

Cubs' Dawson caps good year by capturing the NL MVP award

NEW YORK (AP) — Andre Dawson of the Chicago Cubs became the first member of a last-place team to be named Most Valuable Player, winning the National League award Wednesday.

Dawson, a free agent whom no club bid for last winter, led the majors with 137 runs batted in and tied for the home run lead with 49.

He beat St. Louis shortstop Ozzie Smith by a 269-193 margin in voting by the Baseball Writers Association of America.

"I tried to be realistic and not hold out too much hope," said Dawson, who admitted he thought the Cubs' poor finish could hurt his chances. "I'm thrilled despite a pretty dismal season by the ballclub."

Dawson, 33, was so intent on playing at Wrigley Field this year that he left the Montreal Expos and signed a blank contract with the Cubs during spring training.

Then-general manager Dallas Green filled in the dollar amount of \$500,000, making Dawson the second-lowest paid regular on the team.

"I wanted to convince the baseball world that I would indeed perform better under different circumstances — those circumstances being to get away from the AstroTurf and onto a natural playing field," Dawson said during a news conference at Wrigley Field.

Jack Clark, Smith's teammate on the National League East champion St. Louis team that finished 18½ games ahead of Chicago, was third with 186.

Montreal's Tim Wallach was fourth, and San Francisco's Will Clark was fifth.

Cy Young winner Steve Bedrosian of Philadelphia finished 16th.

Dawson and the two Clarks were the only players named on all 24 ballots.

Smith was named on 22. Two association members in each of the 12 NL cities were eligible to vote.

Dawson got 11 first-place votes, Smith had nine, Jack Clark three and Wallach one.

"I'm not disappointed," Smith said. "It's one of those things I didn't give much thought to. Hopefully, I'll wake up tomorrow." Smith batted a career-high .303 with 75 RBI and 43 stolen bases.

He committed 10 errors, tied for his fewest ever in a season.

As much as Dawson wanted to play in Chicago, the Cubs, burned by multimillion-dollar free agents contracts in the past, were reluctant to have him.

But Dawson, 33, prospered with his best year while the Cubs struggled along at 76-85.

Dawson batted .287 and played a strong right field while also surpassing his previous top power numbers of 32 home runs and 113 RBI, both in 1983 with Montreal.

He earned an additional \$150,000 for staying off the disabled list and an extra \$50,000 for making the All-Star team for the fourth time.

He did not have an incentive clause in his contract for winning the MVP.

Dawson, vowing last winter he would not return to the Expos for a 12th season, rejected salary arbitration and tested the free-agent market.

The Expos offered a two-year contract worth \$2 million, and no other team topped that figure.

From the start, Dawson wanted to play at Wrigley Field, where he had hit .346 in his career.

At that point, he had averaged one home run for every 16.8 at-bats during the day compared to one per each 37.1 at-bats at night.

Dawson joined Ernie Banks and Chuck Klein as the only players from losing teams to win the MVP award. Banks won it in 1958 and 1959 while playing shortstop for the Cubs, who finished fifth in the eight-team NL in both seasons.

Klein won it with Philadelphia in 1932.

Houston "Spiderman" safety rides omen to strong outing, starting job

HOUSTON (AP) — Had he not been one of the University of Houston's "Spidermen" defensive secondary, safety Randy Thornton likely would have dismissed the incident.

But when a spider crawled atop his helmet on the locker room floor prior to Saturday's 37-7 victory over Temple and stared up at him, Thornton was quick to see the symbolism.

Cougar defensive coach Pat Thomas nicknamed his charges "Spidermen" in honor of his cousin, Spider Lockhart, a former pro defensive back who died of cancer.

Thornton stared back at the spider and then put his helmet on and played one of his best games of the season, regaining his starting job and his hopes for a pro contract.

"I started to kill that spider, but he just kept looking at me," Thornton said. "Maybe he was telling me something."

