

The ageless, patient pro

Yaz gets better with age

United Press International
NEW YORK — Hawk Harrelson was talking about the natural process of aging, how hellish it is to grow old and how it eventually catches up with even the very best hitters, when he finally got around to 39-year-old Carl Yastrzemski. And that was where he stopped. "I've known the man since 1963, I see him every day and each day I find myself more astonished by his amazing grace than I was the day before," said the Red Sox' former outfielder-first baseman who now does their games on TV. "Remember the year he had in 1967? He was supposed to be at his peak then. And now look what he's doing 12 years later! He's a better hitter now than he ever was."

There's no shame in it. I saw it happen with great hitters like Mickey Mantle, Al Kaline, Harmon Killebrew, Frank Howard and Brooks Robinson, all of 'em. Not with Yaz, though. He's a much better fastball hitter today than he ever was. Almost every time he comes to bat for the Red Sox now, Yastrzemski either approaches a new record or breaks some old one. When he doubled down the right-field line his first time up in the second inning of Sunday's loss at the hands of the Yankees at Yankee Stadium, for example, it marked the 1,009th extra-base hit of his 19-year career, tying him with Ernie Banks of the Cubs for 13th place on the all-time list.

Yaz, hitting a cool .304, needs only 49 more hits to reach 3,000 and one more home run for 400. When he attains both those goals he will become the first American Leaguer ever to achieve this unique quinella. Only Willie Mays, Stan Musial and Hank Aaron have ever done it before.

When you talk to someone like Harrelson about Yastrzemski, he talks about his incredible grace. When you talk with Dwight Evans, its his tremendous competitiveness, and Mike Torrez dwells on his consistency and his discipline.

But the characteristic that impresses me most about Boston's elder statesman is his restraint. His patience and his professionalism, no matter how intense the pressure is around him.

"Experience probably has most to do with that," said Yaz. "Talking with Ted Williams down through the years also has helped me in that regard. He always told me to be patient, not to give in to the pitcher to take a walk rather than go after a pitch I really didn't want."

In Saturday's 3-2 win over the Yankees, it was Yastrzemski's ninth-inning homer off former teammate Luis Tiant that gave the Red Sox their winning margin. He hit a curveball for the game-winner.

It was almost the identical pitch Tiant got Yaz to tap back to him on the mound his previous time up in the seventh inning.

Yaz remembered the pitch Tiant got him out on. Tiant remembered

it, too, and after he ran the count to one-and-one on him in the ninth, he came in with it again.

Bye-bye. About 10 rows up in the lower right-field seats.

A patient Yastrzemski had been waiting for that same pitch again, only this time he didn't tap it back.

In all the years he has been with the Red Sox, Yaz has been in many different pressure situations and had hundreds of different experiences.

Of them all, though, he likes to call to mind one in particular in Detroit during his rookie season in 1961.

"I was only 19 years old, and taking Ted Williams' place in left field, there was tremendous pressure put on me by the news media," he thought back. "On this particular day, Frank Lary broke my bat on me twice and struck me out twice. I had gone for the collar, it was two months or so into the season and I was hitting .220 or something like that.

"Sitting in front of my locker, I was thinking maybe it was too tough, maybe I wouldn't make it in the big leagues. Mike Higgins, our manager then, spotted it. He must've known the way I felt, what I was thinking. He came over to me, put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Don't worry about it. You're my left fielder, this year, next year, the year after no matter what.'"



Softball mania is here

The hot summer weather and the upcoming Fourth of July celebrations mean one thing to many Bryan-College Station citizens — softball. Men and women alike flock to local softball fields each summer to play in city

leagues, tournaments or just to knock the ball around among friends. David Boggan, sports journalism major from Lockhart and first baseman for the A&M Printing team, was just another routine play at first base.

Oiler rookies head for camp

United Press International
SAN ANGELO — Coach Bum Phillips expected 54 rookies and free agents to complete physical exams and be fitted for uniforms today in preparation for the start of the Houston Oilers training camp.

One rookie Phillips was not sure would attend the opening practice Wednesday morning was second-round draft choice Mike Stensrud of Iowa State. He has not signed a contract and has failed to show up at the camp.

Stensrud's brother, Marvin, is in camp trying to make the Oilers a free agent. Maynard said Mike is still at home in Lake Mills, Wis.

Neither Oilers officials nor Stensrud's agent, Randy Henderson of Houston, would say what was going on in the negotiations apart from the fact that the Oilers do not want Stensrud a four-year contract.

The rookies and free agents were expected to arrive in Houston for game against Kansas City's players July 18, the same day veterans officially begin work.



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