

# 40-year-olds still succeed on mound

From the Associated Press  
Nolan Ryan's fast ball still amazes rookies when it breaks the 95-mile-per-hour barrier, and Charlie Hough's knuckleball still makes those tantalizing dips and turns.

While most of their 40-year-old contemporaries have retired, Houston's Ryan and Texas' Hough are still pitching after all these years.

Each pitcher reached the 40-year-old plateau with drastically different methods.

Ryan does the job with fast ball heat, Hough with knuckleball fluff.

Ryan, 41, works out continuously in the off season and attributes his careful health program with extending his career.

He is a non-smoker who does a full-days' work during the off season on one of his three ranches.

Hough, who turned 40 on Jan. 5, eschews the exhaustive weight training program established by pitching coach Tom House in favor of his own methods.

House decided not to mess with

success, no matter how unorthodox it appeared.

Hough works hard at his own program in spring training, his sessions on the stationary bike interspersed by cigarette breaks.

"I never thought I'd be pitching in the major leagues at this age because most fastball pitchers don't last this long," said Ryan, the major league's all-time strikeout leader.

Ryan had one of the most memorable and forgettable seasons of his career, all rolled into 1987.

Ryan led the major leagues with 270 strikeouts and tied for the major league lead with a 2.76 earned run average.

Yet he became the first player in history not to win the Cy Young award after leading the league in both categories.

Ryan finished fifth in the Cy Young voting because of a 8-16 record, attributed to a season-long lack of run support.

"I've seen pitchers throw well and go through a month of not getting

the support," Ryan said. "But it lasted all season with me."

Hough led the Rangers' otherwise youthful staff in victories for the sixth straight year. He led the major leagues with 40 starts and 285 1/3 innings pitched.

At 39 years, nine months, he became the oldest pitcher to lead the American League in both categories.

"I've incorporated some of what Tom does into my routine," Hough said. "But the main thing for me is to get enough innings to pitch. A knuckleball pitcher has to throw it a lot to get ready."

While Ryan is part of a veteran pitching staff with the Astros, Hough is the elder moundsman of the Rangers.

His 18-13 record last season and his 223 strikeouts, fourth best total in the league, gives more weight to his opinions and he tries to lend a voice of experience to the younger staff.

"I try to be kind of a second to what management says," Hough

said. "Sometimes you'll have a manager tell you something that doesn't sound just right."

"It helps to have a veteran say, 'Yeah, I've seen that work before, you should apply that.'"

Although knuckleball pitchers have more longevity than fast ball pitchers, Hough realizes he's pitching on borrowed time.

"Yeah, you wonder when it's going to end," Hough said. "You get all kinds of aches and pains in spring training."

"One day your legs hurt, another day it's your shoulder. You never know which one will get you."

For all his experience, Hough ran afoul with the new balk rule early in spring training, committing nine balks in four innings.

"It's not going to bother me as long as it's enforced equally," Hough said. "You could find guys getting balks called with one (umpiring) crew and not with another. I don't want to get caught in that kind of disadvantage."

# Collins rejoins Reds after lucky accident

PLANT CITY, Fla. (AP) — A ticket to a Cincinnati Reds' game has turned into a ticket back into the big leagues for outfielder Dave Collins.

He was out of baseball early last summer when he decided to make the one-hour drive from his Springboro, Ohio, home to watch a Reds' game at Riverfront Stadium.

He saw equipment manager Bernie Stowe, spent some time reminiscing, then went down to the Reds' clubhouse to visit.

"I think that was the start of it all," he said.

When Reds officials learned that Collins was out of baseball, they started negotiations toward bringing him back to Cincinnati, where he played from 1978-81.

"One thing led to another," he said.

The result is a reunion that has pleased both parties.

Collins, 35, played for the Reds' Nashville farm club from June 19 to July 3, regaining his batting stroke. He became the Reds' busiest pinch hitter the last half of the season, and hit .294 overall in 57 games.

Collins got a reprieve from the early retirement he feared was at hand when Montreal cut him just

before the start of the regular season.

"I didn't think I'd get on with another ballclub," he said. "I figured that would probably be it."

Had he not gone to the Reds' game last summer, he'd probably be concentrating solely on coaching Springboro High School's basketball team.

The Reds aren't about to let him concentrate year-round on high school coaching yet. They like Collins' varied assets: he has experience and speed, he can switch-hit and pinch-hit, and he can play first base or any outfield position.

Collins isn't shy about trying to help younger players by giving advice.

"Any time you're on a team of younger players and you've got experience, you can help the younger players in relating to them the experience you've had," he said. "If something should be said, you should say it."

Collins is one of six outfielders remaining on the Reds' roster, virtually assuring him of a spot on the team. He and Eddie Milner will back up regular left fielder Kal Daniels, center fielder Eric Davis, and platoon right fielders Paul O'Neill and Tracy Jones.

# Old-Timer Yount still crazy about baseball

CHANDLER, Ariz. (AP) — Teammates still call Robin Yount "The Kid" and at age 32 with his 15th major league season several days away he still approaches the game with a boyish enthusiasm.

"It's as fun as the team is successful for me nowadays," says the Milwaukee Brewers' center fielder, who became a major league shorstop at age 18 in 1974.

