

Astros can hit, too

By RICHARD OLIVER
Staff Writer

When Houston Astro right fielder Terry Puhl sent the second pitch of the 1980 baseball season off the right field scoreboard for a home run, many of the 33,000 in attendance at the Astrodome breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

One of the big questions during the off-season was the power of the Astros. Many felt last year's success was a fluke, and a team with strictly pitching couldn't win a pennant. That is probably true, although Houston came within 1 1/2 games of giving it a try.

Puhl's shot signified a hope that this season the Astros' dormant bats would come alive again, and the 1 1/2-game deficit would reverse itself. While most skeptics agree the Dodgers and Reds have the best shots at Houston, there is no doubt the Astros are fielding a much stronger team to start this season.

Doug Rau, the star Dodger pitcher who is currently marooned on the disabled list after elbow surgery, said before the opening game April 10 he believes the Dodgers are more offensively potent, but the Astros are still the team to beat.

"When you look at our infield, player for player, we have more power," he said. "This team (the Dodgers) has the potential, and we have a lot to overcome. Beating these guys (Houston) is going to be the determining factor."

Craig Reynolds, the Astros' shortstop who was the only ballplayer Bill Virdon assured a starting position prior to spring training, agreed.

"The Dodgers have the power," he said. "When you look at it in perspective, though, we don't need the power, and they do."

There is a point there. The Dodgers have long made or broke their season on the potent bats of their offensive stalwarts: Cey, Monday, Garvey, Baker and Smith. They were brilliantly backed up on the mound by the likes of Rau, Don Sutton, Tommy John and Charlie Hough.

However, the tide has turned, and the Dodgers are a struggling team. Perhaps their most consistent pitcher, Tommy John, left via the free-agent draft two years ago. Sutton stumbled through a disappointing 1979 season, and Rau's surgery will sideline him until at least July.

Reggie Smith, the most consistent Dodger, was injured most of the 1979 season, and his return will help, but it may not carry the pitching slack. Off-season writers' predictions labeled L.A. as the team to beat out Houston this year, but thus far, the threat hasn't materialized. It's been L.A. a la 1979.

Rau, a graduate of Texas A&M University, said some off-season acquisitions may help.

"We're stronger than last year. We got Don 'Stan the Man Unusual'

dugout atmosphere. Last season saw a Cinderella Astro team climb out of the cellar to nip at Cincinnati's heels until the final week. This year, Houston is favored. The team is excited, and the confidence is there.

"We are the favorites, and everyone is ready to play ball," Reynolds explained. "With Nolie (Nolan Ryan) and Joe (Morgan) here, and our pitching, we know what we can do. This team is ready."

So far, "playing ball" has resulted in a 5-2 record, including three-of-four from L.A. and a two-game sweep of helpless Atlanta.

As of Thursday, the team batting average was a healthy .308, and the pitchers are allowing a miniscule 2.18 runs per game. Houston is scoring five.

L.A., however, is 3-5, five games out of first, and has for the most part been shut down until a 10-4 victory over San Diego Wednesday night, and Thursday's 6-4 decision over Nolan Ryan and Houston.

Random, occasional victories over the Reds and Astros just won't cut it for the Dodgers, and they know it.

In order for Los Angeles to make a run for the flag again, it will take a much better showing from the two free agent wonders — Goltz and Stanhouse. Neither has lived up to their billing, and they are desperately needed.

Ryan, the free agent drawing card, has an over-6.00 E.R.A., the worst on the Houston staff — but at least he can hit.

Analysis

Stanhouse from Baltimore, and Dave (Goltz) to boost our starting rotation. The hitters aren't going to lie down, either. We have everything going, it should be better."

So far, Stan the Man Unusual and Goltz have been plastered by opposing batters. Although seven games don't make a season, the Houston series may be an omen of things to come.

Goltz was hammered in Houston's 5-2 opening series victory, and in two appearances, Stanhouse couldn't stop anything. So much for Dodger bullpen power.

The opening game saw several Astro changes. For the most obvious change, Puhl and Jose Cruz both slammed home runs. Houston hit only 49 during the 1979 season.

Joe Morgan was back at second for the Astros after a seven-year hiatus in Cincinnati. He contributed with a base hit and some flawless fielding, not to mention enthusiasm. Prior to the game, he could be seen roving the Houston dugout backslapping and encouraging.

The most notable change is the



Aggie Lacrosse team captain Carl Hayes sizes up a Notre Dame opponent earlier this year. The Ags host a 3-game series this weekend.

Photo by Dave Einsler.

Lacrosse team has big weekend ahead

The Texas A&M lacrosse team will host a three-game series against teams from the University of Texas, SMU, and the University of Houston at the main drill field this weekend.

Saturday the Ags begin their busy weekend when they take on SMU at 1 p.m.

On Sunday, the Aggies begin a double-header at 2 p.m. when they meet the Cougars. After that game, the Ags will play arch-rival Texas at 6 p.m. The two teams last met in Austin, where the Ags won in triple overtime, 13-12.

Defenceman Curt Jones is in his

first semester with the Aggie lacrosse team, and though he's never played against Texas, has a pretty good feeling of what it will be like this weekend.

"Everyone is really getting psyched up for the Texas game," Jones, a junior management major said. "But we're not looking past SMU."

"They (Texas) are about the third-best team in the conference, behind us and Texas Tech. We should be able to beat them, but not by much because we're having a big party Saturday night."

Astros bow to Dodgers in opening road game

United Press International
LOS ANGELES — Ron Cey hit a two-run homer in the third inning and singled in a pair of tie-breaking runs in the eighth Thursday to lead the Los Angeles Dodgers to a 6-4 victory over the Houston Astros in front of an opening-day crowd of 45,476.

With the score tied 4-4 in the eighth, Steve Garvey singled and Dusty Baker doubled before Cey — who has seven hits in his last seven official at bats — singled down the leftfield line, scoring both runners. His home run in the third capped a four-run outburst that gave the Dodgers a 4-1 lead.

Jerry Reuss, 1-0, who took over for starter Don Sutton in the seventh inning, gained the victory, while Dave Smith, 1-2, who relieved Nolan Ryan in the seventh, took the loss.

The Astros opened the scoring when leadoff batter Terry Puhl hit Sutton's first pitch for a home run, his second of the year. In the Los Angeles third, Dave Lopes led off with a single and scored on Rudy Law's triple. The Astros added a run in the fourth when Luis Pujols singled home Jose Cruz, and another in the sixth on an RBI single by Enos Cabell.

The Astros stole seven bases to tie a club record, including three by Joe Morgan.

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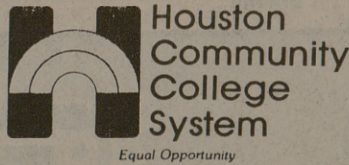
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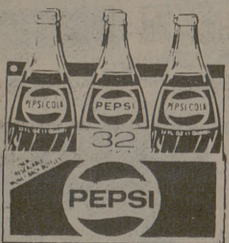


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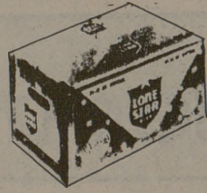


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