

# Rangers young; Astros restless

Pitching staff, injuries cloud Houston's NL West future

HOUSTON (AP) — The haze was supposed to have been cleared by now.

Houston Astros Manager Hal Lanier had hoped by the end of spring training he'd have the lackluster 1985 Astros whipped into an aggressive, sparkling base-running machine.

He hoped he'd have a solid pitching staff with three veterans and two more young arms to grab the other two spots in the rotation.

He thought the Astros would be primed to improve their standing in the National League Western Division after last season's mediocre showing.

But the Astros will go into Tuesday night's season opener in the Astrodome against the San Francisco Giants with almost as many question marks as they started with in spring training.

Strikeout artist Nolan Ryan will be the opening night pitcher, followed in the rotation by Mike Scott and Bob Knepper, but there are no clear takers for the other two starting positions.

Lanier had hoped a 40-pound weight loss would transform Charlie Kerfeld into a fourth starter. But the pitching picture was not clear going into the weekend prior to the opener.

Kerfeld is now being considered

for the bullpen and Mike Madden, whom the Astros tried to trade in the off-season, and trade acquisition Jim Deshaies have moved to the forefront as possible starters.

"The thing is, I just want to pitch," Madden said as he battled for a spot on the team. "If it's here that's fine, if it's somewhere else, that's fine too."

Deshaies, who has had some impressive outings during the spring, was obtained from the New York

"I like to pitch every three days," Smith said. "Last year I had plenty of chances and I was lucky to get through when they needed me."

Injuries have forced the Astros to revamp their starting lineup. Left fielder Jose Cruz sidelined by a knee injury and right fielder Tom Puhl trying to get back into shape after a freak ankle sprain early in camp.

The Astros were among the league's least aggressive base runners last season and the injuries have hindered their attempt to change.

Mark Bailey will return to starting catching position with Greg Davis at first, 1985 most valuable player Bill Doran at second, Darryl Thon at shortstop and Phil Garner at third.

Kevin Bass is scheduled to start center field and Eric Bullock could be the opening day right fielder. Puhl and Billy Hatcher may start left field for Cruz.

Thon has had a full spring of regular work at shortstop and expects to fully recover from a career-threatening 1984 beaming incident.

Lanier has pushed forward with his plan despite the injury setbacks and his efforts have not gone unnoticed by the team.

"He relates to the players real well, but he wants you to work," Smith said.



Yankees as part of a deal for Joe Niekro.

Dave Smith returns as the ace of the Astros bullpen after posting a career high 27 saves last season and a 2.27 earned run average.

Smith underwent minor knee surgery in the off-season and hopes to resume his backup duties on a regular basis.

# Youth to play major role in Texas' turnaround effort

ARLINGTON (AP) — One year ago, the right fielder was slugging home runs for Oklahoma State, the center fielder had fond memories of playing on the 1984 U.S. Olympic team and the starting pitcher had yet to throw his first major league pitch.

But Tuesday night in Arlington Stadium, Pete Incaviglia, Oddibe McDowell and Jose Guzman will be in the starting lineup for the Texas Rangers when they open their American League season against the Toronto Blue Jays.

They are among the survivors of a spring training filled with tough decisions for Manager Bobby Valentine, who had to make a choice between experience and promising youth.

Youth won. Left fielder Gary Ward, 32, and second baseman Toby Harrah are the only plus 30-year-old players in the field and Larry Parrish, 32, will bat fourth as the designated hitter.

"I think this is my time," said Guzman, who is the Rangers' opening day pitcher because ace right-

hander Charlie Hough broke a finger on his pitching hand.

"I'm still young but that's the way you start. If I pitch as well as last year, I'll help this club."

Guzman was called up to the Rangers in September and lost his

The 6-foot-1, 220-pound Incaviglia made an early impression on the entire team when he clubbed a line drive that left a hole in the right-field fence.

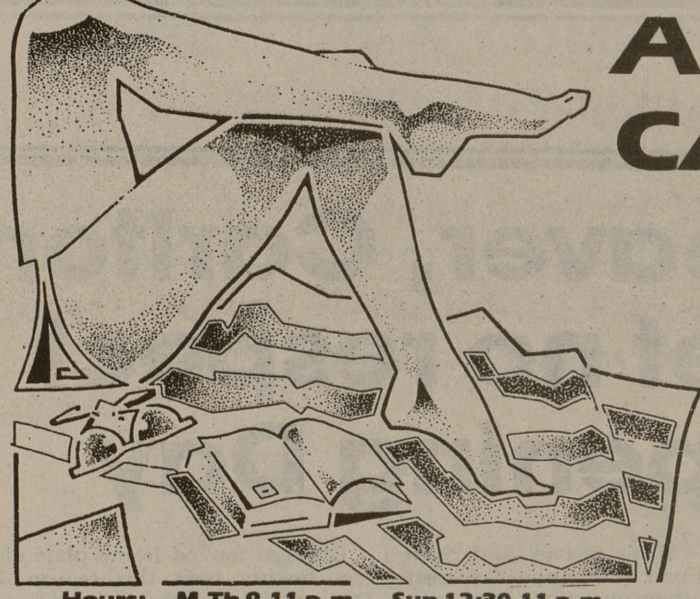
He set an NCAA record last season with 48 homers at Oklahoma State.

