

World of Sports

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Billy Martin

BUS SAIDT Baseball at its worst

NEW YORK — This was baseball in its worst element. The "base" in baseball doesn't necessarily refer to that accomplished by George Steinbrenner and Gabe Paul yesterday. "Base" means low-down, dirty, impure.

It is not sufficient to pass off the callous dismissal of Bill Virdon as manager of the New York Yankees and the hiring of Billy Martin to replace him with the casual observation, "Oh well, just another example of the hazard of the profession."

The decision to dump Virdon represents cynicism running rampant. It is rotten to the core.

Could a man have done a better job than Virdon?

It's easy to forget, but think of the circumstances under which he appeared on the Yankee scene. A distant second, maybe third or fourth choice behind the Steinbrenner-Paul infatuation with Dick Williams and the clumsy charade involving him, Virdon restored balance to a chaotic situation.

A quiet, low-profile man of considerable leadership quality, Virdon quickly led the Yankees know who was boss by putting down clubhouse unrest over Paul's multi-player trade with Cleveland in early '74 and courageously moving Bobby Murcer from center to right field.

Gets job done

Then, perhaps to the surprise of Paul, Virdon had the Yankees in contention for their first championship in 10 years until the next-to-last day of the 1974 season. Virdon was American League manager-of-the-year in my book. Then Paul dealt Murcer for Bobby Bonds and virtually told Virdon he was expected to win a division title or else. What Paul failed to do was provide his manager with any semblance of a major league second base-shortstop combination without which it is nearly impossible to win.

Perhaps the glamorous nature of Paul's moves blinded many of us. I picked the Yankees to win everything this year. I was wrong, but I am firmly convinced the Yanks' collapse may not be attributed to Virdon's managerial inadequacies.

The Yankees are bitter disappointments because of brutal injuries — primarily those to Elliott Maddox, Bonds and Ron Blomberg. Bonds' bad year and the sub-par pitching of people like Doc Medich, Pat Dobson and Sparky Lyle. Dobson must feel fine today, reflecting on his intemperate blast at Virdon in which he tried to cop out by his own poor performance by blaming his manager.

"Bonds has been erratic all year, and his (Maddox) injuries hurt us badly," said Medich, never less than honest. "Sparky and I are having terrible years. I don't see how you can blame Bill Virdon for our shortcomings."

Fatal double loss

Virdon lost his job last Sunday during that crushing, 1-0 loss Hunter suffered to Boston in the

DAVE ANDERSON Prodigal son on parole

N. Y. Times Service  
NEW YORK — In hiring Billy Martin as their manager, the New York Yankees are attempting to rehabilitate a three-time loser, a prodigal-son on parole. But before he was discharged by the Texas Rangers, the Detroit Tigers and the Minnesota Twins for a variety of turbulent transgressions, Billy Martin was a three-time winner. That's all the Yankee owners are thinking about now. They'll worry about the problems later.

"We've chosen Billy Martin," says Gabe Paul, the Yankees' president, "because of the excitement he will bring coupled with the Yankee tradition." It also would have been exciting for Chase Manhattan to have hired Willie

first game of the double debacle. The specific incident which cooked Virdon's goose was his failure to pinch-hit for Fred Stanley in the fifth inning with the bases full and nobody out. The Yanks failed to score, then Virdon hit for Stanley in the seventh inning and Stanley's replacement, Jim Mason, blew the biggest game of the year with a ninth inning error.

While this was going on, Steinbrenner, the new-breed emotional, fan-type owner who really would like to manage the club himself, sat in the Yankee box, directly beside the New York dugout. He leaned over to scream at Virdon during much of the ball game. The owner's tirade continued after the doubleheader, made more valid in Steinbrenner's mind with the help of liquid libation.

"I'm afraid Bill Virdon lost his job today," a man close to the Yankees' and American League scene said solemnly later that night.

Paul got up at the 9:30 press conference yesterday morning and said he began thinking of Martin as his manager the day Billy was fired by the Texas Rangers.

"We're not blaming Virdon for anything," the Yankee president insisted, while intelligent observers rolled their eyes, "not a thing."

Honestly costs job

Whatever else he might be, Virdon is one of the straightest shooters baseball ever has known. He never lies, cons, insults intelligence nor blames others for his own mistakes. For this he has lost his job.

Martin said he wanted to bury the hatchet. To his credit, Maddox indicated to reporters, "Let's wait and see."

