

*AN OLD MAN? LET'S SEE.*

The warm autumn sun flooded Buckley Stadium as the Blue-Jays prepared to meet the fourth-place Chicago entry for the final game of the season. At game time, the Blue-Jays held a narrow half-game margin over the idle New York team, which had ended the season the day before with a 4-1 win over Philadelphia. The Blue-Jays had to win this one to take the pennant; a loss would force them into a post-season play-off with New York. The Blue-Jay manager, doughty old Bud Foster, realized that this would be disastrous. His squad had climbed from fourth place in mid-July to first in the final weeks of the season, in a rags-to-riches drive that stunned fans throughout the National Baseball League. Now, some of his key veterans were beginning to wilt and his pitching staff was overworked and tired. A win today was necessary, but it wouldn't be an easy victory. Chicago was only half a game behind third-place Cincinnati, and a Chicago win against the Blue-Jays today, combined with a Cincinnati loss to St. Louis, would put each Chicago player in line for the third-place share of the World Series gate receipts. Each team was out to win this encounter.

At 2:15 the umpires finished their conference at home plate, and gigantic Bill Wilson, the umpire-in-chief, bellowed "Play Ball."

The Blue-Jays took the field first, and their ace Tom Hall, with an 18-10 won-lost record to date, tossed his preliminary warm-up pitches as the Chicago lead-off batter looked on. At third base today, manager Foster decided to go along with his aging veteran Buddy Savage. Savage had been a standout player in his day, but now, at 36, he was slowing down. The year before, he had been frequently plagued by lumbar miseries, and this year he had to share the third-base chore with Freddy Coleman, a brash, green rookie brought up from Sacramento during the Spring training work-outs. Coleman had been used almost exclusively in these last few weeks to gain additional experience. Now, with one big game remaining, Foster decided to stick with his ring-wise, but rested veteran.

Savage, the owner of a .312 batting average that covered a span of fourteen seasons, and who could cavort around the infield with the best of them in his day, had decided to call it a career at the end of the season. For this reason, he was determined to bow out with a performance the fans would remember. Besides, the Blue-Jays had to win this one if they were to meet the Red Sox in the Series, did they not?

Opposing the Blue-Jays in this contest, the power-laden Chicago team sent Pete D'Alesandro to the hill, hoping to add another victory to his 21-9 record. Chicago picked up a run in the second and two

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more in the sixth inning on back-to-back homers by Schypinski and Conley, their slugging outfield duo. The rally might have continued except for two sparkling grabs by the ancient, but nimble Savage at the far corner. The Blue-Jays had scored three runs in the fourth so that, when they came to bat in the bottom half of the eighth inning the count was knotted at 3-3.

In the last half of the eighth inning, Melton, the Blue-Jay clean-up batter, looked at a third strike, but Carter, the next batter, walked. Playing for one run now, in the late stages of this important game, Manager Foster ordered a sacrifice bunt. The sacrifice was successful, but Carter wrenched his knee sliding into second base on the close play. Looking down the bench, Foster sent the young rookie Coleman in to run for the injured Carter. With two out and Coleman stationed on second, Wade, the Blue-Jay catcher, lifted a short single to left field sending Coleman to third.

For a moment no one emerged from the dugout. Then a roar went up from the stands as the venerable third sacker, Savage, batting in the eighth slot, appeared and shuffled towards the plate. D'Alesandro, the Chicago moundsman, toed the dirt around the rubber as Savage adjusted his cap, picked up a handful of sand and dug in at the plate. "This is it," he said to himself as he faced the experienced righthander, "This is our chance to go out in front."

The first pitch was low. Then "Time" was called as the Chicago pitcher, catcher and manager conferred at the mound. D'Alesandro, with two out, wanted to give Savage an intentional pass to get at the weak-hitting pitcher. Both he and the chunky backstop feared that Savage might find one more devastating wallop in his once potent bat. Howell, the Chicago manager, pointed out that the Blue-Jays would probably send in Keller, a powerful reserve outfielder, to pinch hit should they load the bases. After a brief discussion it was decided that it would be better to work on Savage.

