

Big hitters head leaders list

United Press International
NEW YORK — Fred Lynn of the Boston Red Sox and Keith Hernandez of the St. Louis Cardinals are the new major-league batting champions.

Lynn, the Red Sox' center fielder, spent the final day of the season on the bench Sunday — as did runner-up George Brett — and won the American League batting crown with an unofficial .333 average. Hernandez, the Cardinals' slick-fielding first baseman, went 0-for-3 Sunday

but wrapped up the National League title with an unofficial .344 mark.

Hernandez had 210 hits and Lynn 177.

Dave Kingman of the Chicago Cubs won the major-league home run title with 48 while Milwaukee's Gorman Thomas led the AL with 45.

California's Don Baylor led the majors in RBI with 139 and Dave Winfield took the NL crown with 118. The last AL player to have more than 139 RBI was Harmon

Killebrew of Minnesota with 140.

Kansas City speedster Willie Wilson won the overall stolen base championship with 83 while Omar Moreno, center fielder for the NL East champion Pittsburgh Pirates, led his league with 77.

Baltimore's Mike Flanagan, who will pitch the second game of the Oriole-California playoff series, was the major league's biggest winner with 23. The Niekro brothers, Phil of Atlanta and Joe of Houston, the first brother combination ever to win

20 games in the same league during the same season, paced the NL with 21 apiece. Each won No. 21 on the final day of the season.

Houston's J.R. Richard was the overall leader in earned run average with a 2.71. Ron Guidry of the New York Yankees easily led the AL again with 2.78. The last time an AL pitcher won consecutive ERA titles was Hal Newhouser of Detroit in 1945 and 1946.

Richard was also the leader in strike-outs, with 313, while California's Nolan Ryan, who will pitch the opener against Baltimore Wednesday, led the AL with 223, despite missing a portion of the season with an injured elbow.

Bruce Sutter of the Cubs tied an NL record with 37 saves while Minnesota veteran Mike Marshall paced the AL with 32.

Astros come home to crowd pack up gear until next year

United Press International
HOUSTON — The Houston Astros returned home without a division title Monday, but a noisy crowd of boosters and the relaxing chore of packing away athletic gear helped soothe some of the disappointment of falling 1½ games short of their goal.

Manager Bill Virdon said his winter of handball, quail hunting and working around his Springfield, Mo., house would be a happier time because of his team's surprising season.

"You are never satisfied in baseball unless you win," he said, slowly opening fan mail stuffed far back in his desk during a tense September. "There's always room for improvement. But, yes, I'll get more satisfaction out of this season."

The Astros' '89-'73 record was their finest ever, and they did it with a .256 team batting average and a major league season low of 49 home runs. Houston was the first team in 30 years to hit more triples than home runs.

Virdon said, however, that the current Astros team could win a division title in 1980 with the same lineup.

"We'll have to win more games next year," he said. "It's hard to expect our pitchers to do as well. You can expect more run production from the people we've got."

Cesar Cedeno adjusted well to a move from centerfield to first base despite suffering a midseason illness. But he hit only .262 with six home runs and 54 RBI.

Rookie Jeff Leonard led Astros regulars with a .290 average.

Virdon said he thought the pennant-drive tension gripping Astros hitters for the first time was a factor in the poor run production and 38-42 record after July 4, a date Houston led second-place Cincinnati by 10 games.

Cincinnati ended up winning the division title and faces Pittsburgh in the National League playoffs.

Even as the players arrived sleepy-eyed at their lockers to pack clothes and gear the day after their final game, there was news of another award won by the Astros' pitching staff. J.R. Richard became the fourth member of the staff named as the National League pitcher-of-the-month for his 4-1 record, 1.24 ERA and 69 strike-outs in September.

Ken Forsch won it in April, Joe Niekro in May and Joaquin Andujar in June.

Rookie pitcher Randy Niemann paused as he packed his bags.

"I have mixed emotions about this season," he said. "It's nice to get home. You've gotta consider it a great year. But still, we wanted to

win."

