

Jason Thompson scores with young Tiger fans

By SHIRLEE IDEN
Jason Thompson, who doesn't believe in setting long-range goals, said before last Saturday's Tiger game that he didn't really care if his home run total stayed at 24 for the season.

Then he promptly got up for his first time at bat in the second inning and laced a 380-foot homer into the upper deck in right-center field.

And on Sunday, he hit another homer, a line drive which split a seat in the upper deck, making it 26 round trippers for the second-year Tiger.

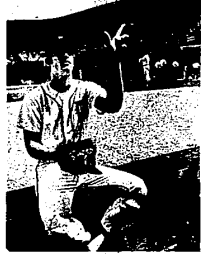
The lanky first baseman's success with the bat has added up to an impressive total of 53 runs batted in, putting him up with the American League leaders, currently third.

"What I really want is to be a consistent hitter," Thompson said. "My main goal is to keep improving and to keep knocking in runs."

One recently-set goal, he said, is to get the 100 mark in RBIs. "And I'd like to raise my average to about .280," he added.

At age 23, Thompson can look back on 15 years of playing baseball, a game he's found fun since age seven or so.

"I was a pitcher and a first baseman," he said. "At college, which was California State at Northridge, I spent three years at as a pitcher and was also the DH (designated hitter)."



Thompson gets the feel of the baseball (above) on the dugout steps before a recent game. The Tiger first baseman is "Jaassunn" to his young fans (below), and they mob around him in great numbers wherever he is.



Thursday, September 1, 1977

(F)IC

THOMPSON COMPLETED three years of college before going into professional baseball. He took business courses, but his plans today include only baseball. He said he hopes to play for about 15 years and then land some sort of job in baseball.

A Southfield resident, Thompson enjoys living in a large apartment complex with six or seven of his Tiger teammates. Thompson lives alone, but Tiger infielder Phil Mankowski is his roommate when the team is on the road.

"I like Southfield a lot," Thompson said. "But I could never make it through the winter here. I go back to California and just relax in the winter."

Rangy and well-built at 6-foot-4 and 210 pounds, Thompson said that when he doesn't work, he puts on weight. So he runs regularly and lifts weights during the winter months.

Asked if the running was for endurance or speed, Thompson laughed and replied, "If it was for speed, it sure hasn't helped."

Tiger teammates are his social buddies since he doesn't really know anyone in Michigan. He likes to play as much golf as possible and he hunts whenever he gets the chance.

"I don't play winter ball, because I find the regular season is such a mental strain and I just want to relax when it's over."

Although he's something of a hero himself to young and old Tiger fans, Thompson has his own baseball heroes, who include Hank Aaron, Carl Yastrzemski and Nolan Ryan.

"At least Ryan was my hero until I had to bat against him," Thompson said with a smile.

IT'S BEEN a season of thrills for Thompson, but two things stand out: being named to the 1977 All Star game and hitting a homerun clear out of Tiger Stadium.

"Being at the All Star Game was really exciting," he said. "Especially with Willie Mays and Joe DiMaggio being there, too."

Asked why he didn't even crack a smile when he was introduced during the pre-game ceremonies, he laughed and said: "Too nervous, that's all."

Admitting he was disappointed at not getting into the All Star game at Yankee Stadium, he said he hoped to be back next year.

Thompson's second thrill, that super-long home run, left him actually shaking.

"It was fantastic," he said. "I didn't get over it for the rest of the game. I put me in pretty nice company with guys like Ted Williams, Norm Cash and Mickey Mantle."

Thompson, always an optimist about the Tigers, predicts that the team is going to improve — and soon.

"We've got a lot of young guys, and once we get more experience, we'll do okay," he said. "The pitchers are going to be just great."

IN THOMPSON'S opinion, Tiger manager Ralph Houk has been "great."

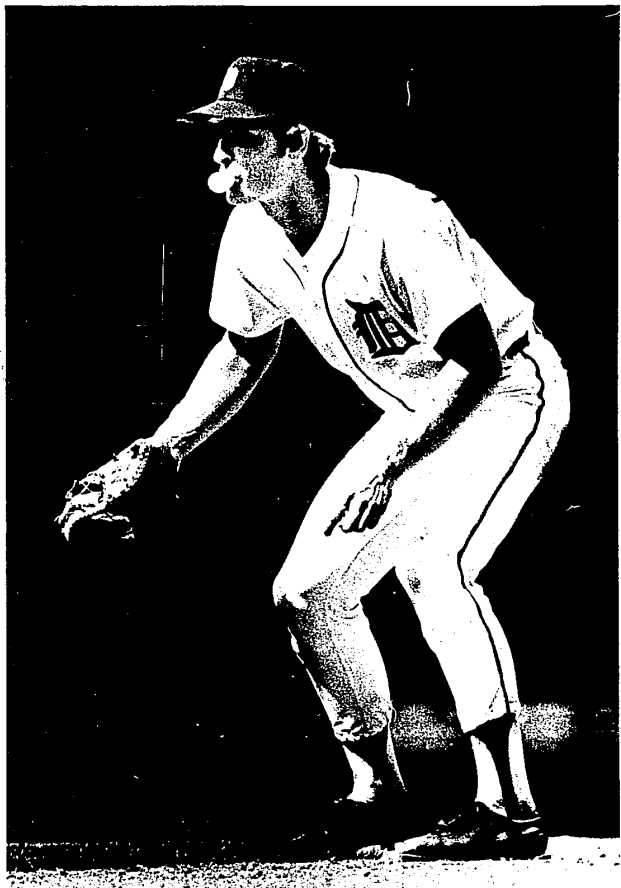
"He does nothing to hurt the confidence of the younger guys," the first baseman said. "He just tells us to relax, don't worry about being platooners, and do the job."