A hush descended over the stadium as the catcher squatted behind the plate and D'Alesandro, now perspiring profusely, checked the runners. The pitch was low but in the strike zone. Savage whipped the bat around and met the ball squarely. It was timed perfectly and the ball sailed down along the left field line towards the bleachers. The spectators were in an uproar and every Blue-Jay fan was up and screaming, following the flight of the ball. D'Alesandro's shoulders sagged wearily. The Chicago left-fielder drifted over after it, but slowed down as he saw it going into the stands FOUL! The ball landed in the upper deck, foul by seven feet. Umpire Wilson flashed the foul signal and the runners returned to their stations. Savage dug in at the plate and faced the pitcher again. D'Alesandro was white as chalk and his uniform



shirt was soaked in perspiration. His catcher trotted out to meet him with a word of encouragement and a pat on the back before crouching behind the plate again.

"I almost had it that time. Damn the luck!" Savage muttered to himself. "I've got to keep calm — just meet it, Pop, just a single." D'Alesandro was up on top again peering down for the sign. At last he nodded and checked the runners, who were edging off their bases again. This time it was a fast, sweeping "rainbow curve." Savage stepped in to meet this one and sent a prodigious fly towering out of the park and into the railroad yards behind third base; another foul. "Strike two," Wilson boomed.

D'Alesandro looked as though he were ready to melt now as two relievers hurriedly heated up in the Chicago bullpen.

The catcher snapped a new ball to the mound and strolled behind the plate again. Savage stepped out of the batter's box and ran a handful of sand along the handle of the bat. He looked at the dugout and the manager indicated that he was on his own. Savage lingered a moment before stepping in again, giving the opposing hurler ample time to sweat it out. He gave Wade and Coleman a meaningful stare and then carelessly wiped his hand across the letters of his shirt. Wilson edged off first base with a look that indicated that he caught the sign. Coleman, however, remained rooted on third, staring incredulously first at Savage, then at the third base coach, and finally, at the dugout.

"Damn that green busher," Savage thought, "Does he want to give it away?" A faint nod from the skipper told Coleman to go along with Savage's plan. With sixteen years as a player and nine more as a manager in the majors, Foster was no stranger to the game. He respected his veteran's judgement, and, although he never would have ordered such an unorthodox play himself, perhaps Savage had noticed something he had missed. All these thoughts had run through his mind in a few short seconds, and the tense Chicago squad, intent upon placing their fielders strategically, neglected to notice Savage's "meaningless gesture."

D'Alesandro was visibly unnerved now. Savage's wand had unloaded two mastodonic blasts. He was in trouble. The crafty veteran was giving him a rough time. The Chicago players respected Savage's once-feared bat, and these last two towering blows assured them that there was still some fight left in this fading hot-corner guardian.

The third baseman was hugging close to the line, laying back on the outfield grass, and the shortstop and second baseman were playing deep, both shaded around to the left field side of second



base, ready to grab a sizzling drive should it come their way. The first baseman held Wade close to the initial sack.

An expectant hush fell on the 47,053 spectators as D'Alesandro looked in for the sign. He shook off one sign, then another and a third. Then Weaver, the catcher, strode out to meet his exasperated hurler.

"Listen," he said, "You shook off the sign for a fast ball, a curve, and a change-up. What would you like to try now . . . . . how about rolling it in perhaps?" he added tauntingly. They were both under a severe strain.

"Nothin', I don't want to throw nothin'," The swarthy Italian murmured. "Let's call it a day and go home." After a brief huddle, Weaver returned to his position and D'Alesandro prepared to face Savage again.

Savage made sure the runners were on their toes, ready to put his surprise move into execution. With the next pitch, Wade took off towards second base and Coleman charged for the plate. The pitch was a bit high, but Savage spun around to face the mound and dropped a perfect bunt down the third base line. Bunting with two strikes on him! Savage scampered to first as fast as his aching legs would take him, as the third baseman and the pitcher were caught napping. Coleman scored and there was no play on either Wade or Savage. The next batter was retired easily on a slow roller back to the mound, but the damage was already done.

In the ninth inning, the cunning reliefer, Chico Pieretti, retired the Chicago side in order and the Blue-Jays were champions of the National League. Pandemonium broke loose as the final put-out was made, and the fans swarmed onto the field to mob Savage, the old warrior, as he trudged off the field for the last time.

— "SIX" '57

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### GUESS WHO ? ?

I come from the wide open spaces;  
I come with a sleeve full of aces;  
When playing at hearts  
Against you upstarts,  
That's when I use my social graces.

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On the field, well, pretty nimble;  
Off the field, twixt tube and symbol;  
Comments on philosophy  
'Specially theses he can't see;