

Astros host Expos

United Press International

HOUSTON — Vice President George Bush will throw out the first ball at the Astrodome Tuesday night and the velocity of the pitch will probably just about match that of the man who will be making his third straight opening night appearance for the Houston Astros.

Knuckle ball-throwing Joe Niekro will open for Houston, which will entertain the Montreal Expos in their season opener.

"I don't care how many times I get the chance," said Niekro, who will turn 40 in November. "It's still a big honor. When you're representing a team and a city in the first game of a sea-

son, it's a great feeling."

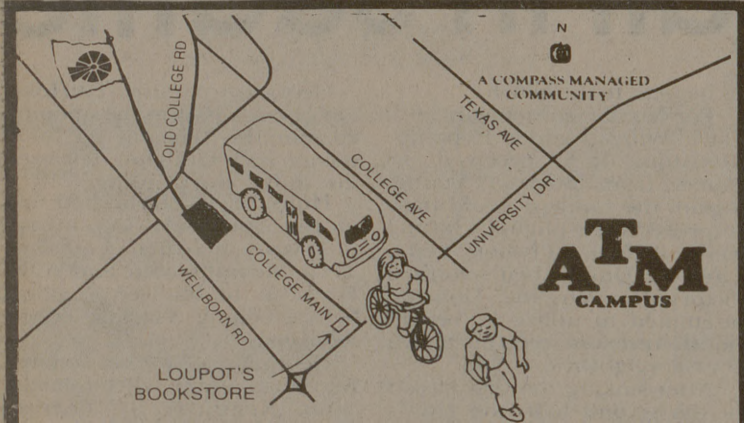
Houston enters the season with soaring expectations, considering the fact the Astros recovered from a horrendous start last year to finish just six games back of the division-winning Los Angeles Dodgers.

The mysterious Expos, meanwhile, will try to put a stop to critics who wondered last year how a team with so much talent could finish just two games above .500 — winding up third in the National League East.

Montreal made two of the more well-noted major league deals during the off-season, trading away career .300 hitter Al Oliver to San Francisco and picking up the ageless Pete Rose — who will continue his assault on the all-time hit record in Olympic Stadium.

In Houston, meanwhile, the Astros will look about the same as it did a year ago. They are simply hoping to avoid the early-season disaster that struck in 1983.

It took the Astros the better part of April to win a game last season and by the time they did they were effectively eliminated from the race.



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Rangers take on new look

United Press International

ARLINGTON — The Texas Rangers, whose 13-year history has been marked with frustration and something less than first-place finishes, open another season Tuesday night and if the win column does reflect all that much improvement at least their dium will.

Arlington Stadium began minor-league park and in ways still looks like one.

But for the 1984 campaign has been given a facelift that includes not only scoreboards and a reg screen, but twice as many concession stands, additional boxes for the area's various lionaires and a whole lot of white and blue paint that been used indiscriminately throughout the structure.

The Cleveland Indians provide the Rangers oppo in their season opener and a dozen names remain on roster from last year's squad.

Texas, meanwhile, phased out veteran Buckle at shortstop and replaced with young Curtis Wilk. traded away veteran catcher Jim Sundberg for Ned Yost moved Gary Ward into field after acquiring him from the Minnesota Twins.

It is not expected, however that the Rangers will be much better than the team finished third in the American League West last year in Chicago and Kansas City.

The Indians finished last in the East a year ago, eighth out of sixth place.

Charlie Hough (who was 13 last year) will start for Rangers, facing the Indians' Rick Sutcliffe (17-11).

Domed stadium awaits

Indy fans welcome Colts

United Press International

INDIANAPOLIS — About 25,000 fans flocked to the city's domed stadium Monday to give their new NFL franchise a warm welcome, but team owner Robert Irsay made it clear that wherever they play, they'll always be the Irsay Colts.

"It's not your ball team or our ball team: it's my family's ball team. I paid for it and worked for it," Irsay sternly told a reporter who asked him about the team's recent move from Baltimore to Indianapolis.

Irsay said he was shocked when, after six or seven weeks of negotiating with Baltimore and Maryland officials, he read in the newspaper last week that the Maryland Legislature had passed a bill seeking to take over the team.