"I'm in it basically for the competition. It's really the only reason I do play, for the competition."

Yount, who is in the second year of a three-year contract that pays him more than \$1 million a season, has played more major league seasons than any other Brewer.

Shoulder surgery in 1984 and 1985 forced him to move from the infield to the outfield because he could no longer make the long throw from the hole.

But in 1987 Yount hit .312 with 21 homers, 103 runs batted in and 198 hits in his best season since he won the American League MVP award in 1982.

"I still feel like I swing the bat as well. Actually a lot of times, 32 is your prime," Yount said.

"Sometimes you don't feel as young. Your body doesn't always work as well as you'd like it do but

most the times it feels pretty good," Yount said.

The outfield presented a new baseball challenge for Yount, and it's one he's conquered after years as one of the game's top-fielding shortstops.

"I played the infield for 20 years, and I've only been out there for three years," said Yount, who made only six errors in center the last two seasons.

"The more you play the more comfortable you get. I feel comfortable out there, but it doesn't mean you don't still have things to learn. Hopefully the more I play the better I get."

Yount's most memorable catch in 1987 came last April when on the dead run he made a fully extended, diving grab of a line drive for the final out of Juan Nieves' no-hitter against the Baltimore Orioles.

Yount already has 2,217 major league hits, but he says statistics have never been as important to him as playing on a daily basis.

"I've been fortunate. I've had injuries but not the type that have kept me out of the lineup. I've been fortunate to stay healthy," he said.

"If I lead, it's by example. I don't go around telling guys what they should do or what they shouldn't do. I just try to play as often as I can and as hard as I can."

# New faces dot Oklahoma spring workouts

NORMAN, Okla. (AP) — For the first time in a long while, Keith Jackson's name is missing from the Oklahoma football depth chart. So is Darrell Reed's, Mark Hutson's, Dante Jones' and Lydell Carr's.

Those players helped put together one of the most successful stretches in Oklahoma history. The Sooners have gone 11-1 each of the past three years and have won one national championship.

Five All-Americans were on last year's club; all five are gone now. Oklahoma must replace six starters from one of the nation's most potent offenses and seven defensive regulars from a unit that led the country the past three years.

"For the last few years, you could post the depth chart on the first day and the names at the top almost never changed," assistant coach Merv Johnson said. "This spring there's competition for positions that'll allow the depth chart to change from day to day."

"It's going to be quite a spirited, enthusiastic spring. There are a lot of young players who haven't played

who really, sincerely think they can start."

There appear to be two major tasks for the offense — rebuild the line that lost three starters and work on a controlled passing game.

That's right, a passing game.

Oklahoma has thrown the ball more in the past few seasons than it ever had before, but the Sooners' inability to effectively mix the pass and run was spotlighted in their national championship loss to Miami on New Year's Night.

"We might not be quite as versatile on offense as far as running the power game and the option game," offensive coordinator Jim Donnan said. "We're going to have to throw short passes once in a while rather than trying to grind it out all the time."

"Our quarterbacks have the ability to throw the ball, and we've got some excellent split receivers. . . . All of our halfbacks are pretty versatile."

One quarterback who won't see playing time this spring is Jamelle Holieway, who is recovering from a

knee injury suffered against Oklahoma State last season. Holieway is expected to be ready by fall, and in the meantime will be replaced by Charles Thompson.

As a redshirt freshman, Thompson started the last three games of the last season and played impressively. Being the main man in the spring is nothing new — last year he did it after Holieway broke a thumb.

The backfield has lost Patrick Collins and the bullish Carr, but players like Anthony Stafford, Damon Stell, Eric Mitchell, Rotnei Anderson and Leon Perry — plus a host of redshirted freshmen — make that a solid part of the offense.

The front line has All-Big Eight guard Anthony Phillips, a three-year starter, and center Bob Latham returning. New names include tackles Mark VanKeirsbilck and Gary Bennett, guards Terron Manning and Larry Medice, and tight ends Duncan Parham and Billy Dykes.

One of the biggest holes was left by Jackson, a consensus All-America

who had a knack for big plays and also dominated his opponents as a blocker.

"He was a great blocker," said Johnson. "I've heard and read where some of the pros question that. But once they come in and study film, they change their talk."

"We're going to be looking for Keith Jackson for a long time. I expect."

The defense, long dominated by experienced players, is littered with youngsters. Tackle Curtice Williams, linebackers Richard Dillon and Kert Kaspar, and defensive backs Lonnie Finch and Scott Carl are the only seniors with their names at the top of the depth chart.

"I think it's critical for those people to assume the leadership position and raise their level of play," defensive coordinator Gary Gibbs said.

"This is similar to the '84 spring — a lot of new faces, a lot of uncertainties, a lot of unknowns. It's a challenge for us as coaches, but it's also a challenge to the players."

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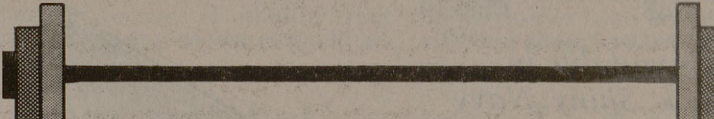
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