

Mets, Padres favorites in NL

Associated Press
NL East

Gary Carter and Steve Rogers spent more than 10 seasons together as batterymates on the Montreal Expos. Now that they will face each other from opposite sides of the field, they still agree on one thing — the New York Mets have an excellent chance of winning the National League East in 1985.

In 1984, the Cubs won the division by 6½ games over the Mets, who were followed by St. Louis, Philadelphia, Montreal and Pittsburgh.

This season, it will look more like this: New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Montreal. The Longshot: Philadelphia, those jackrabbits.

New York Mets

Carter gives the Mets not only that extra offense they needed, but he brings defense and a quality that will be hard to measure — his ability to handle New York's young pitching staff.

Led by right-hander Dwight Gooden, the 1984 NL Rookie of the Year, the Mets' starting pitching may be the only question mark on a club that should be solidly favored in the East.

Chicago Cubs

Age and the law of averages may catch up with the Cubs this season. Larry Bowa is 39, Ron Cey is 37, and Gary Matthews will turn 35 in July.

Rookie Shawon Dunston has been given the starting job at shortstop, despite front-office pressure to keep Bowa there.

Cey, Matthews, Leon Durham, Keith Moreland and Jody Davis give the Cubs the ability to score a lot of runs. The question, as it was a year ago, is how will the Cubs pitching staff perform?

There's no reason Cy Young winner Rick Sutcliffe, 16-1 last year with the Cubs, can't have another fine season, but he'll probably lose more than one game.

Astros' pennant chances riding on Thon's recovery

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Pittsburgh Pirates

The Pirates have improved, but probably not enough to win the division this year.

George Hendrick came over from St. Louis to play right field. Dale Berra went to the New York Yankees for Steve Kemp, who will play left field if he's healthy. That gives the Pirates potential to be a better scoring club than they were in '84, when they were 10th in the NL in run production.

Philadelphia Phillies

Rookie Manager John Felske has a big job in front of him, melding role players and getting the maximum out of the speediest club in the National League. He can rely on one thing, however — the play of 35-year-old Mike Schmidt, who has one fine season after another.

St. Louis Cardinals

The Cards may be coming apart at the seams, although Manager Whitey Herzog can put a decent starting nine on the field.

In the past two seasons, they have lost Keith Hernandez, George Hendrick and Bruce Sutter. St. Louis got Jack Clark from San Francisco to take Hendrick's spot, and that was a positive move. But there's no way they can replace Sutter's 45 saves.

Montreal Expos

The Expos have undergone a radical change, perhaps necessary for the club's future, but it's going to take several years to rebuild.

Carter is gone, and Montreal must replace the entire middle of its defense. Three of the replace-

ments — catcher Mike Fitzgerald, center fielder Herm Winstingham and shortstop Hubie Brooks — came from the Mets, and the Expos got the other one, second baseman Vance Law, from the Chicago White Sox.

NL West

When a division champion stands pat, the result usually is predictable. There's a new division champion next year.

San Diego General Manager Jack McKeon understands this axiom of baseball. So, if the Padres fall in 1985, it won't be because they stood pat.

In 1984, Atlanta and Houston tied for second behind the Padres, followed by Los Angeles, Cincinnati and San Francisco.

This year, they'll finish this way: San Diego, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Houston, Cincinnati and San Francisco. The Longshot: Houston, if Dickie Thon returns healthy after another.

San Diego Padres

Manager Dick Williams' short men are right-hander Rich Gosage and left-hander Craig Lefferts, who had 35 saves between them last year.

Williams' biggest concern is in the outfield, where both Kevin McReynolds and Carmelo Martinez are coming back from injury. His healthy outfielder, Tony Gwynn, led the NL last year with a .351 batting average.

Atlanta Braves

The Braves made two major additions to their roster — reliever Bruce Sutter and catcher Rick Cerone — and changed managers, Eddie Haas for Joe Torre.

Despite the acquisition of free-agent Sutter, who tied the major league record with 45 saves, At-

lanta has at least one major problem. Third baseman Bob Horner probably won't start the season after suffering another injury.

Los Angeles Dodgers

It sounds strange to say it, but the Dodgers made very few changes after a 79-83 campaign in '84. Their sole acquisition brought Al Oliver over from Philadelphia.

