

Rose's place filled

United Press International
TAMPA, Fla. — Pete Rose didn't walk off and leave the Cincinnati Reds holding the bag. He stepped over instead to an eager, pleasant, polite young man in whom he felt he could put his confidence. So far, Ray Knight hasn't let him down.

For the past two years, Knight has been Rose's caddy with the Reds. He usually replaces him at third base for defensive purposes in the late innings if Cincinnati was ahead. All the time this was going on, Pete Rose did everything he possibly could to help Ray Knight. Rose would talk to him about pitchers, about importations, about the different plays that come up, about everything. When Rose decided to take the money and go with the Phillies, Knight automatically inherited the job. Knight's third base job and it's his now. It's essential unless he loses it to the best friend he has in the world, Harry Spilman, a former Red.

"I know it's my job to win," says Knight. "The opportunity is right here. It's just a matter of me proceeding."

Up to now, Knight has. He's hitting this spring and figures to be at the top of the Reds' lineup when the team opens the season at home with the Giants next Wednesday. If he does, you can also figure he'll give much of the credit to Pete Rose.

"Nobody has helped me more," says the husky, clean-cut looking 28-year-old Georgian. "More than anything else, he taught me to think positively. Pete is the most positive person I've ever been around."

Pete also taught me playing baseball should be fun and not a job. Knight goes on. "He really coached me playing. It's not a job with him, it's a joy. You'd be surprised how many guys consider it work."

Pete. He approaches it like a little boy and he has a lot of fun."

Ray Knight already has the reputation of being a defensive player, having hit only .200 for the Reds in 65 times up last season. He's sure he can do much better if he plays more.

"When you don't play regularly, you lose your timing," he says. "When you lose your timing, you can't get hits, and when you don't get hits, you lose your confidence. I know I'm a better hitter than I've been with the Reds. In the minors, I never had a problem making contact, never struck out much and I hit with some power, so why can't I do it in the major leagues?"

"I know I'm no Pete Rose and I know there's no way I can put the statistics on the board that he did, but I just hope I can play consistently and with the ability I know Ray Knight has."

Nobody is ever really going to compare Knight with Rose because they don't look anything like each other, their style of play is entirely different and so is their general life style. The only similarity between them is that both speak rapidly.

Rose, a native of Cincinnati, has big city ways. Knight, from Albany, Ga., is more smalltown. His biggest competition at third base is Harry Spilman, who is from Dawson, Ga., only 15 miles from where Knight lives. The two Georgians always wanted to be big league ballplayers and have been very close all their lives.

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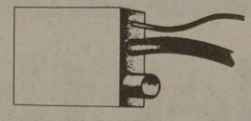
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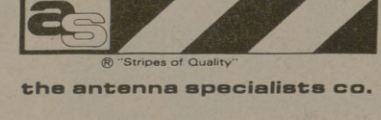


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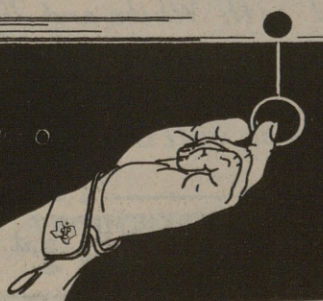
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