The Rangers hope Incaviglia will improve on the team's last-place finish in slugging percentage last year and their last-place finish in American League West with a .60 record.

McDowell, who hit .275 as a member of the U.S. Olympic team, played 31 games in the major leagues last season before making a super rookie impression with the Rangers. He hit .299 in 111 games and led all major league rookies with 18 homers and 25 stolen bases.

"I feel a lot of excitement and enthusiasm that I didn't feel last year," McDowell said. "I'm not getting caught up in any of the past failures. We'll just go do our best and the team will take care of itself."





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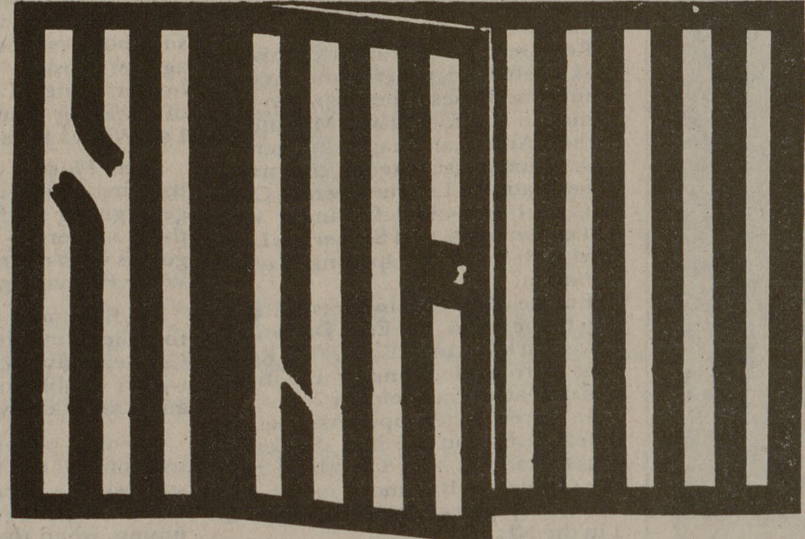
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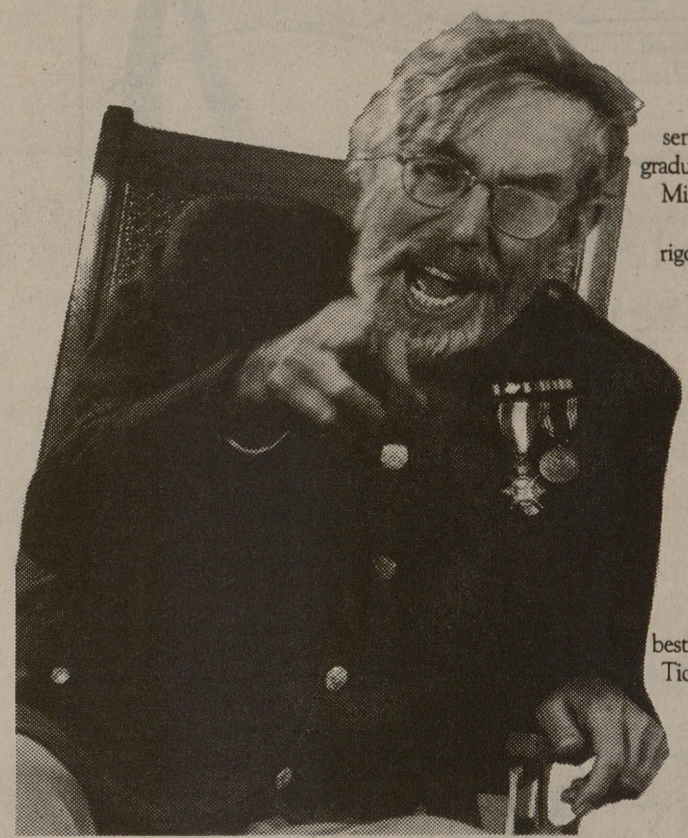
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| <p>Pizzas Behind</p> <p>6 Aston</p> <p>6 Puryear</p> <p>5 Law</p> <p>5 Davis-Gary</p> <p>5 Hart</p> <p>4 Hotard</p> <p>4 Dunn</p> <p>4 Crocker</p> <p>4 McInnis</p> <p>7 Moses</p> <p>7 Moore</p> <p>5 Walton</p> <p>5 Schuhmacher</p> | <p>6 Aston</p> <p>5 Law</p> <p>5 Davis-Gary</p> <p>4 Hotard</p> <p>4 Dunn</p> <p>4 Crocker</p> <p>4 McInnis</p> <p>7 Moore</p> <p>5 Walton</p> | <p>"The Final Four"</p> <p>April 21-27</p> <p>1st place-\$500<br/>2nd place-\$300<br/>3rd place-\$200</p> | <p>Pizzas Behind</p> <p>1 Briggs</p> <p>1 Spence</p> <p>7 Gainer</p> <p>7 Clements</p> <p>4 Haas</p> <p>7 Hobby</p> <p>7 Hughes</p> <p>7 Keathley</p> <p>9 Krueger</p> <p>7 Legett</p> <p>7 McFadden</p> <p>5 Moshier</p> <p>5 Neeley</p> <p>5 Underwood</p> |
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March 24-April 13      April 13-27

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