

Astros Lack Spirit, Not Talent, Claims Griffin

By JOE HEILING

HOUSTON—No glowing promises gush forth from the mouth of Tom Griffin in regard to the 1975 season. No pennant predictions, no 20-victory goals, no anything.

"That's been done for the last 10 years around here," he said, feeling no need to add, without success.

INSTEAD, the broad-shouldered righthander offers hope for the Astros.

"Everybody knows we've got the nucleus of a good ball club," said the club's leading winner last year. "The main thing it lacks is an attitude.

"It doesn't lack 100 percent. It's just that it isn't consistent. Teams like Cincinnati and Los Angeles go into a little bit of a losing streak and they battle out of it. When we went into that 10-game losing streak this past season, we had a tough time getting out of it.

"A contender or a team that's going to finish up there just can't do this. They've got to battle back and turn things around. We've got the personnel. Whatever is lacking, it is not talent."

LITTLE HAS changed with the Astros. They retain the same pitching—starting and relief—and the only new faces belong to Rob Andrews, Enos Cabell, Jose Cruz and Ken Boswell. They replace slugger Lee May and utilityman Bob Gallagher.

Although a flock of trades were expected at season's end, such was not the case.

"I was kind of surprised," admitted Griffin, a 14-10 performer after winning just nine games the previous three summers. "I thought we might trade a little bit of pitching.

"But, heck, the guys we have are guys who can do the job. So there

was no real need to do too much trading. Take Fred Scherman. He had a bad back all last year and wouldn't tell anybody. I don't think anybody really knew how bad it was.

"Fred was so good for Detroit for so many years. No reason he can't do the same thing for us next season. I'm glad he's still here because I think he can do a good job out of the bullpen.

"LOOK AT Larry Dierker, too. He really came back great, winning 11 games with that good (2.89) ERA. As sore as his arm was a couple of years ago, I'm sure a lot of people were wondering if he'd ever pitch again—as was he. He showed everybody a lot, including himself. I'm sure this built his confidence up. So we can look for better years from Dierker and Scherman along with others on the pitching staff."

He includes a fellow named Tom

Griffin. He logged 211 innings, 23 more than his previous high, and they were second only to Dierker's 223 rounds of toil. Tom tossed three shutouts, plus a one-hit victory over the Pirates.

"I learned an awful lot last year," said Griff, "and I don't see any reason why I can't improve on my record. I lost a number of low-run games and I can think of two games where I had a five-run lead and didn't get anything from it.

"So a few more runs here and there and, also, holding some of the leads I had, could make a pretty big difference. I hope to do better at this in the season ahead."

ON TURNING 27 in February, the big righthander has the maturity to accomplish what he wants in the major leagues now. He's overcome arm trouble and other setbacks to reestablish himself as a winner.



Tom Griffin

"This past year was a big breakthrough for me," he said. "I haven't had any arm problems the last three years, but this was the first time I got to start all year since 1969—my rookie season. That was very important to me."

Now Tom Griffin is very big in the plans of the Astros.

Hutch Award 'Greatest Honor,' Says Thompson

By BOB FOWLER

TWIN CITIES—Danny Thompson clicked off the names . . . Harmon Killebrew, Mickey Mantle, Sandy Koufax, Carl Yastrzemski, John Hiller.

Each was a winner of the Hutch Award, given to the most courageous baseball player. And the winner for 1974 was Danny Thompson, the **Twins** shortstop and certainly a worthy recipient.

"It's the greatest honor in baseball I've ever had," he said. "I mean, to be put in a group like

that, well, it's tremendous."

THOMPSON, who will receive his award at the Dapper Dan banquet in Pittsburgh on February 9, didn't know Fred Hutchinson, the former pitcher with Detroit and manager of the Tigers, and later St. Louis and Cincinnati.

"Of course, I've known about Hutchinson," he said. "When I was in high school (Capren, Okla.), he was managing the Reds and Cincinnati was my favorite team.

"I know he died of cancer. He

must have had a tremendous effect on a lot of people because it's quite an honor to have such an award named for him."

AS YOU KNOW, Thompson has chronic leukemia. And since it was discovered in a routine physical two years ago, he, too, has led a courageous life.

First, he has battled his illness. He has had regular checkups and is due for another in February. Then, at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., doctors plan to use a

machine to remove the diseased white cells from his blood.

"But during my last checkup in December, my count was only 15,000 (normal is 5,000-10,000)," Thompson said. "It hasn't increased at all recently, and not much since it was first discovered. "Frankly, I've never felt better."

The 27-year-old has had to battle for his position, too. And, to his credit, it is another fight he appears to be winning.

