

The Bird's baseball career up in the air

United Press International
ORLANDO, Fla. — Nobody around the pool recognized him doing somersaults off the high board, which was all right with The Bird because with his feet flying around like that, he was never going to make it to the Olympics, anyway.

After a half-dozen dives or so, he towed himself off, bought himself a beer and a hamburger at the snack bar and settled his long, bony frame into a thickly padded lounge chair on the fringe of the hotel pool.

"I just like diving," offered Mark Fidrych, baseball's Man of the Year two years ago, when he won 19 games for Detroit and tickled everyone with his completely unique and irrepressible pitching style on the mound. "I'm not a great diver, I'm a poor diver, but at least I get it done."

For the last two years, the uninhibited, curly-haired righthander has been having trouble getting anything done, having spent most of the 1977 season on the disabled list after tearing up his left knee shagging fly balls in the outfield and missing practically all of last season when he developed tendonitis in his right shoulder.

Jayhawks rehire old coach

United Press International
LAWRENCE, Kan. — The University of Kansas began the reconstruction of its crumbling football program Tuesday by naming Don Fambrough as head coach in an obvious attempt to establish superiority once again in its own state.

Fambrough, 55, previously served as the head coach of the Jayhawks from 1971-74, during which time Kansas landed some of the top athletes within its own state boundaries — David Jaynes, Steve Towle, Laverne Smith, Nolan Cromwell and Terry Beeson.

But Fambrough resigned on the heels of a 4-7 season and was replaced in 1975 by former Alabama assistant Bud Moore. Moore posted 7-5 and 6-5 records in his first two years with Fambrough recruits but gradually let state recruiting collapse under him and the Jayhawks only managed to win four games during the final two years of his tenure.

Moore was fired this past season when his Jayhawks went 1-10 for their worst finish in 25 years. Intra-state rival Kansas State finished 4-7 and whipped Kansas in the season finale, 36-20.

"We will start in the state of Kansas," said Fambrough, who had served as a Jayhawk fund-raiser during his four-year coaching absence. "I believe in these kids. I believe in a David Jaynes, a Don Perkins, a Galen Fiss. I know we can win with these kids. That's where we'll start. But if there is a Delvin Williams in Texas, we might go visit him."

"If effort will get the job done, we're going to have a lot of fun around here in the years to come. We will have the type of football team the state of Kansas can be proud of."

Fambrough, ironically, was appointed to serve on the selection committee to find a new coach by Kansas Athletic Director Bob Marcum. The first choice of the committee apparently was North Carolina State head coach Bo Rein, but he was given a contract extension by the Atlantic Coast Conference school last week after visiting the Kansas campus.

"As I looked over the applicants from time to time, I felt the one man who met all the criteria was Don Fambrough," said Marcum.

"One morning about two weeks ago I was visiting with Don. I told him that in looking over all the applicants, I didn't feel we had anyone more qualified than Don Fambrough. I said, 'Coach, you should take the job because you are the most qualified and you can finish the job you began eight years ago.'"

"Out of the 20 players Kansas has in the National Football League and two it has in the Canadian Football League, Don Fambrough recruited them all. He took Kansas to the Liberty Bowl in 1973 and he recruited the players who took Kansas to the Sun Bowl in 1975."

Fambrough was given a four-year contract and he said he would begin assembling his coaching staff immediately. He said one member of his staff would be John Hadl, the former Kansas All-America who coached quarterbacks under Moore last season. Hadl had openly campaigned for the head coaching position.

"I thought it was exciting eight years ago when I got the job but it was nothing like this," said Fambrough. "I made some mistakes but I'm better qualified to be a head coach now than I was eight years ago. I've been like a fish out of water the last four years. I've tried to disguise it."

Fambrough coached the Jayhawks to records of 4-7, 4-7, 7-41 and 4-7 during his first four-year tenure.

was making his third start of the season after having won his first two games. His arm stiffened up on him and when it failed to come around, the Tigers sent him to their Lakeland farm club in mid-summer, hoping the warm Florida weather would help. That was in August, which is the last time The Bird threw a baseball for anyone.

He's attending these winter baseball meetings with the full blessing of the Tigers and at the invitation of the Major League Physi-

cians' Association, 20 of whose members are on hand and will try to do what they can to help him.

"He still has pains in his shoulder and everytime he throws, it hurts," explained Dr. James Parkes, the Association's incoming President for 1979 and the Mets' team physician.

"So far, the problem has not been pinned down, and we would like to help in any possible way we can to restore him to playing condition. We are going to talk to Mark today, all of us are, and try to see if we can't

shed some light on his problem."

What the baseball physicians are doing with Fidrych at their seminar at these meetings has never been done before. Not in a group like this, anyway.

The Bird is game. He'll try anything he thinks will help because at 24 he doesn't like to think his career is all finished.

Reclining on his lounge chair, Fidrych didn't seem to have a care in the world although he admitted he did.

"The thing I think about most is coming back and playing ball," he said. "Why not?" he shrugged. "I worked so hard to get there."

With his wild curly hair, his natural, almost child-like antics on the mound, and his habit of talking to the ball, Fidrych captured the fancy of baseball fans everywhere when he came up to the Tigers in 1976 and proceeded to beat the best clubs in the league and lead the league with his 2.34 earned run average.

Honored as baseball's Man of the Year during the winter of 1976, The Bird drew rollicking laughs from an audience in Los Angeles by shrugging off all the adulation he was getting from people, saying "they're even following me to the toilet."

Fidrych has learned a lot in the two years he has been with the Tigers. He has lost little of his basic boyishness but shows more poise than he did when he first arrived on the big league scene.

"I've learned how to focus on

problems and how to keep my mind intact," he said. "Somebody Rusty Staub has helped me with education-wise. He's a man who listens to and talk to his players and have to live your own life on my own ability."

The Bird says the Tigers contend this coming season likes their offense, their pitching staff, which is good 50 percent better than member of it.



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