Another Tiger plus has been Mark "The Bird" Fidrych, according to Thompson. "If The Bird had been pitching, we'd have had more wins in that column," Thompson said. "Even not pitching, he was good for morale, all right." Fidrych was recently sent home for the rest of the season.

Thompson pointed out that the Tigers' 1968 World Series win was the result of a long building process, and that's just what's going on now.

"We have to play together for a long time until everyone knows what to expect," he said. "We're getting closer to getting it all together."

Thompson is "Jaassunn" to his young fans, and they mob around in great numbers wherever he is. Going back into the dugout before the game last Saturday, he was stampeded by youngsters waving scorebooks for autographs.



Jason Thompson, always an optimist about the Tigers, predicts that the team is going to improve — and soon. (Staff photos by Gary Friedman)

Three times the ushers asked Thompson to stop the autograph signing so the patrons could be seated in the boxes next to the dugout. Three

times Thompson ignored the ushers, never changing expression. Finally, he had to end the session and go into the dugout.

"Sorry," he apologized to his young fans, "we've got to break it off now." But they all knew that their hero was on their side.



O&E tournament popular

Entries for the men's portion of the Observer & Eccentric Open Golf Tournament have been returned at a faster rate this summer than last year, when the largest field in the eight-year history of the tourney leaped off at Whispering Willows. "They're coming in pretty strong

Men's, Women's Open Golf Tournaments
Sponsored by the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and Whispering Willows Municipal Golf Course

MEN'S
36 holes medal play; Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 10 and 11. Entry fee: \$22 (greens fees, trophies and prizes.)

WOMEN'S
18 holes medal play; Thursday, Sept. 15. Entry fee: \$10 (greens fees, basket of practice balls and trophies). Make checks payable to Gary Whitener, tournament director and enclose with entry blank.

NAME _____

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PHONE _____ HANDICAP _____

Men's entries close Tuesday, Sept. 6 at 6 p.m. Call for starting times on Friday, Sept. 9 after 9 a.m.
Women's entries close Monday, Sept. 12 at 5 p.m. Call for starting times Wednesday, Sept. 14 after 9 a.m.

Open to all residents of Livonia, Plymouth, Canton, Garden City, Westland, Redford Township, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Southfield, Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills, Troy, Rochester and Avon Township.

Entries may be mailed to Tournament Director Gary Whitener, Whispering Willows Golf Course, 20690 Newburgh, Livonia.

now," said Tom Sheldon, assistant pro at the Livonia municipal course located at Eight Mile and Newburgh. Sheldon said he has processed approximately 90 entry blanks.

Two-hundred two men started play in last year's tournament. Traditionally, Gary Whitener, pro at Whispering Willows and tournament director, and Sheldon have experienced a crush of last-minute entries. "Last year, we had 100 entries turned in on the last day," said Whitener.

"They just kept stopping by and dropping them off like crazy," Sheldon added. "We could hardly keep up with them."

Entries for the men's tourney—18 holes both Sept. 10 and 11—must be received with the \$22 entry fee by 5 p.m. Sept. 6. Whitener said that no more than 225 entries will be accepted.

Bill Curtis, from Farmington, and Bud Stevens, of Livonia, both former champions, have submitted their entries for this year's tourney. As of Tuesday afternoon, none of the 1976 champions had registered.

Sheldon reported that entries for the women's 18-hole tournament, slated for Sept. 15, have been trickling in. The registration deadline for women is Sept. 12. Their entry fee is \$10.

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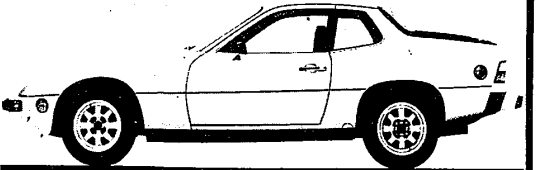
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