Before midnight Friday, Virdon still didn't know where he stood. Both news wire services reported him out of a job, replaced by Martin, but Paul was going around, saying, "No comment." Virdon went out all class, as he had been since the first day he arrived.

Martin capable

Billy Martin undoubtedly has outstanding managerial capacity. He is fiery, brash, egotistical, dynamic and pugnacious. He also must have everything his own way. It's his show all the way, or else.

Steinbrenner's attraction for the new man may stem from his desire to have a manager who is the owner's buddy-buddy drinking pal and off-the-field companion with whom he may talk inside baseball. The combination bears watching.

"It's a thrill coming home," said Martin, the bulldog second baseman of Casey Stengel's great Yankee teams in the early '50s.

Paul was asked if it weren't gross to fire Virdon on Old-timers' Day, to ensure a happy, festive occasion.

"We had to do it now because of availability," Paul answered. How does that great Stephen Sondheim Broadway show tune go? "Bring on the clowns, there ought to be clowns. Don't bother, they're here."

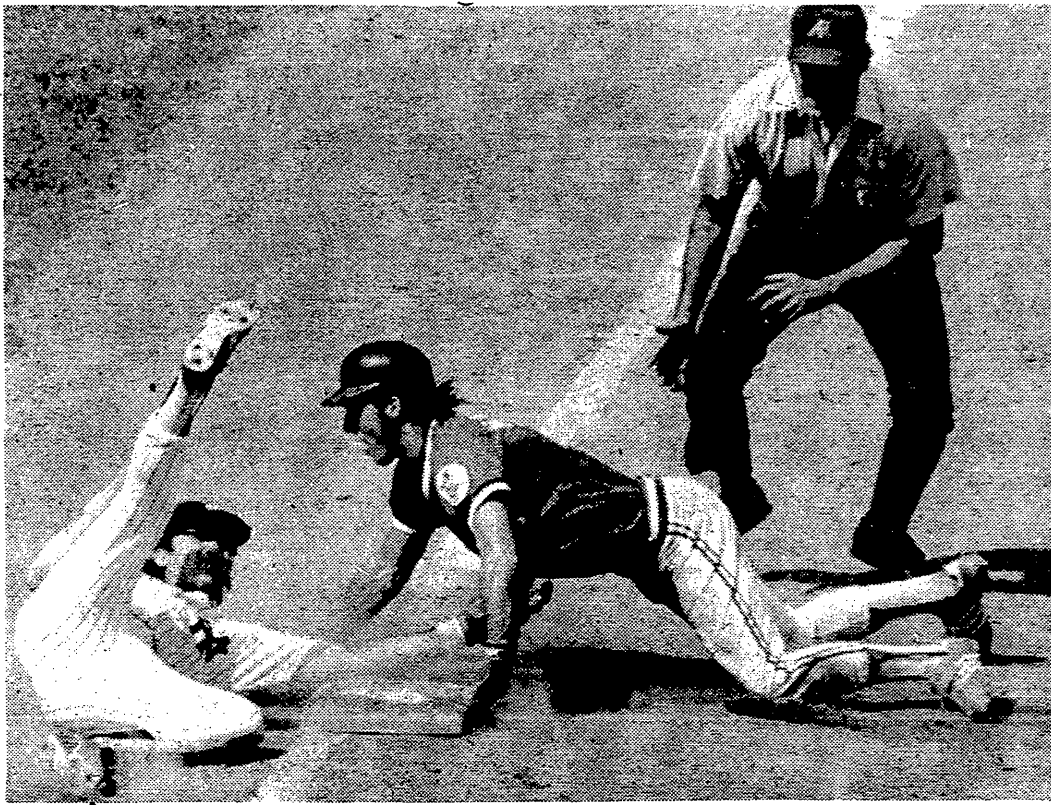
Sutton as a bank guard, at least until he robbed the bank. Sooner or later, Billy Martin will rob the bank. He was everywhere else.

Until then, like Willie Sutton as a bank guard, Bill Martin will be a manager to watch, and a manager to be watched.

The shame of Martin's arrival is Bill Virdon's departure. Virdon is a good manager, a good man. If the Mets become disenchanted with Yogi Berra as their manager, Bill Virdon would be an ideal successor in the Met image — calm, patient, honest.

"But if Billy Martin had not been available," Paul explained

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Yankee third baseman Graig Nettles puts the tag on Cleveland's Rick Manning to thwart a steal attempt in fourth inning.

