

LE DIAMANT.

Le quotidien du baseball montréalais · Montreal's baseball daily

MONTRÉAL · MARDI 8 AVRIL 1969 · TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 1969 OPENING DAY · EXPOS AT METS, SHEA STADIUM, 2:05 P.M. 10 ¢

LES EXPOS · JOUR 1

Play Ball, Montréal

The major leagues finally cross the border today. The roster is thin, the farm system is a blank page, and the city could not care less. It has a ball club.

PAR ÉMILE GAGNON · LE DIAMANT BASEBALL COLUMNIST

Somewhere on Rue Saint-Denis this morning, a waiter is going to lean over a table and ask a customer whether Staub can hit National League pitching. Two years ago that question would have been nonsense in this city. Today it is the only conversation in town.

At 2:05 this afternoon, in a borough of New York most Montrealers have never seen, the Expos will take the field for the first time. They are the first major league club ever based outside the United States. They are named for the world's fair that put this city on the map in 1967. And they belong to us now, a team that did not exist when the snow started falling last winter.

Let me tell you what that feels like from here. It feels like the Forum on a playoff night, except it is April and the ice has been put away. People who could not name a shortstop at Christmas are arguing about the batting order on the Métro. The tickets for next Monday's home opener at Jarry Park, all 28,250 seats of it, are the hottest paper in the province.

WHAT WE HAVE

Start with Rusty Staub, because everyone else does. He is 25, he hit .291 for Houston last year, and the club's own scouts grade him as the best player in the building with room still to grow. He will

play right field and bat in the heart of the order every day, and if this franchise has a face for the next decade, it is probably his.

Around him the front office has assembled a lineup of men with something to prove. Mack Jones in left. Manny Mota, a professional hitter, at second. Bob Bailey at first, a 26-year-old who looks like the second-best long-term piece on the roster. Donn Clendenon, who hit 17 home runs for Pittsburgh last year, in center. And at shortstop, at 36 years old, Maury Wills, who stole 52 bases last season and will be the first man in the batter's box who makes the other dugout nervous.

"The lineup is a collection of veterans looking for a second chance. The farm system is a promise. Montreal will take both."

The pitching is honest work rather than glamour. Mudcat Grant leads a rotation of Bill Stoneman, Mike Wegener, Larry Jaster and Steve Renko, and Roy Face, 41 years young, closes. The two arms worth watching are the young ones, Renko and Stoneman. Their best years are still in front of them, and so is everything else about this club.

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BY THE NUMBERS

Active roster	25
Minor league clubs	2
Jarry Park seats	28,250
Games on the schedule	162
Wills' 1968 steals	52
Staub's age	25
Face's age	41

OPENING FORTNIGHT

Apr 8-10	at New York
Apr 11-13	at Chicago
Apr 14-15	vs St. Louis · Jarry Park opener
Apr 16-17	at Philadelphia
Apr 19-20	vs Chicago

NL EAST · 1968 FINISH

St. Louis	97-65
Chicago	84-78
Pittsburgh	80-82
Philadelphia	76-86
New York	73-89
Montréal	new

WHAT WE DON'T HAVE

Here is the part the posters on the lampposts leave out. Behind these 25 men there is almost nothing. The Expos have exactly two minor league clubs: a Class A team in West Palm Beach and a rookie team in the Gulf Coast League that won't even play until late June. There is no Triple-A club and no Double-A club. When a regular pulls a hamstring in May, there is no one in a nearby city waiting by the phone.

The best prospect in the system, by the organization's own grades, is a 22-year-old relief pitcher at West Palm Beach named Bob Reynolds. After him come a pair of teenagers: an 18-year-old lefty named Balor Moore and a 17-year-old switch-hitting center fielder named Tony Scott. This farm system will be built one draft at a time, and the first of those drafts comes in July.

To the front office's credit, it seems to know this. The word from camp is that the club spent the final days of spring hunting for coaches who teach, not just coaches who manage. When there is no depth to buy, you have to grow it, and growing it takes teachers.

LES NÔTRES

And yes, there are a few of our own in the system. The one I'll be watching is Michel Dostaler, an 18-year-old right-

hander born right here in Montreal, who reports to the Gulf Coast club this summer. With him is Mac McSween, a 16-year-old lefty from Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, the youngest player in the organization. Further along, catcher Bill MacKenzie of Pictou, Nova Scotia, and outfielder Hank Zacharias of Winkler, Manitoba, carry the Maple Leaf through the system. None of them is close to Jarry Park yet. All of them are the reason to check the box scores from Florida this summer.

SO WHAT DO WE EXPECT?

Let's be grown-ups about it. The last National League expansion club, the 1962 Mets, lost 120 games. Nobody in this city is ordering pennant bunting. A team with this little depth will have long weeks in July, and some of those weeks will be painful.

But that is not what today is about. Today Montreal gets a box score in the morning paper with its own name on top. It gets to boo the umpire in two languages. It gets to watch a 25-year-old redhead grow into a star in front of its own eyes. I'll put my marker down: 60 wins, a full house at Jarry Park more often than anyone in New York expects, and at least one summer evening this city will never forget.

Bienvenue au baseball majeur, Montréal. Play ball.

LES NÔTRES · HOMETOWN WATCH

Michel Dostaler, RHP, 18	Montréal
Mac McSween, LHP, 16	Valleyfield
Bill MacKenzie, C, 22	Pictou, N.S.
Hank Zacharias, OF, 23	Winkler, Man.

Dostaler, McSween and MacKenzie open with the Gulf Coast club in late June. Zacharias is at West Palm Beach.

L'ÉTAT DU CLUB

Strength: a real top of the order in Staub, Jones and Mota.

Worry: no Triple-A or Double-A safety net.

Watch: Renko and Stoneman, the young arms with room to grow.

Next: the First-Year Player Draft, July 7.