

SPORTS

Scope



When Hank Gets Riled,
He Really Hammers 'Em
by F. M. Williams

ATLANTA—Hank Aaron is no shrinking violet. He speaks his piece on issues concerning him, or baseball, but he has a way of doing it that avoids personalities.

He is by far the most accessible of all the so-called Super Stars in baseball. He has a keen sense of humor, laughs easily at his own expense, and is possessed with so much talent that almost everything he does appears effortless, sometimes lazy.

There are those who say his major league career is being prolonged by such firm control of his emotions, and there are others who say lack of fire in Aaron's makeup deprives the Atlanta Braves of the on-the-field leadership so vital to championship athletic teams.

So it was with somewhat mixed feelings that people here greeted the news last week that Henry (The Hammer) had his dander up over some remarks made at a booster club banquet by Milo Hamilton, the Atlanta radio announcer.

MANAGER BILLY HITCHCOCK, rushing quickly to Aaron's defense, could not help but be secretly happy over the controversy.

In two games thereafter, Hank had seven hits in eight times at bat, plus two walks, and he showed more aggressiveness than anyone in these parts has ever seen him display.

It was in jest, but with some semblance of truth, that a wag commented after Sunday's tremendous exhibition by Aaron that it would be a good investment to hire a hand to visit Henry each day with just one remark: "Roberto Clemente's a better outfielder than you are."

Actually, that is not what Hamilton said, nor what Aaron got angry about. Milo's remark was to the effect that last year, in the All-Star game, Aaron was shifted to left field to make room for Clemente in right, implying that baseball players favored Clemente.

AARON'S DISPLEASURE was in being brought into verbal testimonial to Clemente, in the first place, and to Hamilton's ignorance of the facts. Aaron got move votes for outfielder in the All-Star game than did Clemente a year ago, and could have started in right if he had insisted upon it. He shifted to left at the request of All-Star Manager Walter Alston.

Durocher Set Off Controversy

A year ago down here there was a big controversy going over whether Aaron was as good an outfielder as Willie Mays. Leo Durocher set that one off, and coincidentally, he did it in a speech at another Atlanta Booster meeting. Leo took Mays, of course.

"Actually, I'm flattered to be mentioned with Willie Mays or Clemente when people get to talking about who's the best outfielder playing today," said Hank. "I'm perfectly willing for my record to speak for me."

The record speaks loudly. He has a lifetime batting average of .317. To date he has hit 453 home runs, has batted in 1,461 men. He is regarded, with Mays, as the very best base runner in the National League, not because of the bases he steals, but because he seldom ever gets thrown out taking an extra base. He has a great arm, he has more than adequate speed. And when he gets mad, he's vicious at the right place—at home plate, with a baseball bat in his hand. The problem is keeping him mad.

It Takes Homers To Draw Fans

The Braves, who open a three-game series against the St. Louis Cardinals here tonight, have played 29 dates at home and have drawn 367,520 people. That's some 22,000 less than at a corresponding time during their first season in the South. Almost all the difference can be traced right back to opening day.

Aaron and Joe Torre are the main reasons that fans are flocking through the turnstiles in such great numbers. They hit home runs, still the greatest attraction baseball has to offer. Aaron has 11, Torre nine.

Almost anyone who has ever seen a baseball game knows that Atlanta cannot win the National League pennant—yet it is an interesting team and exciting.

Despite injuries and illnesses that have deprived him of his two best pitchers, Tony Cloninger and Ken Johnson, for much of the early going, Manager Hitchcock has the club playing at a much better pace than a year ago. With a record of 18-16, the Braves are two games above the .500 mark. A year ago they were two games under the break-even point.

Unpopular Walker on Way Out?

Harry Walker, the talkative Alabama managing the Pittsburgh Pirates, is as unpopular with his players as was Bobby Bragan with the Braves a year ago. Sources close to the Pirates say only a pennant can save Walker's job, and they add, the pennant will never be won with him as manager.

Admittedly, Walker is one of baseball's keenest students, especially in the art of hitting. His problem with the players, it seems, is that he never knows when to leave them alone. Harry is a stickler for perfection, he doesn't even like horseplay around the batting cage. He says it tends to break concentration at a time when the hitters should be practicing that, as well as their hitting.

One report circulating in the lobby of the hotel where the Pirates lived during their four games with the Braves had Walker enforcing a bed check on Vernon Law, a deacon in the Mormon Church and perhaps the most devout baseball player in the major leagues.

True or not, it makes the point of why his players do not like him.



Hank Aaron