IN 1973, bothered mentally at the discovery of the illness and nagged by injuries, he played in only 99 games and hit a mere .225 while making 24 errors.

Last season, Sergio Ferrer was given the assignment but didn't field well. Then Luis Gomez was handed the position but didn't hit well. Thompson finished the season as Minnesota's shortstop and played quite well.

In 97 games, he hit .250 and made only 13 errors as the **Twins** rallied from 13 games under .500 to finish with an 82-82 record.

"I was pleased with last season," Thompson said. "I felt I played well once I was used regularly."

Apparently, Manager Frank Quilici plans to stick with Thompson at shortstop when the **Twins** open the 1975 season. He, too, was impressed with Thompson's play during the final two months of 1974.

If he plays that well for an entire season, **Minnesota** might have a leading candidate for the American League's Comeback Player of the Year trophy. But it probably wouldn't mean as much to Thompson as his Hutch Award.

Whatever, those who voted for the Hutch Award couldn't have made a better selection. Thompson truly symbolizes the award—on and off the field.

Jackson a Stone Wall as Oriole Fireman

By DOUG BROWN

BALTIMORE—As major league ballplayers go, Oriole reliever Grant Jackson is unknown, unheard and unappreciated.

It is almost as if he wants it that way. He talks little and never pops off. He is not brilliant enough to draw heaps of praise, yet he seldom does anything to merit criticism. Grant Jackson seems to work at remaining obscure.

It is significant, though, that ever since he came from the Phillies to the Orioles in 1971, his name has been missing from trade rumors. Not once was his name mentioned during baseball's convention in New Orleans.

It can be assumed, then, that Jackson will be doing the same thing next season that he has done the last four, working with high competence as the Orioles' short

lefthanded reliever.

PERHAPS IT COMES as a revelation to learn that Jackson has led the staff in relief points the last two years. He was 8-0 with nine saves in 1973 and 6-4 with 12 saves last season.

"Just being able to throw strikes in any given situation without being nervous is the key to relief pitching," Jackson said. "I don't get upset easy. I try to keep everything easy. I don't feel any pressure going in there."

As testimony to his calmness, Jackson cited an appearance late last season against Milwaukee when the Orioles were embroiled

in a frantic race for the American League East championship.

He arrived with one out and a man on third with the score tied in the eighth. With apparent calm, Jackson struck out the next two batters. Then he retired three straight in the ninth and picked up a 5-4 victory.

"WHAT DID YOU throw those guys?" a man asked.

"A jive-time fast ball," Jackson replied.

"What's that?"

"Here's a fast ball, hit it if you can catch up with it."

The questioner studied Jackson, wondering if the nonchalance

were feigned. "Nothing bothers me," Jackson said, unsmiling, as if in answer to the question that wasn't asked.

If anything distinguishes Jackson, it is his nickname, Buck. A teammate, Lou Garvin, branded him with that when they were playing in Philadelphia.

"I reminded him of a cowboy when I walked to the mound," Jackson said. "You know, bow-legged, pigeon-toed, walking like I was ready to draw a gun."

JACKSON JOINED the Orioles ostensibly as their fifth starter. He did make nine starts in 1971, but that year the club had four 20-game winners—Jim Palmer, Dave McNally, Mike Cuellar and Pat Dobson.

He has been in the bullpen ever since. Not that he seems to mind. It doesn't even seem to upset him when Manager Earl Weaver pulls him in mid-inning, with a righthanded hitter coming up, in favor of Bob Reynolds.

"I don't care," Jackson insisted. "I just work here."

With a high degree of competence, it should be added.

Bird Seed: The possible sale of the Orioles to a Baltimore group has hit a snag. A lawyer for a minority stockholder said Owner Jerry Hoffberger has the obligation to sell to the highest bidder. Whereas Hoffberger is willing to sell for \$12 million, certain out-of-town interests reportedly would pay as much as \$16 million. Hoffberger's reaction to the new development: "It obviously complicates an already difficult negotiation."

