

Frazier Threatening To Bench Kingman

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Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, April 8—Manager Joe Frazier joined the New York Mets' war with the unsigned Dave Kingman today, threatened to bench the power-hitting outfielder and said: "I think it's time for him to shut up."

"The old man's had it up to here," Frazier said, referring to M. Donald Grant, chairman of the Mets' board of directors and Kingman's main target in his long salary dispute. "He says if Kingman doesn't like it, you can sit him down. So I think Kingman's popped off enough."

"It's time for him to shut up, to let his actions speak for him, not his words. If he's going to play out his option, all right. But he keeps calling press conferences after games and all that, and he's trying to create his own directions. But you can't bite the hand that feeds you so much."

Frazier, who had stayed outside the main battle arena during spring training while Kingman was feuding with Grant, finally joined the fray on a sunny but cold afternoon while the Mets were working out at Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs. They opened the 1977 season here yesterday with a 5-3 victory over the Cubs, with Kingman playing right field and otherwise trying to talk up a trade to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

No game was scheduled today, but Frazier called a team workout anyway, and the Mets did some running and practiced their defense against base-stealers. That is, 24 of the Mets worked out: Kingman was back in New York on the third "day off" granted to him in the last month. The purpose this time apparently was to "take care of" his new house in Greenwich, Conn., and to transport his pet Labrador retriever back home.

Some Mets Resentful

"He had permission," the manager said, standing in the dugout behind first base while the Mets shivered on the field in 39-degree cold. "He'll be back tonight. What can I do? It's too cold to swing the bat today, anyway."

"Any ballplayer who asked me to leave today could have done it. I'd let half of them go back to New York if they needed to. And don't let any of the other guys complain that I have one set of rules for them and one set for Kingman. I don't."

"But the old man is fed up with Kingman's actions. I don't like him popping off about Don Grant. I don't think Don deserves it. I spoke to Kingman about it yesterday, but apparently I didn't ring his bell."

Kingman's absence may have been authorized by the manager, but it appeared to be resented by some of the other players. Ed Kranepool, who began with the original Mets 16 years ago and who now is the senior man on the team in service, said: "Why should I be out here running around in the cold if he's back in New York?"

And Jon Matlack, who will pitch Sunday's game against the Cubs, looked ahead a bit and said: "If they sign him for a lot of money, and if they then go to Tom Seaver and make it up to him because of Kingman, I'll tear this place apart."

Seaver, the hero of the team for a decade, is now in the middle year of a three-year contract at \$225,000 a season. Matlack signed a three-year contract last winter for \$150,000 each season. Kingman was paid \$90,000 last summer, has spurned a raise to \$200,000 and is demanding a six-year package totaling \$2 million. If he does not sign with the Mets, he must play for them this season but then will become free to auction himself in the open market next October.

"I don't want to play here," Kingman

said yesterday, as the Mets opened the season in a grim mood. "From now on, I'll play ball but not negotiate. The Dodgers have made a good offer for me. I just want to go. I want my freedom."

He also did some more sniping at Grant, the stockbroker who runs the team, saying that "Grant should be in politics, not baseball—all he cares about is public image."

Joe McDonald, general manager of the Mets, took account of all the war-ringing today, noted that the Mets had advanced \$30,000 to Kingman for his home and said:

"I've made attempts to make a trade, but it's not the easiest thing in the world to do. Kingman has impaired his market value with all this. Also, we don't want to weaken our team or incur the wrath of our fans. Los Angeles has shown more interest in him than other clubs. But I don't think a trade is imminent."

Meanwhile, the Mets were not alone in family feuding. The world champion Cincinnati Reds fought publicly with Pete Rose all spring, then signed him to a two-year contract on the eve of the season this week. The Yankees have had to deal with several players who became disenchanted by the large salaries paid to free agents. The Boston Red Sox fought Luis Tiant, then extended his contract. And two opening-day pitchers yesterday—Don Sutton of the Dodgers and Jim Palmer of the Baltimore Orioles—muttered even after they had signed long-range contracts.