

# Dave Anderson

## Those Kingman and Schmidt Home Runs

In less than two weeks, Dave Kingman and Mike Schmidt have put baseball back into baseball. Never have so many fans owed so much to so few home runs.

Just when baseball most needed home runs, the essence of the game and a non-negotiable item in the lingering labor dispute, Dave Kingman and Mike Schmidt supplied them. Kong Kingman, the most notorious beast ever brought back alive by the New York Mets, hit a home run at Wrigley Field in Chicago last week that soared

**Sports  
of  
The Times**

high over the ivy-covered left-field wall, high over the bleachers, high over the 30-foot wire fence, high over the street outside and ricocheted off a red-brick porch. Baseball surveyors estimated the distance at 630 feet from home plate to the bottom of the trajectory beyond the red-brick porch, which makes it either the longest home run or the longest exaggeration in baseball history. But if the porch hadn't been there, autos on Lake Shore Drive might not have been safe. Then last Saturday at Wrigley Field again, Mike Schmidt of the Philadelphia Phillies hit four consecutive home runs in one game. Only three other major-leaguers had done that—Lou Gehrig, Rocky Colavito and Bobby Lowe of the 1894 Boston Braves.

### 'He Let Me Be Me'

It was a bad week for Wrigley Field but a good week for baseball which needs more home run hitters and less labor negotiations. Dave Kingman and Mike Schmidt now can resume their duel for the National League home run title. Schmidt won it last season, with 38 to 36, but so far this season Kingman has seven and Schmidt has six.

"I don't try to hit homers, I just try to hit the ball hard," Kingman says. "I ended up spring training shaky. I wasn't hitting the ball well, I wasn't comfortable. But last week I suddenly felt comfortable. It just happened, I can't explain why. And when I'm comfortable, I'm snapping the bat. That's the secret—bat speed. I've got good wrists and forearms and being tall, I think I get a little more leverage than other guys. I can reach more pitches than other guys. But bat speed is the most important thing, that and playing everyday. I always had the confidence that the ability was there. I just wanted the opportunity to play every day and the Mets gave it to me."

When the Mets purchased Dave Kingman from the San Francisco Giants during spring training last year, he was tutored by Phil Cavarretta, the Mets' batting instructor.

"Phil was very patient with me," the 27-year-old outfielder says. "He didn't try to shorten my swing. He let me be me. I'll always take my big cut. But he helped

me become more selective in the pitches I swing at, more patient in waiting for my pitch."

Cavarretta, the 1945 National League batting champion as the Chicago Cubs' first baseman, noticed that Kingman was dropping his right shoulder as he swung.

"My theory," Cavarretta says, "is that some hitters strike out more than others and I didn't want to take away his aggressiveness. But he was uppercutting the ball on his swing because he was dropping his right shoulder. We concentrated on keeping the right shoulder up and swinging at the ball wherever the ball was. If the ball was high, go at it high. We had tried to get him to make contact more often to lessen his strikeouts but he couldn't cope with it. It's not his makeup. So we let him be himself. He appreciated that. In the past some people had told him to make so many changes that it just messed up his natural power.

### The Talk With Dick Allen

That natural power was obvious when Dave Kingman was a Little Leaguer in Hawthorne, Calif.

"I still hold the Little League home run record there," Kingman says. "I hit 15 homers in about 15 games one year. I remember there was a drainage ditch about 50 feet beyond the left-field fence and I put a few over the drainage ditch."

But even with so many home runs so quickly, Dave Kingman isn't thinking about threatening Roger Maris's record of 61 in a season.

"That's pretty far-fetched," he says. "That's a record set by another ballplayer in another ballpark in another time. I don't make predictions. I have 'em inside me but I don't talk about 'em. I'd like to lead the league but so would Mike Schmidt."

Mike Schmidt has led the National League in home runs the last two seasons but, like Dave Kingman, he strikes out often. He had fanned in nine of his 18 times at bat before Saturday.

"I had a long talk with Dick Allen before Saturday's game," Mike Schmidt says. "I wasn't hangdog or down in the mouth, but I needed a little boost. He got my mind straight."

Mike Schmidt hit another home run Sunday, but five homers in two games didn't satisfy Seymour Siwoff.

"If he only had hit two Sunday," says Siwoff, the keeper of the decimal points for the Elias Sports Bureau which handles National League statistics. "He would've knocked Cap Anson, Ralph Kiner, Don Mueller, Joe Adcock, Billy Williams, Ty Cobb and Tony Lazzeri out of the record book. We need the space."

Sooner or later, Dave Kingman or Mike Schmidt might solve Seymour Siwoff's space problem.

**The New York Times**

Published: April 20, 1976

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