Inspired by the spider, Thornton threw a web around Temple. He had eight tackles, knocked down a pass and returned an interception 19 yards for a touchdown.

Thornton was benched after the opening game of the season. He had seen only spot duty most of the season. It was not what Thornton had anticipated for his senior season.

"At the beginning of the year, my

dream was to go to a bowl, then go to some senior bowls," Thornton said. "Then in the middle of the season, we were losing and I wasn't playing."

"In the pros, if you get put on the bench, you still get paid and you still ride home in your Mercedes or Porsche. But in college, when a guy is benched, it messes with your head."

Thornton expected his senior year to be a showcase for the pros, the year he'd put it all together. Instead, after starting for three seasons, he found himself on the bench.

"Many nights I sat up wondering if I should go to truck-driving school or something," Thornton said. "I kept thinking I'm never going to get drafted now."

But Thornton earned his job back in the Cougars' 60-40 victory over Texas two weeks ago when in a substitute performance he had five tackles, returned an interception 17 yards for a touchdown, caused one fumble and recovered another.

"Everything happens for a reason," Thornton said. "I think it (getting benched) was good for me. Right now I'm so hungry to play, that I'm trying to show people that I wasn't one of those high school All-Americans who came out with a big name and couldn't do anything."

Although the Cougars are last in the Southwest Conference in total defense, they lead with league with 18 interceptions.

Teammate Johnny Jackson returned three interceptions for touchdowns against Texas, setting an NCAA record (several schools had held the record of two). Thornton's touchdown return gave the Cougars a team-record four scoring interception returns.

Despite a two-game winning streak, the Cougars will go into Saturday's game against Texas Tech with a 3-6 season record and 1-4 in the SWC.

"You look around and see all the talent on this team and you say 'why are we losing?'" Thornton said. "It's like a mystery story. There's no way we should have lost to some of the teams because of our talent."

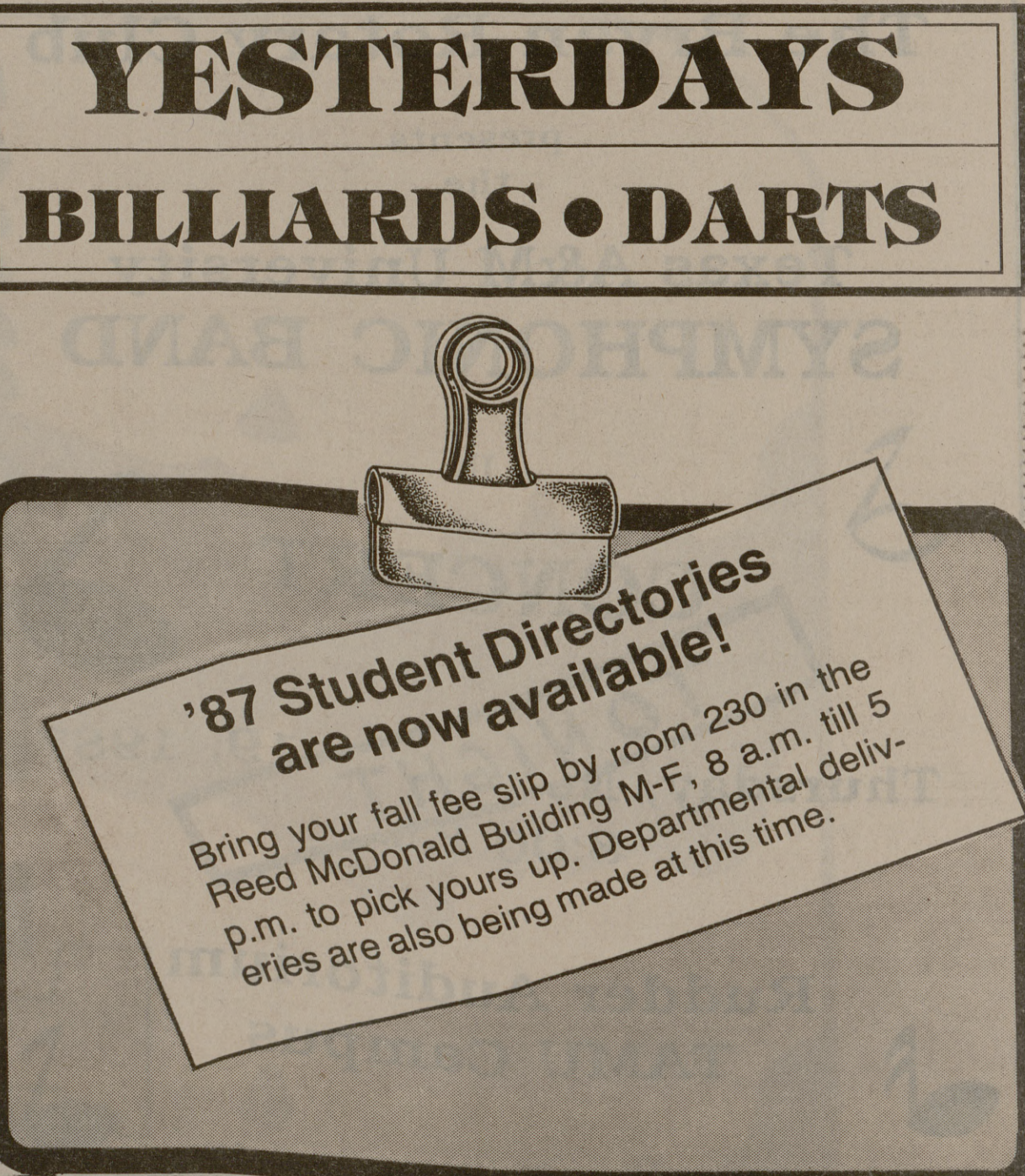
The Red Raiders, 6-4, are trying to wrap up another bowl invitation with a victory over the Cougars.