With the personnel they have — like pitchers Fernando Valenzuela and Orel Hershiser, and sluggers Pedro Guerrero and Mike Marshall — it's hard to believe the Dodgers can't finish at least .500.

Houston Astros

The Astros are the sleeper of the division. Plagued by poor starts the past two seasons, they have been unable to contend. Bob Lillis returns a team this year that made few changes.

The key to Houston's success is the comeback bid by shortstop Dickie Thon, sidelined for all but five games of the '84 season with vision problems after he was struck in the face with a pitch.

Cincinnati Reds

Buoyed by the enthusiasm of player-manager Pete Rose, the Reds could get off to a fast start this year, and that could save them from the cellar.

Late in the spring, the Reds still were trying to pick a catcher from among four so-so candidates. Cesar Cedeno could help if he can maintain some intensity over the long season, but much of the Reds' attack will be predicated upon the success of Gary Redus.

San Francisco Giants

New Manager Jim Davenport faces some rather grim prospects in his major league managerial debut. Jack Clark, who has led the Giants in RBI four times since 1978, was traded to St. Louis, leaving Jeff Leonard to shoulder the burden.

Ags, track world focus attention on Texas Relays

By CINDY GAY
Sports Writer

The eyes of track fans across the nation are focusing on the University of Texas this weekend.

The Texas Relays entice the fastest and the strongest from the running ranks of America's high schools, junior colleges, colleges and universities for four days of heats in the heat of Austin.

The Texas Relays are high on the priority list for the A&M track team, bowing only to the Southwest Conference and NCAA Championships in importance, said A&M Assistant Track Coach Ted Nelson.

While most athletes are delighted simply to qualify for the Texas Relays, the Aggies can boast that a couple of their runners were personally invited.

A&M's Rod Richardson will lean on the tape in the 100-meter invitational sprint and the 5,000-meter invitational run will be journeyed by Arturo Barrios.

"This meet should be the one to qualify," Barrios said about his chances for making the time needed to run at the 1985 NCAAs.

Barrios' best in the 5,000 is a two-week old clocking of 14 minutes, .03 seconds and he's looking for 13:50 this weekend.

However, Barrios believes his most assured success at the NCAA championships lies in the 10,000-meters rather than the 5,000 because the longer the race, the more the runner must be able to handle the humidity. Since both the Texas Relays and the NCAAs are taking place in Austin, Barrios said he owns a climatic advantage over athletes from the northern states.

In the relay events, the Aggies should also fare well.

Nelson said both the 400-meter relay team of Darrell Austin, Tony Jones, Tommy Alsbrooks and Richardson and the mile relay team of Tony Tolson, Kyle Harggett, Maurice Holt and Kendrick Wesley are expected to turn agile exchanges into pay dirt.

The Aggie sprint medley relay will be guided by Austin, Alsbrooks, Tolson and Wesley, while the 800-meter relay features Austin, Jones, Alsbrooks and Bill Shelton.

Single-handedly maneuvering through a medley of events, Kurt Thome had a strong hold of third place in the decathlon at the end of Wednesday's competition with 3,937 points, 20 points behind second place.

But the hurdle events still loom in the future for David Henzler in the 400-meters, Rickey Alexander and Harry Johnson in the 110-meters.

For this Aggie team, track events are only half the story.

"Most people pick their poison," Nelson said about teams that concentrate on either track or field events. "We've tried to keep ours at a balance."

Nelson said Ethan Glass and Ernie Mendez should have good sight of the highest bars in the high jump, while Chris Walker and Johnson are slotted for the long jump. Desmond Kidd and Mark Bruce will compete in the pole vault, and for Francisco Olivares, three isn't a crowd in the triple jump.

In weightier matters, Todd Howard and Dana Baptiste are throwing the discus, and Howard will round his endeavors out with the shot put competition.

Nelson said the track team's spring recruitment is maintaining a commitment toward a balanced program, but this year the sought-after tracksters have more renowned talents.

"We're recruiting some of the top high school athletes in the US," Nelson said. He added that not having atrack the last two years has hurt A&M's recruiting successes. The new track is currently under construction, west of Olsen Field.

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