

The Pros

by John Cairns

The Cincinnati Reds have had a dismal season. When have they been so inept, or was a championship team so outclassed? Never this season were they in contention. Even in second the team isn't safe. The lowly Houston Astros are close behind.

The blame lies with the entire squad. Cincinnati pitching has been pathetic, allowing almost five runs a game. Three times the Reds have scored over ten and been beaten. Gone are Gary Nolan, Don Gullet, Rawly Eastwick and Will McEnaney. Tom Seaver has arrived, but he alone can't carry the team. Manager Sparky Anderson admits that consistent hitting has also been a problem. "All we do is thunder away in games that don't mean anything... We don't get clutch hits, the two-out hits." The mental fielding errors bother him even more. Those are absolutely unforgivable.

Every player has a theory. Pete Rose talks about bad breaks. "Everything that could go wrong has gone wrong." Joe Morgan misses the calm steadying influence of the traded Tony Perez. "Tony was always the same, never excited... We missed him early." Early, significantly, was when the Reds

dropped right out of the race. Johnny Bench blames "mental drain" and the pressure of being champions. "Teams are always laying for us," he complains.

The players emphatically deny that past success has made them complacent. They argue that pride, rather than wealth, motivates them. Anderson, though optimistic, isn't so sure. "We've become more show business than baseball. The lime-light is wonderful but maybe if you stay out of it for a while you'll realize how wonderful it was."

Whatever the explanation, the result is the same. A once unbeatable team is now losing regularly. Sparky speaks for everyone when he says, "I'm embarrassed; I feel like walking around in back alleys. I sure don't feel like going out socially."

Every baseball season has its high points and its low ones. 1977 was no exception.

Baseball Surprises the Orioles contending, the Cubs and White Sox before the all-star break, the Dodgers humiliating Cincinnati. Sparky Anderson not dying of frustration. Rose, Bench and Morgan not dying of embarrassment.

the Mariners and Blue Jays winning occasionally. the Mets trading Tom Seaver. Steve Carleton winning twenty games. Rene Levesque allowing the Expos to speak English.

Baseball Disappointments California's free agents, the Reds losing regularly. Fred Lynn batting poorly, the Cubs and White Sox after the all-star break.

Millionaire Yankees bickering. Charlie Finley not making news.

the Mariners and Blue Jays losing regularly. three pennant non-races. Ferguson Jenkins not winning twenty games.

Lou Brock not stealing one hundred bases.

the National League again winning the all-star game. baseball's home run leader being from Japan.

Gene Mauch not winning a pennant in Minnesota.

Rod Carew not batting .400. Rod Carew missing the World Series.

Mark Fedrych's injury.

September 18 was Brooks Robinson Day in Baltimore. The talented and deserving third baseman ended a twenty-three year career amid the cheers of his fans. Boston thumped the Orioles in the ensuing game. If only Brooks had been playing.

Free agents hurt baseball. Recent statistics show that they aren't even helping their new teams, and are definitely not earning their salaries. The Baltimore Orioles show that huge wage earners aren't necessary. Lots of desire and a good farm system are much more valuable.

Golf's Ryder Cup needs revision. The Americans easily outclass their British-Irish opponents and this year was no different. The United States is clamoring for change. The most common suggestion is that all Europe be their opposition. Men like Britain's Brian Huggett

however, have a different viewpoint. "We still get the odd victory," he argues. "I'd hate to see us go European." Though the change would increase interest, he does have a point. Both Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson lost matches. You can't beat stronger opposition than that."

Nothing insures success in professional sport. Pat Sullivan, the former Heisman Trophy winner, was cut for the third time by an N.F.L. club. Teams signing amateur stars to six figure contracts are taking huge chances. Sure things don't exist.

N.H.L. exhibition games will feature two new rules. During altercations players will be ordered to their benches, and forward passes from behind the blueline over center may go to players following the puck. The changes will limit fighting while increasing scoring. I'd like to see them adopted permanently.

New York Rangers have signed Hardy Aaström, the super Swedish goalie. Goeron Hoegosta, also of Sweden, will tend nets for the Islanders. Neither is particularly awed by North American stars. The two goalies, Anders Hedberg, Alf Nilsson, Lars-Erk Sjöberg and Borje Salmung may totally outshine our players.

Another North American hockey club embarrassed us in Europe. Cincinnati Stingers were winless in a tournament with Czechoslovakia and Russia. They were also involved in unpleasanties. The climax was a brawl with the Czechs after which the Stingers left the ice. We have to realize that only our best can compete with the Europeans. Will our players continue to act like children, or will we learn to lose gracefully?



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