

LE DIAMANT.

Le quotidien du baseball montréalais · Montreal's baseball daily

MONTRÉAL · VENDREDI 2 MAI 1969 · FRIDAY, MAY 2, 1969

EXPOS 8-15 · 6TH, NL EAST · 7½ GB

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LES EXPOS · LE PREMIER MOIS

Close Enough to Hurt

April gave Montreal its first win, a sold-out opener and a 25-year-old who hits like a star. It also gave us a bullpen that could not hold a one-run lead to save its life.

PAR ÉMILE GAGNON · LE DIAMANT BASEBALL COLUMNIST

If you want the whole first month in one number, it is this: one and six. That is the Expos' record in games decided by a single run. Turn three of those six into wins and this club is 11-12, two games under .500 and the talk of the National League. Instead it is 8-15, sixth in the new East, 7½ games behind Pittsburgh. And the city is learning what every baseball town learns eventually: the close ones are the ones that keep you up at night.

It started like a dream. After a 5-4 loss at Shea in the first game this franchise ever played, the Expos came back two days later and pounded the Mets 11-3 for the first win in club history. Then they came home. On April 14, before 20,907 at Jarry Park, they beat the defending National League champion Cardinals 7-5. Grown men wept in the bleachers. I may have been one of them.

WHAT WENT RIGHT

Start on the mound, where Mudcat Grant has been everything the front office hoped. Five starts, a 2.48 earned run average, two complete games and a shutout, and somehow a 1-3 record to show for it. Larry Jaster has been nearly

as steady at 3.13. Steve Renko is 0-3, but his 3.75 ERA says he deserves better.

At the plate, Rusty Staub is becoming what we hoped. He sits at .287 with a .392 on-base percentage, and he has been on fire over the last ten games, hitting .424. Mack Jones leads the club with three home runs. Before he went down, Manny Mota was the best hitter in the league nobody was talking about at .426. Behind them, Maury Wills is quietly the best shortstop glove in the division, by the numbers the club keeps.

"Turn three of those six one-run losses into wins and this club is the talk of the National League."

The organization also used April to hire teachers. Andy Simpson, a pitching coach the league's insiders rate as the best in the business, now runs the staff. Jeff Vied takes over the hitters. And a new trainer, Earl Burns, is in charge of keeping young arms healthy. One office at Jarry Park is still empty: the manager's. Whoever fills it inherits a staff built to develop players, which is exactly what this franchise needs.

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BY THE NUMBERS

Record	8-15
One-run games	1-6
Runs scored / allowed	83/122
Grant's ERA	2.48
Staub, last 10	.424
Avg. home crowd	11,692

NL EAST · MAY 1

Pittsburgh	16-8
St. Louis	15-9
Chicago	13-11
New York	10-14
Philadelphia	9-14
Montréal	8-15

LES HONNEURS D'AVRIL

NL Batter of the Month: Richie Hebner, Pittsburgh. He was also Player of the Week Apr 28.

NL Pitcher of the Month: Gaylord Perry, San Francisco.

NL Rookie of the Month: Clay Kirby, San Diego, our expansion cousins.

Our own: West Palm Beach CF Don Bosch, Florida State League Player of the Week, Apr 28.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Now the bullpen, and I'll say it plainly. Carl Morton, Jerry Robertson and Don Shaw have pitched 27⅔ innings between them. They have walked 29 men and allowed 40 earned runs. Roy Face, 41 years old, has been fine as the closer with three saves and a 1.69 ERA, and Howie Reed hasn't allowed a run. But too many games in April were handed to Face in pieces, or never handed to him at all.

The young starters have growing pains of their own. Mike Wegener has walked 29 batters in 30 innings. Bill Stoneman has given up five home runs, the most on the staff. Both have the kind of arms you build a rotation around in three years, and both are learning on the job, in front of us. That is the deal an expansion city makes.

The bottom of the order needs a pulse, too. Donn Clendenon has struck out 27 times, more than anyone on the club. Ron Brand and Coco Laboy are hitting in the .230s and .240s without much power. Laboy does lead the team with 14 runs batted in, and he has been a fine third baseman with the glove.

And the crowds are thinning. After 20,907 on Opening Day, the last homestand against the Mets drew about 9,000 a night. That's the honeymoon

wearing off, not the love. Win a few one-run games and they'll come back.

DOWN ON THE FARM

There is life in Florida. At West Palm Beach, catcher John Boccabella is hitting .384 with four home runs, and outfielder Floyd Wicker is getting on base at a .538 clip. With John Bateman hitting .143 as the backup catcher in Montreal, you can expect calls for Boccabella to grow louder. On the mound, 22-year-old closer Bob Reynolds has a 0.98 ERA and five saves, and 18-year-old lefty Balor Moore has 37 strikeouts in 27 innings. Les nôtres in the Gulf Coast League, Dostaler, McSween and MacKenzie, don't open until June 24. Manitoba's Hank Zacharias is 4-for-12 at West Palm.

WHAT COMES NEXT

May opens at home against the first-place Pirates, which is either a terrible draw or exactly the test a young club wants. Mota is due back late in the month. The trading deadline is June 25, and I'd expect this front office to be shopping for a reliever who can throw strikes long before then.

Eight and fifteen is not where anyone wants to be. But 1-6 in one-run games is the kind of record that evens out, and the team underneath it is better than the standings say. Patience, Montréal. On a été proches. We were close. Next month, let's be closer.

L'ÉTAT DU CLUB

Strength: Grant and Jaster at the top of the rotation, and Staub and Jones in the lineup.

Worry: a bullpen that walks the park.

Watch: Boccabella's bat, and the empty manager's office.

Next: Pirates at Jarry Park, May 2–4.

LES NÔTRES · HOMETOWN WATCH

Hank Zacharias, OF	4-for-12
Michel Dostaler, RHP	GCL, Jun 24
Mac McSween, LHP	GCL, Jun 24
Bill MacKenzie, C	GCL, Jun 24

APRIL'S BEST DAY

Apr 14, Jarry Park. Expos 7, Cardinals 5. The first major league game ever played in Canada, before 20,907 people.