brought with him a .167 home batting average, born of six hits in 30 trips to the plate in cavernous Comiskey Park. Of his first 25 runs batted in, only four were at home. Of his first eight homers, only one came in Chicago.

"I CAN'T WAIT to get out of town," Zisk had said when the White Sox set out on a 10-game trip that started May 2 in Kansas City.

Little wonder. He was batting over .400 everywhere but home.

"Here we are—only about a month into the season, and I'm

mentally beat in this ball park already. I suppose it's psychological, but they take my strength away here. I showed them early that I hit the ball in all directions. I'm not just a pull hitter.

"I hit a ball the other day just to the right of center field. It's at least 400 feet, and it's a home run everywhere else. But it's caught here. I only know one other field that would contain it—O'Hare."

Zisk also went down the line and talked about homers he has hit in such parks as Toronto, Oakland and Detroit. At least three of them, he said, would have been caught in Chicago.

ALL OF WHICH doesn't exactly hasten Richie toward signing his White Sox contract. He had thought that Comiskey Park fences were to have been shortened in the alleys and in the prohibitive 445-foot depths of center.

But Owner Bill Veeck backed off on the advice of Manager Bob Lemon, who wants more room for his pitchers. Once established, the fences must remain the same for the season.

Zisk gave the Sox an 11th-hour "hint" before the home opener.

His first homer of the season in Toronto five days earlier barely cleared the 400-foot sign in dead center. In Chicago, it would have been an easy out.

The question becomes: will it be more expensive now than it would have been in spring training to sign Zisk? Neither he nor his agent, Jerry Kapstein, will tip their collective hand. But it has become clear that Comiskey Park is not going to be a Zisk favorite with its present contours.

IT HAS BEEN reported that he is asking at least a three-year pact at \$200,000 per. By now the price may have gone up. He appears headed straight for the re-entry draft. It may be assumed, however, that Veeck is too smart to let that happen. He has two ways to avoid it: sign him by June 15, or trade him to any of several American League teams which see him as the difference between a title and failure. June 15 is the trade deadline.

But Zisk has a warning to those who may wish to use him as a designated hitter. He insists that's not his role.

"I tried it a couple of times in (Continued on Page 22, Column 1)

# Fire Engine Replaces Limo for Sparky, Bride

NEW YORK—It was far and away the social event of the season, the wedding of Mary Fontaine Massey to Albert Walter Lyle, the celebrated relief pitcher of the Yankees, better known as Sparky.

After the ceremony at the Marble Collegiate Church in downtown Manhattan, the newlyweds stepped out into the street and discovered their limousine had been replaced by a 1936 fire engine.

The newlyweds and their wedding party rode on the fire engine to a reception at McTeague's, attended by Lyle's teammates and Yankee Owner George Steinbrenner.

"It's quite a surprise," practical joker Lyle said of the fire engine, "but frankly it's not as bad as I expected."

The following night, Lyle was back in the Yankee bullpen, where he resided as king with six saves and one victory in his first nine appearances.

PHIL PEPE