

Wednesday, July 12, 1989

San Francisco Chronicle

# SPORTING GREEN

## Beware of Those Midseason Stats

By Richard Zitrin  
Special to The Chronicle

It's the All-Star break — time to evaluate the season and predict the second-half performances. Fantasy-leaguers must decide whether to ride the same horses or change in midstream. They'd be wise to consider the Reitz-Madlock syndrome.

Ken Reitz and Bill Madlock had superficial similarities. Both were born in 1951. Each reached the majors in the early '70s, and both were starting third basemen in the National League for the rest of the decade. Both played for the Giants, Reitz in 1976, followed by Madlock from 1977 to mid-'79.

In ability, though, they weren't close. Madlock, a lifetime .305 hitter, won four batting titles and hit better than .300 eight times. Reitz never hit more than .271 and was washed up at age 30.

Yet back then, if you checked the league leaders in May, odds are you found Reitz's name at the top and Madlock's near the bottom.

In the seven years they were both regulars, Reitz averaged .341 in the season's first month, or 81 points over his lifetime average. He hit over .400 twice, led the league twice, was second once and in the top 10 four times.

Madlock, on the other hand, averaged .263, or 42 points below his average. In his last two seasons with the Giants, he spent the spring under .200. In '79, his .156 propped up the whole league. The Giants, fed up, traded him to Pittsburgh, where he came alive, hit .328 and starred in the World Series.

### Some Like It Hot

It's July, not mid-May, but — like Reitz and Madlock — certain players tend to struggle in the spring and thrive in the summer, while others tend to spurt in the first half, then sputter later on.

Before you throw in the towel on Jack Clark (.227, 9 home runs) or Eddie Murray (.241, 9 homers), remember that these two sluggers have had even worse starts, only to finish the season like gangbusters.

Last season, Terry Steinbach, averaging just .217, was named the starting All-Star catcher. The critics howled, but Steinbach showed them. First, he was the game's hero. Then he had a great second half to finish with a solid .265. This season, Steinbach reached the break at .322. Not a soul objected when he was again named an All-Star starter.

Bo Jackson topped the American League All-Stars in votes this

season. He shows more talent in one sprint to first base than Reitz showed in a whole career. But if past performance is any guide, Bo may think more about baseball before the All-Star break, and more about his hobbies afterward.

In 1987, Bo hit .254 before the break, just .188 after. Last season, he hit .287 before the break, then .209 in the second half. He's baseball's best athlete — but this might be the time to trade him for top value.

Hitting is a streaky business. True yearlong consistency is rare. Perhaps the most consistent hitter of the '80s has been Keith Hernandez, who until his recent injuries put together first and second halves that were clones of each other.

### Not So Consistent

Over the past five seasons, Carney Lansford looks like Mr. Consistency. He's finished each season batting between .277 and .300, and his home run and RBI totals have been just as consistent.

Yet each separate season is a roller-coaster ride. The last time Lansford hit .300, he was only .259 at the All-Star break, then .347 in the second half. In 1988, he was hitting over .400 in June and .331 at the break, then had a horrible .185 second half.

This year Lansford is well over .300 again. But he hasn't put together two top-notch half-seasons since he won the batting championship in 1981.

Of course, this could be the year Jackson leaves "potential" behind. And maybe Clark is starting to feel the effects of all those injuries. Predicting future performance based on past history is guesswork, but sometimes it's all there is to go on.

The trade that brought Steve Bedrosian to the Giants started a game of musical chairs that changed the value of several relief pitchers. At times like this, all a fantasy-league owner can do is sit back and wait for the music to stop.

The trade sent Bedrosian's value skyrocketing. He'll have many more chances to save games for the Giants than he did in Philadelphia.

Roger McDowell and Rick Aguilera's stock also jumped. McDowell replaces Bedrosian as Philly's stopper, just weeks after he had lost his job on the Mets to Aguilera. And with McDowell traded, Aguilera is firmly established as the Mets' main bullpen right-hander.