

Sky King Rejects Met Economy-Flight Ticket

By JACK LANG

NEW YORK—The Mets opened the season with two of the unhappiest players in baseball, a situation which does not augur well for a successful year.

Their biggest pitcher seemed to

Now Mets Have Nothing For Staub, Unser Deals

NEW YORK—Two of the most controversial deals made by the Mets last year were those that sent Rusty Staub to Detroit and Del Unser and Wayne Garrett to Montreal. As the season opened, the Mets, who have frequently been criticized for their bad deals, had nothing to show for either of those swaps.

On their final day in St. Petersburg, the Mets cut both Pepe Mangual and Billy Baldwin. Mangual came to the Mets last summer in the Garrett-Unser deal with the Expos. Jim Dwyer, also in the deal, was shipped to Chicago in December.

The Staub deal was for Mickey Lolich and Baldwin. Lolich retired before spring training and Baldwin was sent to Tidewater at the end of training. JACK LANG

be forcing them into a deal for him and, on top of that, their unsigned slugger issued a "sign-me-or-trade-me" ultimatum as the club was about to complete spring training.

The likelihood that unhappy Tom Seaver would be traded was as remote as the possibility the Mets would sign unhappy Dave Kingman. Certainly not at his terms.

Barring an unlikely last-minute capitulation by either side, Kingman was prepared to play out his option and make himself available to all bidders in October. If he hits the 50 homers he is capable of in a full season, Kong might command the highest salary in baseball history. He does not expect that the Mets will be the ones to pay it.

"I WANT TO sign, I am encouraging them to sign me," Kingman said in a press conference in St. Petersburg just before the Mets broke camp.

"But I am also encouraging them to trade me if they do not sign me. Now they can get something for me. At the end of the season, they will get nothing for me."

Kingman insisted he bears no malice toward the Mets. All negotiations, he said, had been friendly, although he did say in his one meeting with Board Chairman Donald Grant, "Mr. Grant did all the talking."

The situation that existed at the

end of spring training was no different than it had been all winter. Kingman is asking for twice what the Mets are offering. Neither side will mention figures, but it is assumed, from addition and subtraction of known figures, that Sky King wants \$400,000 annually for a six-year period.

The problems came to a head following two long meetings between Kingman and General Manager Joe McDonald at the end of spring training. Then King started to talk publicly.

"I CAN'T PLAY in New York without signing a contract," he said at the press conference he called. "Maybe somewhere else I could but not in New York. I'll take a lot of heat just from what's happened already. I'm willing to accept that. Maybe I'll wear earplugs so I won't hear the boos."

There was no doubt in anyone's mind what Kingman had reference to. He was having his usual season even in spring training. His average was .192 but he led the club in home runs and RBIs. Also in strikeouts. He knows it will not be much different during the season. New York fans will cheer him for his homers and stand in awe of his power.

But they also will boo his frequent strikeouts, his low average and his defensive lapses in the field. Already he was told in a poll conducted by the New York Daily

News that the fans do not support his salary demands. He lost that poll, 2-to-1.

McDonald, answering Kingman's ultimatum, said, "It happens every spring. The only difference this year is that, under the rules, he can become a free agent. I did not know he felt that he wanted to be traded. Now that I do, I can talk more sensibly with other clubs. I don't want to trade him, but we are far apart."

