

Baseball fever

Major League teams set for spring training

The sports pages have come to life once more. After five months without earned run averages, runs batted in, and bases-loaded-with-two-out-in-the-bottom-of-the-ninth suspense, life has meaning again. Baseball season is about to begin. Day after day, stories of spring training give football-weary sports sections a breath of excitement.

In the world of professional baseball, teams are making their way to the sunny fields of Florida and California to begin the ritual of loosening arms and getting used to running again.

Spring training serves a number of purposes. For some teams, like the Houston Astros, the spring is a time to work out the kinks in what promises to be a championship team.

However, the Astros' chances to produce a World Series winner are running out. Everyone knows about the talent the Houston ballclub has, especially in the pitching department. Averages of hitters if the National League last year showed that



denise sechelski

Nolan Ryan, Joe Sambito, and Dave Smith were among the hardest pitchers to hit.

With a fast outfield, a strong infield, and reliable hitters, the Astros are always a threat to the other members of the National League.

So why don't they win the pennant? One of the first explanations is the sometimes great, but most of the time puzzling, strategy of Manager Bill Virdon.

Virdon may have been voted Manager of the Year in 1980, but his methods for changing pitchers in a game are enough to give a loyal fan ulcers by the time the playoffs roll around.

He'll leave in a game a starting pitcher

who is struggling with his fastball, wondering where his curve has gone, and finally realizing that his change-up has already gone back to the dugout.

Instead of putting the pitcher out of his misery, Virdon leaves him in the game until it is too late for the Astros to ever catch up. Maybe the spring season will give Virdon practice in recognizing a dying pitcher in time to save him and the game.

The Astros' relief pitching staff of Joe Sambito, Dave Smith, and Frank LaCorte is considered by most to be the best in the country.

Virdon also has a peculiar habit of using several different lineups throughout the season.

Using different players every day is fine if a team lacks a talented set of starters. But the Astros were not deficient in any position after they acquired Phil Garner at second base and used the since-departed Caesar Cedenio at first base.

Maybe spring training will give Virdon a chance to get rid of his itchy fingers when it comes to making out the lineup card.

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



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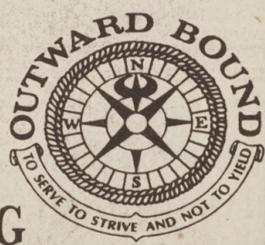
(continued from page 18)

- ✓ Todd Tschantz, K, Richardson Lake Highlands — 6-1, 212 (4.8)
- ✓ Gary Rogers, DE, Dallas Roosevelt, blue chip — 6-3, 220 (4.6)
- ✓ David Dowell, DE, Bryan — 6-4, 215 (4.9)
- ✓ Ben Zachry, DE, San Antonio Alamo — 6-3, 200 (4.7)

- ✓ Jimmy Lipscomb, CB, Navasota — 6-1, 185 (4.6)
- ✓ Domingo Bryant, S, Garrison — 6-3, 180 (4.6)
- ✓ Ira Valentine, S, Marshall — 6-foot, 180 (4.6)
- ✓ Jared Marks, S, Houston Dulles — 6-foot, 185 (4.7)
- Texas A&M has apparently lost Douglas, Ga., fullback George Smith to the University of Georgia.
- ✓ Chris Lammers, DT, San Antonio Churchill — 6-5, 225 (5.0)
- ✓ Terry Thompson, LB, Midland Lee — 6-3, 220 (4.8)
- ✓ Greg Shepperd, LB, Austin Anderson — 6-3, 195 (4.8)
- ✓ Paul Leventis, LB, Houston Stafford — 6-4, 215 (4.7)
- ✓ Chris Vaughn, CB, Dekalb — 5-11, 175 (4.5)

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