

New Hitter Rule Gets The Best Of Tigers

By W.W. EDGAR

Although the major league baseball season is only one week old, the new designated hitter rule that was the main topic of discussion during the long winter months, already is proving to be the tonic needed for what once was called the national pastime.

Designed to create more interest in the game by permitting an extra hitter to be placed in the lineup in place of the pitcher — or any other player — and to give new life to many of the veteran players, it is doing just that.

Take the case of Tommy Davis, the Baltimore outfielder who ruined the Tigers' opener on Wednesday and sent them down to a 3-1 defeat in 12 frigid innings.

Thirty-four years old and considered past his peak, he had been released by the Oakland Athletics because of poor legs and later dropped by the Chicago Cubs before the Orioles picked him up a year ago.

All he has done thus far is win two of the Orioles' first three games and he was the thorn in the side of the Tigers on opening day. He

drove in two runs and they were more than enough to offset the Tigers' lone hit — Norm Cash's home run in the second inning.

Woody Fryman, the Tigers' starting hurler, was riding along on a one hitter until the seventh inning. He was working with a one run lead and seemed headed for a shutout by the manner in which he was pitching.

Little fear was felt when Don Baylor, the Oriole outfielder, opened with a single. But he moved around to third on two infield outs and was standing on third base when Davis, the designated hitter, came to bat and lined a single to left field that tied the score.

This made it a new ball game.

For the next four innings

both teams struggled. Then came the 12th and doom. And who caused it? The designated hitter.

Again Baylor started the damage with a double and that left it up to Davis, who wasted no time lining one of Lerrin La Grow's pitches into left field for a double that gave the Orioles the edge they needed to go on and win.

There were many in the gathering of 46,389 half frozen spectators who claimed Jim Northrup, the Tiger left fielder, played the ball poorly — that he misjudged it and let it go. But the ball was well hit and into the corner of left field.

It was an odd twist for Davis, too.

Only a year ago he spurned an offer of \$80,000 to play ball in Japan, claiming that the new designated hitter rule could be a career saver for him.

"My wife wouldn't let me go to Japan alone," he said after the game, "and now I'm glad I stayed. That designated hitter rule is a lifesaver."

Until Davis made his presence felt, the game was a great pitching duel between Fryman and Jim Palmer, ace of the Oriole staff.

While Fryman had allowed only one hit, Palmer was touched for four, including

Cash's home run, and seemed to be getting stronger.

But when Davis went to work in the seventh inning the tide turned and he made the designers of the new rule, look good.

On the other hand, Billy Martin was unlucky with his designated hitters—Gates Brown and Frank Howard. Gates got a single in the fourth with one on base and Howard flied out on his appearance.

The season still has a long way to go, but if the first week is any criterion, the designated hitter rule, will provide many exciting moments before the snow falls.

Second Guessing Billy Martin?

So you'd like to be a baseball manager — in the big leagues.

Okay.

Here's a test for you.

Suppose your team was riding along with a one run lead and your pitcher had allowed only one hit during the first six innings.

Then, in the seventh, the first batter singled. The next grounded out on a hard hit ball.

Would you consider taking the pitcher out of the game — or would you let him stay in after talking to him?

Well, that's what Billy Martin, the Tiger manager did on opening day.

He walked to the mound and talked things over with Woody Fryman — and allowed him to stay in the game.

But Billy's confidence boomeranged when Tom-

my Davis, the designated hitter singled, drove in a

run, tied the score and changed the entire ball game.

Then, in the 12th, after Lerrin LaGrow had pitched three fine innings in relief, Billy walked out to the mound and talked to him. LaGrow had allowed the first batter to double.

Was he weakening? Was the pressure getting to the newcomer?

Bill talked to him — and allowed him to stay.

You know what happened.

That man Davis hit the next pitch into the left field corner and drove in the run that conquered the Tigers.

Immediately, the second guessers went to work on Billy.

Why didn't he remove the pitcher?

Well, you're the manager now. What would you have done?



BILLY MARTIN
"Twas A Cold Opener

WOODY FRYMAN GAVE IT ALL and then some in the Detroit Tiger home opener against the Baltimore Orioles. It wasn't enough as the Tigers were knocked off in 12 innings, 3-1. (Observer photo by Tom Donaghy)

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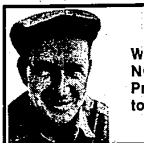
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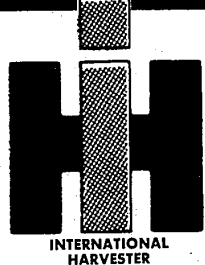


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