That move — plus the threat of legal action by Baltimore and Maryland — decided Irsay on closing the deal with Indianapolis. Irsay's attorney, Michael Chernoff, signed the lease on Wednesday. That night, the Colts loaded up 15 moving vans with team equipment and headed for the Hoosier Dome.

The Indianapolis Capital Improvement Board met Saturday to approve the deal, making the Baltimore Colts the Indianapolis Colts.

Many who turned out for the ceremony Monday said they wanted to see what Irsay was like.

"I think Irsay is a shrewd businessman," said Charles Carson as he watched the cere-

mony on the 50-yard line. "I wanted to come down here and find out for myself what the man is like."

Irsay smiled nervously as he spoke to the crowd, telling the fans in the new 61,300 seat stadium that he didn't leave Baltimore because of the money involved.

"It was not a monetary decision," he said. "We did have better offers. But we're very happy to be here. We're very pleased with your domed stadium."

Irsay gave a sharper answer to reporters asking why he chose Indianapolis over Baltimore. "You people hounded my family for two years," he said. "I was not about to let them take it anymore."

Maryland officials reportedly offered Irsay a \$15 million loan for 10 years at only 6 1/2 percent interest, compared with Indianapolis' offer of a \$12.5 million loan at 8 percent interest for 10 years.

Irsay and city officials evaded giving further details on the Colts' move to Indianapolis, citing legal reasons.

"Lawyers for the Capital Improvement Board informed us we'll probably be sued today. Our lawyers have advised us we cannot talk to the media about the negotiations," said David Frick, Indianapolis' city negotiator in the deal.

City officials were quick to tell the fans that the Colts will bring millions of dollars to the city and Marion County each year.

PLAY BALL!

Major League baseball season is underway

United Press International

Throw out that "Winning Ugly" slogan. There was nothing ugly about the White Sox' opening day victory Monday.

The White Sox adopted the slogan "Winning Ugly" last year as they romped to the American League West championship because many of their victories weren't considered pretty by baseball purists.

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On Monday, however, they used all the classic components — solid pitching, good defense and timely hitting — to defeat the Baltimore Orioles, 5-2, in the American League opener.

LaMarr Hoyt, the 1983 AL Cy Young Award winner, scattered seven hits over 7 2-3 innings and Britt Burns, shifted to the bullpen this year because of the surplus of talented starters on the club, turned in a strong relief appearance to spark the triumph.

Harold Baines provided the offensive spark by knocking in three runs and the White Sox also played errorless ball in the field as they silenced a crowd of 51,333 at Baltimore's Memorial Stadium, including President Reagan.

The White Sox wasted no time in getting to loser Scott

McGregor as they pounded the left-hander for two first inning runs.

Dave Concepcion, who had only one last year, added a bases empty shot to power the Reds to an 8-1 opening day victory over the New York Mets.

Two other games were scheduled for Monday, but one of them — New York at Kansas City — was postponed by rain. It will be made up Tuesday afternoon.

Boston was at California in a night game.

In addition to Kansas Oakland, Texas and Milwaukee, the Rangers host to Cleveland and Minnesota meets Detroit.

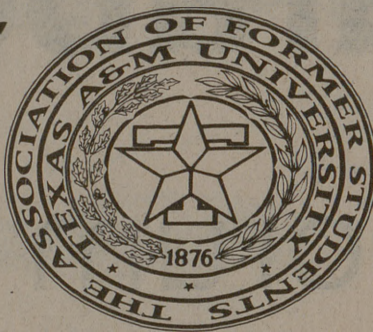
In the National League Cincinnati Reds' unique season plan for more home production provided immediate dividends.

The Reds, who had hit home runs last year, erred the fences at River Stadium by four feet in 1984 season. The move quickly Monday as Tom Milner, who had nine hits last season, hit a three homer and Dave Concepcion who had only one last added a bases empty shot to power the Reds to an 8-1 day victory over the New York Mets.

Both home runs would have gone out last season when fences were 12 feet high instead of the current eight feet.

There are four more openings scheduled in the National League today: St. Louis at Los Angeles and Chicago at San Francisco in afternoon games. In night action, Philadelphia at Atlanta and Montreal at Houston.

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