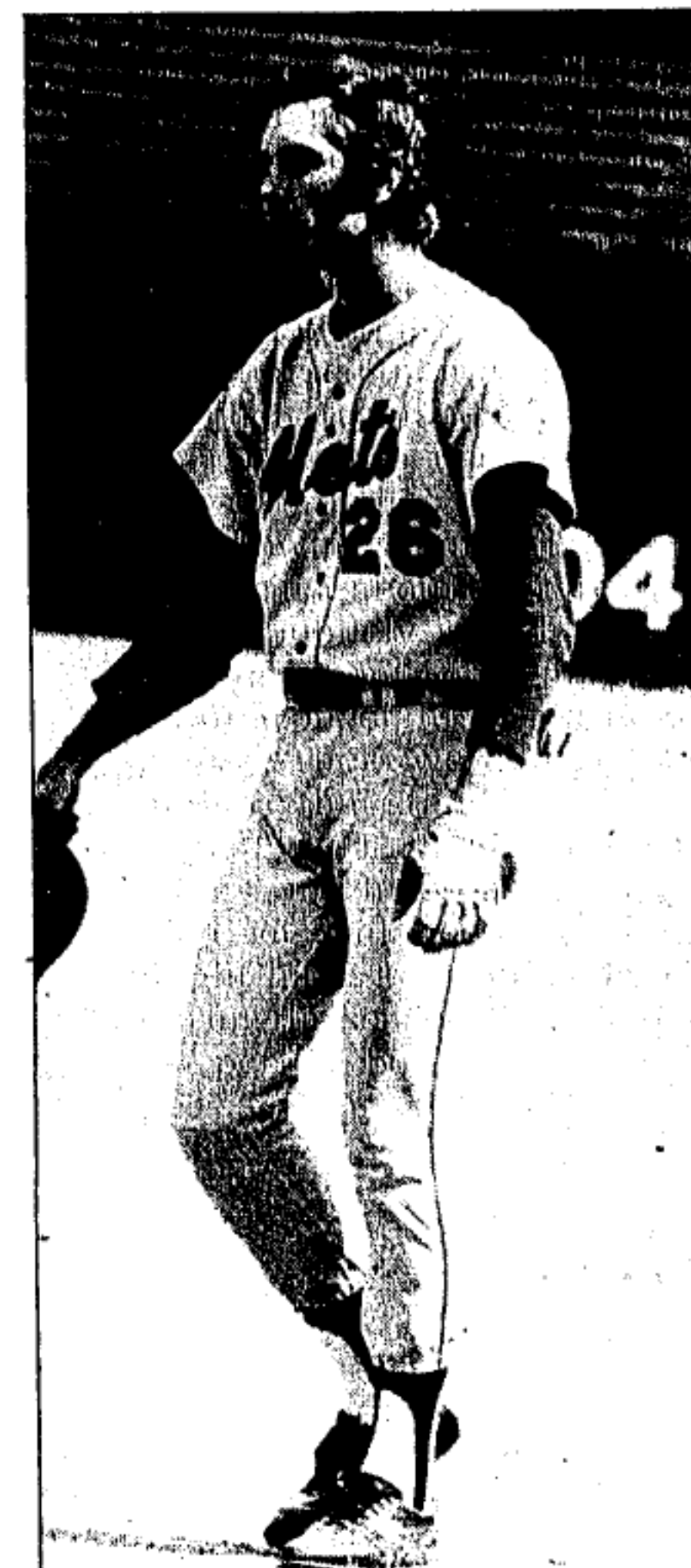
KINGMAN, WHO can't understand the Mets' stand on salaries that predates the new agreement with the players' association, also cannot believe their efforts to improve the club. The Mets did not make a single significant player deal over the winter nor did they sign one of the many free agents available.

"We have a great club and we could win it," he said, "but I wish I had some help. By that, I am talking about free agents they could have signed. My contribution to this club is different than that of my counterparts. The others have more help."

"I know what I can do and they know what I can do. I'm capable of doing above what I've already done. But they want me to sign a multi-year contract under the old standards."

Dave Kingman, 37 homers going on 50, sounded very much like a man who would not be signed by the Mets this year. Any offers?

Metscellaneous: Ray Sadecki, 36, latched on with the Mets for a second time as a short lefthander in the bullpen. He had an excellent spring. . . . Mike Vail, right fielder, suffered a broken small right toe



Dave Kingman

that was likely to keep him out of the opening lineup. . . . The Mets kept Ed Kurpiel right to the final days. He was on the Tidewater roster, but had impressed Grant while caddying for him last fall. The Mets are the fifth club to look at the husky first baseman.

