

It's 'PLAY BALL!' again for majors



Reds rev machine for third straight title

Baseball's 1977 season opens today with the Cincinnati Reds raising their second straight world championship pennant...

have gone to Don Gullett, longtime ace of the pitching staff. But Gullett is gone. He became a free agent last winter and signed with the New York Yankees.

The Reds will pitch veteran Woodie Fryman, one of the few bright spots of an otherwise dismal spring training...

So, it will be Fryman, who came to Cincinnati in the trade that sent slugger Tony Perez to Montreal. The veteran left-hander was the most effective pitcher on Manager Sparky Anderson's staff during spring training.

The American League season gets under way a few hours later with a night game in Seattle. The expansion Mariners will face the California Angels...

Replacing first baseman Perez in the Reds' batting arsenal is Dan Driessen, who also had problems this spring because of a leg injury.

Seattle's first-game pitcher will be 38-year-old Diego Segui, and the veteran right-hander already has been nicknamed "The Ancient Mariner."

The spotty pitching and Driessen's leg are minor Reds' headaches compared to the contract fight the club is waging with third baseman Pete Rose.

Those two games are today's only action. Tomorrow, eight openers are scheduled with St. Louis at Pittsburgh, the New York Mets at the Chicago Cubs, and San Francisco at Los Angeles in the National League...

All of Cincinnati's problems are good news to the Padres, who think they can challenge the Reds for the NL West championship. San Diego spent plenty in the free agent market...

Atlanta plays at Houston Friday night and Montreal is at Philadelphia and Minnesota at Oakland on Saturday, completing the schedule of openers.

The Padres will open with their ace, Jones, who is trying to come back from shoulder surgery following his 22-14 record last season.

The Reds' opening day pitching assignment ordinarily would

Commissioner Bowie Kuhn will be in Seattle to help the fans welcome the return of baseball to the state of Washington. The old Seattle Pilots lasted only one year before fleeing to Milwaukee and lengthy litigation followed with the birth of the Mariners terminating the suit.

For Segui, the opening night assignment for Seattle will be an encore. He was one of few bright performers with the old Pilots, compiling a 12-6 record with them and being voted the team's most valuable player in their only year of existence.

He will face a vastly strengthened Angel line-up, thanks to free agent pickups. California added outfielder Joe Rudi, infielder Bobby Grich and first baseman-designated hitter Don Baylor over the winter and the Angels think those three plus a pitching staff constructed around Tanana and Nolan Ryan, will help them make a run at the American League West title won last year by the Kansas City Royals.

Immediately after the Angels-Mariner game, Commissioner Kuhn will fly to Toronto to see the American League's other expansion club, the Blue Jays, open their first season tomorrow. The Seattle and Toronto games will be part of a busy schedule for Kuhn, who also will be at three other home openers and nine games in seven different cities during the first 10 days of the season.

Kingdome with problem

SEATTLE (AP) — The lighting bank suspended 133 feet above the floor. Balls hit below the lights were not a problem, but those that went above were.

"There's no more saying, 'I got it!'" said Mariners first baseman Joe Lis during an afternoon workout before 2,500 spectators.

"When somebody pops one up, it's gonna be: 'I think I got it!'"

Growth, money may be ruining major leagues

Professional baseball is becoming cancerous. Growth is good to an extent, but when that growth gets out of hand, it can be disastrous.

The major leagues will consist of 26 teams with the addition this year of the Toronto Blue Jays and the Seattle Mariners. Time will tell if two more teams sit well with the fans, but the real problem may come if the National League decides to expand also.

There has been talk recently of making baseball one three-division league to keep the balance, but if that doesn't turn out, then we very well might see Washington and New Orleans join the National League.



George Weigel

American League owners like Bill Veeck and Charlie Finley complain about the conservative National League owners who are trying to keep baseball as it is. Short pants and orange baseballs aside, change is necessary but not at the expense of alienating fans.

And this is exactly what I think Seattle and Toronto are going to do to American League baseball fans this season.

For one thing, fans are going to see more marginal players perform while seeing less of superstars on present teams. For example, Orioles fans will not see Thurman Munson, Catfish Hunter, and the rest of the Yankees nine times at Memorial Stadium, but instead will have Toronto and Seattle in to replace a couple of those more "attractive" Yankee games.

Secondly, all fans will now have two more teams that they know little or nothing about. This takes a lot of interest out of the sport as fans start to lose touch with more and more of the league as a whole.

Not long ago, baseball was fun because it was possible to know what every team was doing. It gave Joe Fan a sense of satisfaction knowing the White Sox' starting rotation or the Braves' cleanup hitter.

That feeling is gone unless he memorizes the Sporting News.

But even worse is how expansion can make fans turn their backs on other teams as well. I know I can't possibly keep up with all 26 teams, so I wonder, "Why even try to keep up with the 20 teams I used to..."