Niekro became the club's 21-game winner Sunday. That's one more win than Larry Dierker had in 1969 and Richard in 1976.

"I'm disappointed, even more so," he said.

A group of about 500 Astros greeted the team at Intercontinental Airport early Monday after the finished its season Sunday in Angeles.

"I can't believe it," third baseman Enos Cabell said. "This club has more people who love it than any other team I've ever seen."

The season marked a tremendous improvement in three seasons since Virdon and president general manager Tal Smith took control of the team in late 1976. That season the Astros finished games behind the leader.

"That's a 42 game swing," said Virdon.

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GOOD YEAR

Playoff schedule

By United Press International
National League
Cincinnati vs. Pittsburgh
Best of Five (All Times EDT)
Oct. 2 — Pittsburgh at Cincinnati, 8:30 p.m.
Oct. 3 — Pittsburgh at Cincinnati, 3:15 p.m.
Oct. 5 — Cincinnati at Pittsburgh, 3:15 p.m.
x-Oct. 6 — Cincinnati at Pittsburgh, 8:30 p.m.
x-Oct. 7 — Cincinnati at Pittsburgh, 1:15 p.m.

American League
Baltimore vs. California
Best of Five (All Times EDT)
Oct. 3 — California at Baltimore, 8:30 p.m.
Oct. 4 — California at Baltimore, 3:15 p.m. or 8:30 p.m.
Oct. 5 — Baltimore at California, 8:30 p.m.
x-Oct. 6 — Baltimore at California, 3:15 p.m.
x-Oct. 7 — Baltimore at California, 8:30 p.m.
x-if necessary

know I've never been treated fairly by the press. I could sleep at night knowing that ever I said that night would be out right in the newspapers."

"And the fans have treated very well which I appreciate."

When asked whether he had appreciated by the front office, Oliver said:

"I'd like to think so. I'll say they haven't appreciated me there is something wrong with understanding of the game. They have said they don't want me."

"It would be tough to be a pinch hit for a .246 average son, his second with the team being acquired as a free agent in 1977."

Oliver likes Texas but may leave

United Press International
DALLAS — Al Oliver said Monday he would hate to leave Texas. And the management of the Texas Rangers have said they want him to stay.

So Oliver can be expected to return to the outfield at Arlington Stadium next season, right? Maybe, but maybe not.

"Right now I just can't say if I will or not," said Oliver, who hit .323 for the disappointing Rangers this sea-

son — fifth best average in the American League. "I don't know."

"But when I make the decision everyone willm about it, just like when I get a hit everybody hears it."

Oliverjnot been on the best of terms with Rangers' owner Brad Corbett and wants to renegotiate his contract with Texas. Corbett has said he will not do so and Oliver has hinted that he might asked to be traded if things cannot be worked out with the Rangers.

"I have an attorney representing me and we hope to work things out," said Oliver. "I'd say that there are problems which are common knowledge. But some things go far below the surface."

"But I've been happy here. I

The two worked out their differences at a meeting of the Southern Governors Association.

Clements bet a Longhorn that Texas will win the match. Texas is putting up a buffalo to the Sooners.

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Governors put bull on line

United Press International
NEW ORLEANS — Texas Gov. Bill Clements and Oklahoma Gov. George Nigh are betting more than a steak on the outcome of the annual Texas-Oklahoma football game to be played in Dallas Oct. 13.

The two worked out their differences at a meeting of the Southern Governors Association.

Clements bet a Longhorn that Texas will win the match. Texas is putting up a buffalo to the Sooners.



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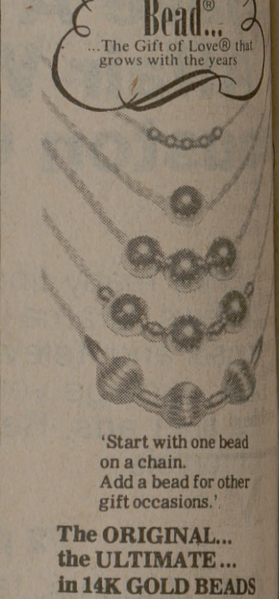
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