

# the sports

## Astros: big West question

**United Press International**  
NEW YORK — With the All-Star game out of the way, everybody can get back to what they were doing before, and what they were doing before was asking the same question about baseball's most surprising ball club — the Houston Astros.

They're even asking Joe Altobelli, and he manages San Francisco, not Houston.

"Wherever I go people keep asking me, 'Are they that good?'" "They're leading the league, aren't they?" Altobelli says, answering his own question. "They played a great first half, didn't they? If they're not that good, than the rest of us must be terrible. All I keep hearing are these cliches. 'How can a club like them be leading?' They must be doing something right. And some of these same people who say that about them say this about us — 'how can they be that bad?'"

Big things were generally expected of the Giants this season. They had all the basic ingredients, good, solid pitching, strong enough hitting and enough speed not to clog up the basepaths. Giant owner Bob Lurie made a genuine pitch to get Rod Carew in the free agent market last November but even when Carew decided to go with the Angels, many considered the Giants strong enough to dominate their division. Oh, sure, the Dodgers and Reds might give them some trouble, but few ever expected the Astros to give them much. And then look what happened.

Not too long before the All-Star break, Altobelli had a meeting with his players in Montreal. Altobelli

told them he felt they could still finish first at the end of September if they were no more than seven or eight games behind by the All-Star game.

Well, they're 6½ in back of the Astros and without downgrading Houston, Altobelli feels the Giants still have a chance.

"We've made two bold moves that could help us by bringing up second baseman Joe Strain and catcher Dennis Littlejohn from Phoenix," he says. "Strain was doing okay for us before he hurt his shoulder the other day. It isn't anything serious, though. He isn't going to hit .300 every year like a Bill Madlock but he's a fine looking young player and everybody in our organization likes him."

"Littlejohn is only 24 and as soon as we started catching him in Montreal, we beat the Expos in all three games he caught. He has shown tremendous improvement over the past two years and what we're trying to find out is how good he can be."

The Giants' pitching wasn't anywhere near as good the first half as people figured it would be. At one point, John Montefusco, Ed Halicki and Randy Moffitt all were sidelined for one reason or another. Vida Blue won his first six games and then went into a slump that was aggravated by shoulder stiffness. The main reason the Giants dealt Madlock to the Pirates was because they were desperate for right-handed pitching.

What hurt the club as much or more was its general inconsistency although Bill North turned into a

strong leadoff hitter and 40-year-old Willie McCovey continued surprising those who said he was too old by accumulating 45 RBI and 14 home runs at intermission time.

The NL West is far from the strongest division in baseball. Still, the Giants will have to pass not one, but two clubs, if they are to finish on top. The Reds can win it as well as the Giants, in Altobelli's opinion, and unlike so many skeptics who believe the Astros may begin leaking over the next 2½ months, the Giants' field leader has deeper respect for them. He especially likes Houston's regular three outfielders, Terry Puhl, Jose Cruz and Jeff

Leonard. "The three of them do all the little things correctly," Altobelli says. "Maybe they're not real robust hitters, but they hit well, they field and they have excellent speed. Puhl is going to be one of the best players in the league in another two years. I like everything about him, his bat, his power, his speed and his aggressiveness."

The Astros continued the story Monday night as they defeated the St. Louis Cardinals, 3-2 while the Reds lost both ends of a doubleheader with the Chicago Cubs giving the Astros a five game lead in the West again.

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## Notes 'n stuff

Former Texas A&M pitcher Mark Thurmond has been awarded a \$1,500 post-graduate scholarship by the NCAA. He was presented the honor by the NCAA Post-graduate Scholarship Committee, which awards scholarships to deserving athletes in each division of the NCAA upon completion of their undergraduate work.

The selections are based on both the athlete's academic and athletic achievement during their collegiate career.

Thurmond, a left-hander from Houston Spring Branch, pitched four years for the Aggies and had a career won-loss record of 34-8. He holds or shares seven school records and twice was named to the NCAA All-District 6 team.

Thurmond twice was selected First Team Academic All-America and pitched on three international United States All-Star teams during his collegiate career.

Drafted in the fifth round by San Diego in the recent major league baseball draft, Thurmond is now pitching in Amarillo for the Padres AA farm club.

A&M half-miler Joel Vogt of Pasadena was one of the 43 Division I scholarship finalists. Vogt, who lettered four years at A&M, received special mention by the NCAA selection committee even though he did not make the scholarship list.

Both Thurmond and Vogt completed their athletic eligibility for the Aggies last spring.

### Water Polo

Coach Dennis Fosdick will be coaching the South team for the second year at the national sports festival in Colorado Springs, Colo. Fosdick, who has amassed a 171-30-1 record while coaching water polo at Texas A&M will be joined by six of his players, or former players, on the team.

Carl "Jim" Yates, a two-time college All-America selection and currently a swim coach at Baylor University while earning his Masters degree, will probably be the most experienced player on the team. "He is the outstanding driver in the Southwest," said Fosdick.

Bob Leland, a member of both of A&M's NCAA Championship teams is also a world class swimmer. Le-

land, from College Station, was singled out by Water Polo Scoreboard as one of the most impressive players at the 1978 NCAA Championships.

George Dallam and Vincent Tavarez, training in Long Beach this summer, will meet the team in Colorado Springs for training camp.

Dallam was the number one two meter man for Texas A&M in 1977 and '78. Tavarez, like Leland, has been on both of A&M's NCAA teams and has been starting goalie for three years.

Bob Probe and Mark Holley will also make the trip. Probe, red-shirted last fall as a freshman, is one of the best two meter men to come out of the Texas high school program. Holley was the only freshman moved up to varsity last fall. He started most of the 1978 season and because he is left-handed, was one of the key men on the Aggies' zone attack.

Shawn Rourke, coach of North Miami Water Polo Club, will be the team manager and will bring Rickey Solomon, John Testa, Jim O'Neill, Bob Arnold and Larry Krauser with him from Florida. Mike Karcis, from Houston-Clear Lake is the final team member.

The team arrived at the Air Force Academy Monday. Games will be played on the 29th, 30th and 31st.

### Intramurals

As the first summer session drew to a close it seemed the intramural tournaments would never end. However, teams played hard and long for the last days before finals to have the championships decided on time.

Listed are champions from last summer session: **Cross Country** — Men's, Aadrian Anderson; Women's, Carol Reynolds and Cathy O'Keefe; **Men's Team, Streakers** with Rusty Fusilier, David Fusilier and Jim Bolleter; **Co-Rec Team,** Gruene with Tinker Murray, Steve Zinkgraf, Carol Reynolds and Cathy O'Keefe.

**Horseshoe Doubles** — Class A Men's, Mike Hare and Dick Edwards; Class A Women's, Neysa Buckley and Lana Coble; Class A Co-Rec, John Marinos and Neysa Buckley; Class B Men's, Bryan Ator and David Hefflin, and Class B Co-Rec, John Hickox and Julie Martin.

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