What I end up doing is following three or four favorite teams closely and the rest superficially.

Even if the ambition is there, the information often isn't because newspapers can't give a lot of space to each team anymore. With 16 or even 20 teams it was possible, but with 26, sports editors have to start cutting and cutting until nothing but scores are sometimes left.

On top of this there is the dynasty issue that could threaten to limit competition. With the free agent ruling, players can now practically choose which team they want to play with — which is usually the team that offers the most money.

And the teams that offer the most money are usually the teams in the big cities that have more prospective fans. As expansion continues, it is the smaller cities that are getting teams, obviously because the big cities already have teams.

Logic may suggest that these big city teams could buy up the top players, especially the ones playing in smaller cities, and create monopolies on the pennant.

The Yankees may be doing just that right now. Hopefully, baseball executives will be able to do something about this and expansion before it's too late — if it's not too late already.

But that's going to be hard to do with guys like George Steinbrenner around. As long as ego, personal interests, and money come before baseball and its fans, no cure is in sight.

Yeah, there's no doubt now that money is the name of the game and that's too bad. The ballpark used to be one place to go to get away from problems and money worries.

Those days are gone now, replaced by giant animated scoreboards, high ticket prices, and maybe even instant replay screens in the future.

I just hope Seattle and Toronto fans enjoy their new teams, because I sure won't.

And I hope the Gene Autrys and the George Steinbrenners and the Charlie Finleys — or the Catfish Hunters and the Reggie Jacksons, for that matter — all keep making lots of money.

Baseball could be at a crossroad now, as Joe Fan is getting left further and further behind at each turn.

If he gets far enough behind, he may just stop chasing altogether and put the whole gang out of business. And I'm not so sure that wouldn't be a bad idea after seeing what they've done to the game I grew up with.

Opening day means thrills

Thanks for the memories

"Opening Day." To the baseball fan, there is no other two-word phrase, save perhaps "World Series," as exciting, Naw, on second thought, "Opening Day" is more exciting!

"Opening Day" conjures up memories for anyone who has ever witnessed one. Remember your first? I do mine. Yep, the Giants and the Padres at Candlestick, San Francisco.

It was a Thursday. My parents, thank God, knowing that attending this special game was a life-and-death matter for me, wrote a note excusing me from my afternoon high school classes.

A dentist appointment, you know. What a game! What a day! Rushing home afterwards in my eagerness to tell my parents of the afternoon's exciting events, I sustained a gash above my right eye. (I still don't know when they lowered that branch — but that's another story.)

Anyway... Undaunted, yet suffering from unbearable pain, I picked myself up off the ground and managed to walk the remaining 50 feet to our house.

Oozing blood from my forehead, I staggered through the door and said "hi" to the folks. Horrified at the sight of their eldest dripping blood on the new living-room carpet, they exclaimed, "What happened?"

"Well," I began, "McCovey lined a two-out single to right in the ninth to win it, Marichal went a strong seven, and



Chuck Buchanan

Lanier made a play you wouldn't believe!"

Ah, yes, opening day memories. And speaking of memories, just think of the remembrances the good folks of Toronto will cherish for the years to come of that city's very first opening day. Yes, sports fans, the Toronto Blue Jays (a ferocious-sounding name if ever there was one) embark on their initial campaign tomorrow afternoon.

And long before the All-Star game is upon us, we will be accustomed to associating such adjectives as "fledgling" and "embarrassing" with the fledgling Blue Jays — see!

One thing the Toronto fans, and any other fans who attend any opening day anywhere else, can be sure to encounter — and, with all luck, survive through — are the traditional opening day ceremonies.

The combined effort of 43 high school marching bands playing a medley of your favorite George and Ira Gershwin tunes for half an hour before a crowd that only came to see a ball game; the introduction of every last player, coach,

and assistant trainer on each team to a crowd that only came to see a ball game; the eyes of everyone in a crowd that only came to see a ball game trained on the box seats next to the home dugout where someone that sorta looks like the mayor (No, by God, it's Bowie Kuhn himself!) throws out two or three or more "first" balls — these are the opening day ceremonies.

Ah, yes, the opening day ceremonies. But, the fans will put up with all this pagentry and excitement, because they know what will follow — baseball at its finest.

You bet!

Sore-armed starting pitchers who everyone knows will go only six innings or 100 pitches, whichever comes first; a rookie second baseman who's destined to boot at least two easy grounders due to the worst case of rookie jitters to come up from Florida in years; an over-aged, run-down perennial bench warmer who patrols the outfield with all the grace and speed of your pet rock (and who still earns in one year what the average fan couldn't possibly hope to make in five) starting in right because the regular starter pulled a hamstring just prior to the game while trying to stay loose in the 35 degree temperature; the game-winning hit coming in the top of the fourth on a 17-hopper up the middle off the bat of a reserve shortstop who owns a .178 career batting average — yeah, baseball at its finest.