But Texas Tech hasn't beaten the Cougars in Houston since 1953, and Thornton wants to continue the winning string.

"I feel like if Houston can't go to a bowl game, then Texas Tech can't either," Thornton said. "I'm not going to be the only one Christmas and New Year's watching the bowl games at home."

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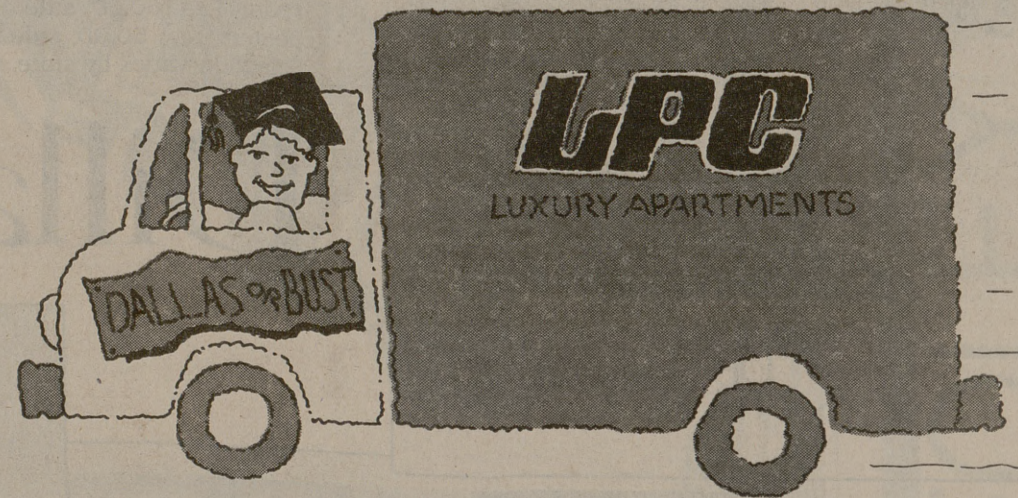
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