



Getting back to the base-ics

Texas A&M's center fielder Mike Hurdle dives back to first base to foil a pick-off attempt by Houston first baseman Bobby Hollas. Hurdle and the Aggies got off to a good start in Southwest Conference play by sweeping the Cougars in the three-game series in Houston

last weekend. Coach Tom Chandler's crew defeated the Coogs 17-2, 8-0 and 8-5. The Aggies will travel to Coral Gables, Fla. over spring break to play in the Hurricane Invitational Tournament.

Battalion photo by David Boggan

Cedeno hungry for action

United Press International
COCOA BEACH, Fla. — Manager Bill Virdon, who at 47 probably can still do it better than most of them because he learned how before coming up, was putting some of his Houston players through a sliding drill and one by one, all of them hit the dirt.

All except Cesar Cedeno. He looked as if he had something on his mind, and he did.

Twice, he ran straight for the bag, and twice he went past it without sliding into it. On his third attempt, he finally hit the ground and went sailing into the bag with his left foot first — the one he tore up so badly eight months ago.

This was last Friday and it was the first time Cedeno had tried sliding into base since he ripped a ligament in his left knee so badly sliding into second base against the Cubs last June 16 that he had to undergo surgery the very next day.

"I thought about it a lot," Cedeno said, talking about the trauma of sliding for the first time after making his way back. "It stays in your mind. I knew how serious the injury was when I hurt my leg. The first thing I wondered was whether I would ever play again. It's a natural thing. You can't help thinking about it."

Cedeno's knee has a long lateral scar where he was cut. It swelled up on him a bit after he tried sliding the other day but he claims he's all right.

The 29-year-old Dominican-born center fielder started out last season as if he was going to do all those things people have been saying he

could for the past nine years. He batted .347 in the Astros' first 12 games. Having stole 61 bases the season before, he looked like he might steal 75 this time. When he got hurt, he already had 23.

Cedeno spent 10 days in the hospital after he was operated on and no sooner did he get out when he landed right back in again.

"I was on crutches and my knee was in a cast, and when I was walking to my seat, this little boy, about eight or nine years old, came running right into me. He broke my crutches and my cast. Laying there on the ground, I said to myself the little bugger didn't even bother to stop."

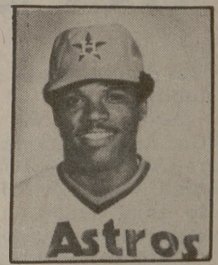
Another cast was placed around Cedeno's left leg and he was outfitted with a new set of crutches.

"That was the first of seven times the cast snapped," he says. "I'd kick in my sleep and all of a sudden it would come apart again."

Before the season ended, Cedeno wanted to try out his knee in a ballgame. He had regained some of the strength in it by using weights

but he was anxious to find out if it could stand up under actual game conditions.

Cedeno's knee passed the test when he beat out an infield hit on



Cesar Cedeno

Sept. 29. Two days later, he accepted for his seventh homer of the year in the season finale.

Before spring training got underway, Bill Virdon announced everyone would have to win a job with the Astros, and there would be no exceptions, including Cedeno. The Astros' five-time All-Star resented it and said so but that has all been straightened out now.

"Do you think you can make the club?" Virdon asked Cedeno the

first day he reported this year. "Yes, I think I can make the club," Cedeno replied.

"That's the way I want to think," said Virdon.

Both laughed. They both knew the whole thing was a joke.

Twice since he has come to the Astros in 1970, Cedeno has won the Gold Glove award. He has 320 stolen bases and won four Gold Gloves still he keeps hearing people say that with all his natural talent he should do better. He resents it.

"Why do I have to hear people say I should? Just because it doesn't mean it's so, they say I'm supposed to be that fine. I'd like to hit it's easier to say than to do. I've ever problem I ever get into to lack of concentration, that. I also know I am never with what I do. I get three want four. I'm just a hungry I've always been hungry."

Cesar Cedeno keeps talking that and he can play on Bill team anytime.

Ellis hopes this season he can just 'be Dock'

United Press International
POMPANO BEACH, Fla. — Dock Ellis isn't a drinker or a fighter, he's a lover, and that's what got him into all that trouble with his old boss, Billy Hunter.

What Dock Ellis loves most is his freedom, his inalienable right to do what he likes and go where he likes, and when Billy Hunter, who felt he had a few rights himself as manager of the Texas Rangers last year, told him he didn't want his players drinking in the bar of any hotel where the club was staying, that's when the Rangers' big right-hander rebelled.

Hunter, fired at the end of the season and replaced by Pat Corrales, wasn't doing anything so radical. Most managers tell their players if they must drink, they should do it in some other bar outside the hotel, the theory being they won't be so easily recognized as ballplayers that way and people will have less to gossip about.

Dock Ellis isn't what you would call a big drinker. But, when he does drink during the season, it will be in a hotel bar because he claims he'll get into less trouble there.

"You put your life at stake when you go outside the hotel bar to drink when you're an athlete," argues Ellis, who's never going to be arrested for understatement.

When Hunter told Ellis he couldn't drink in the hotel bar, Ellis came right back and told him maybe he could impose that rule on the other Ranger players; but not on him and he didn't care how much Hunter fined him.

"I told him I wasn't going to go outside to get drunk," says Ellis, whose troubles with Hunter mushroomed as the season progressed.

The relationship between Ellis and Hunter reached such a point Hunter told Ellis he needn't bother

making the final road trip.

While Ellis was gone, Hunter was let go by the Rangers, after which Ellis "sort of disappeared" for a month so he wouldn't have to answer any questions from the press.

Ellis had a rather undistinguished 9-7 record and 4.20 earned run average for the Rangers last year. He was 7-3 through June and 2-4 the rest of the way, pitching only four times after July 18 because of a groin injury. That represented a sharp comedown for someone who had a 19-9 log with the Pirates in 1971 and a 17-8 record with the Yanks in 1976.

This year, the Rangers figure to be "looser" under Corrales, according to Ellis. How he comes to that conclusion is a bit difficult to understand because Corrales looks as if he's going to be tougher than Hunter was.

As for Ellis personally, he thinks he can do better this year than he did last year when he feels he let the team down. How well he does this

time out will depend on how much he's allowed to be himself, Ellis says.

"If I can be Dock, then I'll be successful and the team will be successful."

So far, Corrales hasn't put any rein on Ellis. He has permitted him to be Dock. And just what is Dock?

"Dock is when he comes to the ballpark, he prepares himself for a day's work in his own way," explains Ellis. "In spring training, say, I may cut loose with a few screams here and there directed at certain individuals. That gets my adrenalin flowing."

"I'm not allowed in the trainer's room this year, so I can't go in there and shoot the bull for an hour or two anymore. That means I come to the ballpark a little later. Before we go out on the field, I might jab a few other guys. After that, we do a few laps and that's when the hard work begins for me. After the workout, I'm ready to go home. That's the Dock; that's the real Dock."

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