Cubs Excited Over Finding a Thief

By JEROME HOLTZMAN

CHICAGO—It's much too early to make any predictions about the Cubs for the long season ahead, but there is the constant temptation to mention the base-stealing potential of Ivan DeJesus, their new shortstop.

DeJesus, who came from the Dodgers in the Rick Monday trade, was a veritable blur during the exhibition season. He stole 10 bases in 10 attempts in the Cubs' first 24 Cactus League games. Moreover, on most of his steals, the plays weren't even close.

Nobody expects DeJesus to maintain this pace, or his plus-.300 batting average, during the regular season, but the fact remains that if he stays healthy and plays every day, he could be the first Cub in 71 years to swipe as many as 50 bases.

COMPARED WITH most major league clubs, the Cubs have been laggards on the base paths. Remarkable as it may seem, Jose Cardenal's 34 steals in '75 were the most by a Cub in the last 46 years, or since Kiki Cuyler had 37 in 1930.

Cuyler also was the last Cub with 40 or more steals, an accomplishment he achieved in 1929, when he had 43. Further research reveals that only two Cubs have had more than 50 thefts since 1898, when the current rule on stolen bases was established.

The only members of this exclusive 50-or-more club, which DeJesus may crack, are Frank Chance, the legendary Peerless Leader, and Billy Maloney. Maloney had 59 steals in 1905, Chance 57 in 1906 and 67 in 1903, which stands as the Cubs' modern record.

There is no question that DeJesus was one of the few bright spots in the Cubs' spring camp. From the first game, when he had three hits (two singles and a double, plus two steals), he kept his average above .300. In addition, he is sound

in the field and has a considerably better-than-average arm.

"I'D SAY he's quite a find," said Manager Herman Franks. "For a fellow who hasn't played too much, he's shown us there really isn't anything he can't do."

Then Franks added: "I don't want to put him on the spot or add to the pressure, but there is no question he's got the potential to be one of the best shortstops in the league."

DeJesus' previous record is somewhat spotty. Though he always did fairly well at the plate in the minors, he failed to hit .200 in his last two trials with the Dodgers. He batted .184 with the Dodgers in 63 games in 1975 and dropped to .171 in 22 games with them last year.

DeJesus' overall major league

average going into the 1977 campaign is an anemic .183, with no home runs and only four RBIs in 131 official at-bats. Moreover, he has had only one stolen base in big league competition.

DeJESUS, WHO is 24 and a native of San Juan, Puerto Rico, is confident his day finally has come.

"All I really need is a chance," he said. "I know I can do it if I can play every day."

