

# Gil Feels Amazing Mets Have Room For Improvement

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP)—After the amazing success of the 1969 New York Mets, Gil Hodges is retiring as a baseball prophet. "I told the newspapermen we'd win 85 games," recalled Hodges. "Everybody knows we won 100. When you miss by 15 games it's time to quit."

Nobody was happier than Hodges to have his spring forecast fall short. At the time his prediction of 85 was a daring

step. Until last season no Met team had come close to playing .500 ball.

"I really felt we became a ball club when we went on that 11-game winning streak in May, actually May 28 to June 10. We started out five games under .500 and ended up six over and never dropped below again.

"During that streak the boys developed confidence in themselves and started to play together.

When a club catches fire like that and gets that little spark there is no way of telling how far they can go."

The Mets, of course, went all the way. Although they trailed the Chicago Cubs by 9½ games Aug. 13 they won going away by eight games. They polished off Atlanta in three straight to take the pennant and beat back Baltimore in a five-game World Series.

"You can sense a different attitude," said Hodges, "not that there wasn't a good attitude in camp here in 1968 and 1969. But now they have more confidence in themselves. They feel they are good."

Hodges realized he will face new challenges in repeating. Last year's dramatics leave little room for improving.

"Our chance is as good as anyone's," said Hodges. "I think we

should be contenders. Certainly we can win it all. It remains to be seen whether we will. Chicago, St. Louis and Pittsburgh are real contenders."

Hodges shrugs off any who talk of complacency or fat cat attitude among a group of kids who just have their first taste of big money and the accompanying fame.

"There is room for improvement and I think the boys know

it," he said. "Offense is where we can improve the most.

"It would be hard to see where Tom Seaver could be better after winning 25. But Jerry Koosman

can do better. Last spring he had a sore shoulder down here and didn't really get going until June but still won 17.

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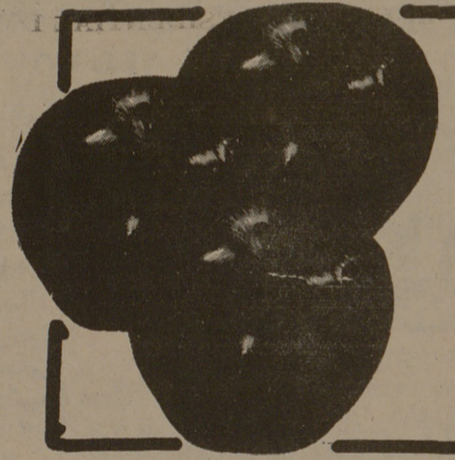
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