Yankees give Martin 5-3 victory in debut

By BUS SAIDT Staff Writer

NEW YORK — Under the deposed Yankee regime of Bill Virdon, Sparky Lyle, once known as the Count because of the royal manner in which he saved countless games as a premier relief pitcher, had become a peasant. Virdon had lost faith in Sparky.

The new Yankee manager, Billy Martin, couldn't believe Sparky Lyle had gone back so far.

The first time the opportunity arose in his debut as skipper of the club for which he used to fight and win, Martin went right to Lyle even though the Cleveland Indians already had taken a 3-0 lead in the sixth inning on Bob Powell's three-run homer off Pat Dobson.

Sparky responded with three and a third innings of scoreless, if not quite superb, ball. The Yankees banged around Frank Robinson's own relievers for three runs in the eighth and made off with a 5-3 victory over the Indians before 43,968 oldtimers' day fans.

"I thought Sparky looked awful good," said Martin, sorting through a pile of congratulatory telegrams. "I think he has to pitch a lot more to be successful. Today's game might have gotten him over the hump."

Felt comfortable

While not criticizing Virdon in any way, Lyle obviously felt more comfortable with a new man calling the shots around the disappointing Yankees.

"Maybe it looked like I was working enough by my number of appearances," he said, "but I need appearances in a row to get things all together. I'd like to pitch three or four days in a row. I hope Billy can use me Sunday and Monday. If there's one thing I don't need, it's days off after I get the feel of things with my pitches."

"We went with my fastball more in this game, not as much slider. You know the story all year — one good slider and three bad ones."

"It's possible everybody put out just a little more today. They all want to get off on the right foot with a new manager. Billy is a different

type all right. For one thing, he talks all during the game, telling the guys on the bench what he's doing and why."

Dobson and former Yankee Fritz Peterson had a dual shutout going through five innings, then the Indians struck quickly for three with two out, Rick Manning, who had three hits for the losers, outran a bouncer to Sandy Alomar at second.

George Hendrick ripped a single up the middle and Powell slammed Dobson's first pitch over the wall in right center for his 17th homer to give the Tribe its three-spot.

Yanks respond

The Yanks bounced back with a pair in their half of the sixth, Roy White leading off with a disputed.

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Post 313 ties Legion series

By DON WILNO Staff Writer

BROOKLAWN — Two suicide squeeze attempts, one of which failed fundamentally, but still brought home a run, led to a two-run eighth inning, snapping the 5-5 tie to send Hamilton Post 313 to a 9-5 victory over Brooklawn Post 72 here yesterday in the second game of the American Legion District 4 semi-final series.

Hamilton PAL's come-from-behind series tied at one game each. The deciding game will be played here today at four p.m.

The winner will meet Sayreville Post 211, the Middlesex County representative, tomorrow at four p.m. at Sayreville High School in the opening game of the best-of-three District 4 championship. Sayreville is 17-7-1 and won the 'B' Division in Middlesex.

Chris Barlow, playing in his last game of the season for Post 313, opened the eighth with a bad pop single to third baseman Dan Poleiro. He moved around to third after Bob Lloyd's sacrifice bunt was thrown wildly to first by pitcher Bill Sword. Ken Sobolewski tried the first suicide squeeze attempt only to miss the ball. Barlow, caught between third

and home, retreated to the bag. Catcher Ted Frangos threw over Poleiro's head at third allowing the game-winning run to score.

After Vince Costa was hit on the left hand by Scott Patterson, the fourth Brooklawn pitcher, Jeff Plunkett executed a suicide squeeze perfectly as Lloyd came home with a critical insurance tally.

"We didn't go out and beat them," explained Hamilton manager Chuck Giambelluca, "but they themselves. If we wanted it, they beat us. We would have gone out there and destroyed them."

Post 313 had been humiliated Friday night at Mercer County Park, West Windsor, losing the first game of the series, 13-1.

"They gave us run"

"We miss a suicide play and their guy (Frangos) throws the ball away. They gave us that run," said Giambelluca. "Plunkett, though, lays down a real good bunt and gives us a big insurance run."

Hamilton PAL, the Mercer County champion, padded its advantage with

(Continued on Page 7, Col. 1)

CLEVELAND	NEW YORK	Total
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r	r	5
h	h	12
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e	e	3
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