



Plotting more Yank wins, pitcher Don Larsen talks with canny Casey Stengel.



Bums need pitcher Johnny Podres, returning from service this year.

Yankees is only approaching the peak of his ability and, barring injuries, should retain his triple crown. That is, he once again will lead the Majors in the three most important phases of hitting—batting average, home runs, and runs batted in.

The first and last of these accomplishments will be completely dwarfed by the explosiveness of Mantle's home-run bat. This should be the year he'll hit more than 60 homers to break the record set by the immortal Bambino back in 1927. Mickey came within eight of equaling the mark last year despite a slump in the closing stages of the race. This year, now that he has experienced the tremendous pressure which thwarted such sluggers as Jimmy Foxx, Hank Greenberg, Lou Gehrig, and Ralph Kiner, Mickey isn't likely to be bothered too much by it. He'll be more relaxed. And there's no telling what batting feats a relaxed Mickey Mantle might accomplish.

Records are made to be broken and Ruth's will be, durable as it's been. Casey Stengel, the wise old manager of the Yankees, says Mantle is the man who will break it. Bill Dickey, great Yankee catcher of another era and now a coach for the world champions, agrees 100 percent.

"Mickey," he says, "can hit a ball harder than anyone I've ever seen."

The Yankees, though destined to continue their American League reign, will find the competition stiffer this year, with both Boston and Detroit developing enough young talent to join Cleveland and Chicago in close pursuit. Unfortunately, the league lacks balance. Baltimore, Kansas City, and Washington have little to look forward to except the chore of playing out the 154-game schedule.

Al Lopez, who made a career of chasing Stengel home while managing the Indians, got ahead of ol' Casey once last Winter, but only by speaking before him at a banquet. As the new manager of the White Sox, he'll still be in pursuit of the Yankees, for Chicago lacks the pitching depth and hitting power to come out on top.

The Indians, under their new skipper, Kerby Farrell, have the pitching to carry them a long way, but not far enough. The Tribe has too many

weaknesses elsewhere. The real surprise may be furnished by the Tigers. If their new manager, Jack Tighe, can get his infield straightened out, the young Detroiters can finish second—and a close second, at that.

The National League race, which went right down to the wire last year, figures to produce another ding-dong finish with the Dodgers, Braves, and Redlegs once again running abreast. I look for Brooklyn to repeat as champion. True, the Dodgers are getting old, but they are not yet too old. The retirement of controversial Jackie Robinson may hurt somewhat because of the competitive lift he gave the club, but this should be more than offset by the return of Johnny Podres, hero of the 1955 World Series, to the pitching staff.

Milwaukee's Braves, the perennial bridesmaids, will make the run with the same team of horses which has failed in the past. The Cincinnati Redlegs, if they can find some pitching to go with their power, could win. But where is that pitching? St. Louis has an outside chance.

Perhaps the most interesting development of the year will involve the Chicago Cubs, who are engaged in a complete rebuilding job with new front-office personnel, a new manager, Bob Scheffing, and pretty much a new ball club. The Cubs are a cinch to be a better team than the misfit bunch which finished last in '56.

The American League will bounce back in Midsummer to win the All Star game and, as the season progresses, new names will begin to usurp the sports-page headlines. Here are a few names to remember:

Bobby Richardson, a second baseman who may force the Yankees to move Billy Martin to third base; Buddy Daley, "a new Herb Score" with the Indians; Heywood Sullivan, Red Sox catcher; Jim Landis, White Sox outfielder; Jim Bolger, Cub outfielder; Fred Kipp, Dodger pitcher; Curt Flood, Redleg infielder, and Juan Pizarro, 19-year-old pitcher with the Braves.

My choice for the outstanding young player of the year: Myron "Moe" Drabowsky, bonus right-hander of the Cubs, who was a small riot at the close of '56.



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