Carbo Can Help—Some Way

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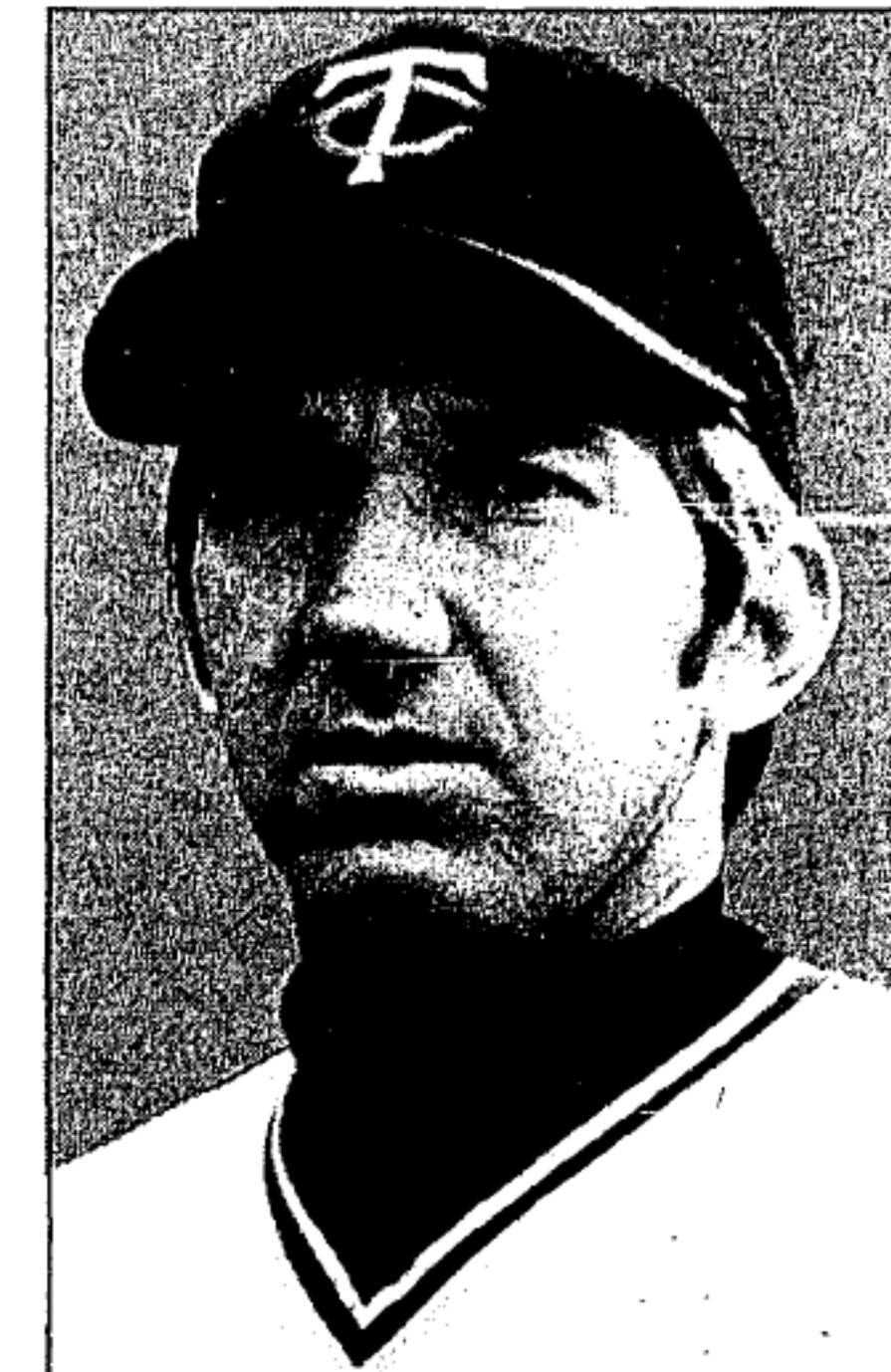
had only 84.

"I want to try to work out a little at third, and maybe fill in there once in a while. Maybe I can be a DH, and if I do well enough, win the left field job. If not, I can help coming off the bench, because I can knock in runs. One thing that should help is Johnny Pesky as hitting coach. When I go into a slump, I don't mess around with an 0-for-10. No, I go 0-for-20 or 0-for-30, and Pesky's great at picking up bad habits I might get into. I know if I can cut down my slumps and my strikeouts (90 in those 338 ABs), I can add at least 20 points to my average."

The Notebook: The Boston Baseball Writers' dinner, January 23 at

the Boston Statler-Hilton, will honor the Indians' Gaylord Perry and the A's Reggie Jackson, along with numerous Red Sox players. Boston players to be honored are Luis Tiant (most valuable pitcher), Carl Yastrzemski (MVP), Rick Burleson (rookie), Rico Petrocelli (comeback) and Dwight Evans (most improved).

The Red Sox still have not heard from Deron Johnson as to whether he plans to come to spring training as an invitee or go to Japan. . . . The non-roster invitees at the present are Tony Conigliaro, catcher Ernie Whitt and pitchers Ken Watkins, Lance Clemons and Don Newhauser. . . . Reports from Puerto Rico have been good on lefthander Rich Kreuger, who will be given a shot as a lefthanded reliever.



Danny Thompson