Opening day — ah, yes.

Scribes tab Fort Knox Yankees to bring home '77 Series gold

By BILL KLINE Collegian Sports Writer

It's that time of year when sportswriters around the country slip into telephone booths and emerge as SUPERBRAIN!... able to leap to conclusions in a single bound and disappear faster than a speeding bullet when somebody reminds him that he picked the Cubs and the Brewers in the World Series.

So wrote a columnist recently, and recognizing that opening day is today, The Daily Collegian Sports staff courageously picks the New York Yankees, not the Cincinnati Reds, to win the 1977 world's championship.

In fact, 11 of 14 Collegian writers polled don't even expect the Reds to make it to the World Series, as eight of them foresee the Philadelphia Phillies as the Yankees' opponent.

This is how we picked 'em, and we realized that all readers won't agree. So we're providing an opportunity for you to voice your picks. Just drop your predictions for the order of finish at the Collegian office (126 Carnegie) by 6 p.m. tomorrow, and we'll compile and print the results.

"Look out for the Yankees, they're the best team money can buy," one writer says about the Bronx Bombers, last year's AL East winners, by 10 games.

The Yanks bought free agents Reggie Jackson and Don Gullett during the winter and inspired one writer to say, "The Yankees are so deep that it would be a choke if they don't win."

On the strength of seven first place votes, the Kansas City Royals are picked to edge Gene Autry's California Angels and repeat as AL West champions.

"Gene Autry will learn that depth means more than a

couple of overpaid superstars, as Kansas City's John Mayberry wakes up his slumbering bat and helps the Royals repeat," says one writer.

But it will be a hollow victory for the Royals, because the rules once again say the AL West winner must meet the AL East standard-bearer.

Significantly, not one of the seven writers picks Kansas City to make it to the World Series. It is hoped Billy Martin and his Fort Knox Yankees will be humane in disposing of them.

Eleven scribes tab the Phillies to repeat in the NL East. The logical reasons are their hitting, fielding and bullpen, but one female staffer simply called her rationale, "intuition!"

Only two diehards pick the Pirates. "Pittsburgh should take the National League because of (Chuck) Tanner's enthusiasm and its greatly improved pitching," one writer says.

Picked third are the Mets, who possess the best arms in the division, but unfortunately will once again win baseball's Oscar for the best impersonation of a Little League hitting attack.

Moving out West, you have my permission to take San Francisco, San Diego, Houston and Atlanta out to lunch while the big boys — Cincinnati and Los Angeles — decide the issue.

The Reds are picked on 12 ballots, but two scribes don't believe their hitting will again carry their suspect pitching. "Cincinnati's average pitching staff became mediocre with the loss of Gullett, and the Dodgers will take over," one writer says.

Regardless of who wins the West, eight scribes foresee the Phils as NL champions.

"The Phils have a hole in

their pitching staff," says one writer, "but they'll take Cincinnati because the Reds have a bigger hole in their staff."

The writers were polled on several other controversial issues, and baseball czar Bowie Kuhn took a lashing on three counts.

Only four writers of the 14 agree with the recent court ruling that upheld Kuhn's right to rescind deals that are not in the best interests in baseball.

Also, ten scribes feel Ted

Turner, Atlanta's flamboyant owner who was suspended by Kuhn for tampering, should be reinstated.

The writers also feel the players, not the fans, should vote for the major league All-Star teams. It is Kuhn's philosophy that the fans should vote.

Finally, is Richie Hebner going to have a good year for the Phillies? Most scribes think he will, but one staffer put it succinctly when he simply replied, "Richie Who?"

The Collegian's picks...

Table with columns for American League East and West, listing teams and their predicted finishes (1st-7th) and total votes.

Points tabulated on a 7-6-5-4-3-2-1 basis. AL CHAMPION: New York (12), Oakland (1), Boston (1).

Table with columns for National League East and West, listing teams and their predicted finishes (1st-6th) and total votes.

Points tabulated on a 6-5-4-3-2-1 basis. NL CHAMPION: Philadelphia (8), Cincinnati (3), Pittsburgh (2), Los Angeles (1).

WORLD SERIES CHAMPION: New York Yankees (7), Philadelphia (2), Cincinnati (2), Pittsburgh (2), Oakland (1)

Major league standings

Table showing 1976 Final Standings for National League and American League, including teams like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York, etc., with columns for W, L, Pct., GB.

Today's Games (1976 Won-Loss Records) San Diego (Jones 22-14) at Cincinnati (Fryman 13-13) Only game scheduled

Today's Games (1976 Won-Loss Records) California (Tanana 19-10) at Seattle (Segui 9-0), (n) Only game scheduled



Manager Billy Martin's New York Yankees are picked by The Daily Collegian's sports writers as the team to beat in major league baseball this season.