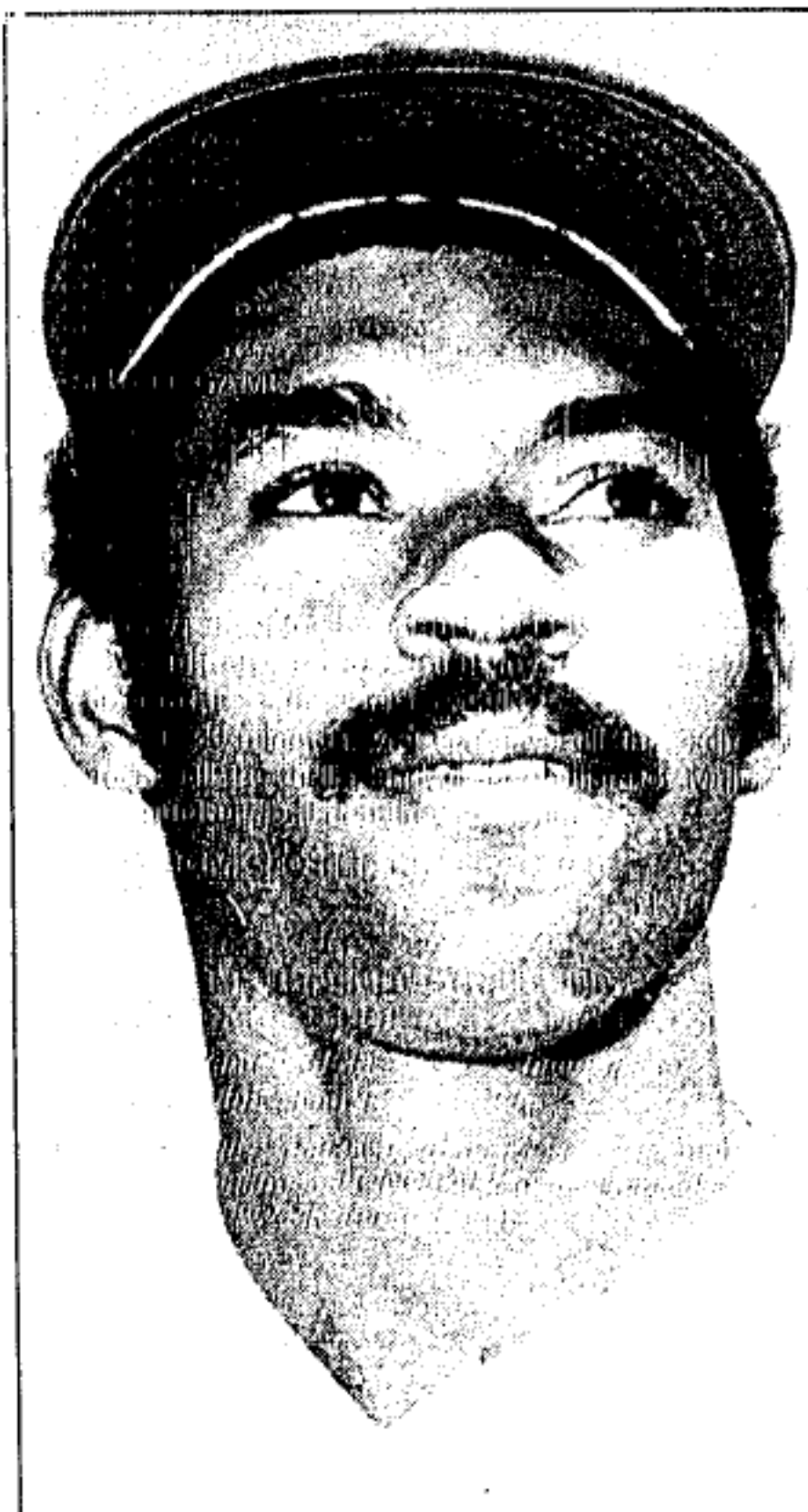
As for his base-stealing ability, DeJesus doesn't want to make any predictions.

"I know how to steal," he said with a big grin. "That's one thing I know how to do. But I have to get to first base first. If I keep hitting, I should steal a lot of bases. But how many I'll steal is something I can't say."

Cub Capers: First baseman Larry Biittner was among the club's batting stars in the final stages of spring training and said he owed his improvement to batting coach Lew Fonseca. Biittner explained that his sudden success at the plate was the result of Fonseca's advice to stop lunging and instead to hang back and wait until the last instant before pulling the trigger.

Jerry Morales had four spring homers through action of March 29 and was tied for the club RBI lead with newcomer Steve Ontiveros. Each had 12. . . . Rookie Mike Krukow won a place in the starting rotation. . . . Manny Trillo signed a new three-year contract which extends through the 1979 season.

Randy Hundley, the veteran catcher who originally was signed as a bullpen coach, homered in his first spring at-bat and then, in the bottom half of the inning, pegged out a would-be base stealer with a perfect throw. It was Hundley's first appearance in a game since last May. Chances are he'll be used as the club's No. 3 catcher behind George Mitterwald and Steve Swisher.



Ivan DeJesus

"Should be read twice—first in a single gulp, then one chapter at a time like passages from the Bible."

—RED SMITH *The New York Times*

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