

Gilliam: Unsung, Unhonored--and Unsurpassed

Dodger Mates Salute Jim as Ideal Player

By BOB HUNTER

VERO BEACH, Fla.

Jim Gilliam is baseball's forgotten man, except to those who know him best—his teammates.

Willie Mays may be the most spectacular. Don Drysdale may be the most intense. Mickey Mantle may be the biggest threat. But Gilliam is the original forgotten man and, at the same time, as incongruous as it may sound, one of baseball's most expert performers.

He's seldom had a "regular" job in almost 20 years, yet each season, the record shows, Junior has played his 145 games.

But, through it all, he has been unsung, unheralded, unhonored — and, significantly, untraded.

In 1953, as a youngster up from Montreal, he did win the Rookie of the Year award and, ten long years later, at the age of 34, he was voted to sixth place on the National League's MVP roster.

But, to the world champions themselves, and those who know the fine mechanism of baseball, Gilliam is the guts of the Dodgers.

Twenty-four players, a manager, four coaches, a business manager and this writer will tell you that.

Never Moans, Gives 100 Per Cent

"He doesn't make any mistakes," Walter Alston said on the first day of spring training. "He gives you 100 per cent, day in and day out. He never moans. He's a good team man. If I had eight like him, I wouldn't have to have a single sign."

As usual, Gilliam has no job at the moment.

It's been that way every spring. Last year was no exception and this writer asked him why he was spending so much time tutoring Nate Oliver to take his job.

"I'm just helping him. I ain't teaching nobody to take my job. I'll play my 145 games some place," he answered sharply.

He did. And I thought it was his best season ever. Fresco Thompson agreed. However, Gilliam reserves that distinction for the year of 1956, his only .300 season.

"I wasn't supposed to be a regular that year, either," recalled the dean of the Dodgers. "But Sandy Amoros got hurt in the spring and they sent me to left field, where I stayed almost all season."

Four Jobs as Big Timer

He has performed at four positions in the majors—second and third base and left and right field. In the minors, he also played at shortstop and in center field.

Forget figures when assaying the value of Gilliam to a team.

When the phrase "team player" was coined, it was coined for Junior. As far as he's concerned, he's faceless and nameless. Leave his name out of the box score, as far as he's concerned. He's one player who thinks only in terms of the impersonal message of the scoreboard.

"There's no use to look for any



JIM GILLIAM . . . He's Forgotten Man — Except by His Dodger Teammates

L. A. Writers Tabbed Jim 'Ball Players' Ball Player'

VERO BEACH, Fla.—In 1962, the Greater Los Angeles Press Club initiated its Ball Players' Ball Player Award.

The first recipient was — who else? — Junior Jim Gilliam, the forgotten man of baseball, and the unsung hero of the Dodgers for 11 years.

"Individualism in my story," confessed Gilliam, as solid an endorsement for baseball as the National Pastime ever has known. "There's no use to look, because it isn't there. I don't get paid to hit home runs or that sort of stuff. I get paid to score a lot of runs, knock in some and move the runner into scoring position.

"I would not rate myself a great ball player, but I think I do a lot of things well—things which beat the other team."

One season, after he had hit .249, coach Jake Pitler told him:

"They can't keep you out of the lineup, Junior, because you're one great offensive player. Good clubs have to have a guy like you because you make a team move."

Gilliam, although an outstanding leadoff man, has been hitting second behind Maury Wills, just as he did in 1962 when the Los Angeles green light bandit swiped 104 bases. This meant Jim took many, many pitches, in order to help Maury.

He is the rare player who can take

two strikes and still get a piece of the third one. Gilliam's record through the years shows he always is one of the toughest to fan and he also is a leader in runs scored.

"We were winning games and that's what we were paid to do," went on Gilliam. "If Maury could steal second and I could move him to third and someone score him with a fly, that was what we wanted. With our pitching, one run often is a big run."

"It's Team Game," Says Jim

"Baseball, to me, always has been a team game.

"I think our loss in 1962 made us a team, rather than so many individuals."

Leo Durocher is a member of the legion that readily recognizes Gilliam's quietly productive talents:

"I never had him on my side when I was managing, but I wish I had. What a guy. He never—and I mean never—misses a sign. He does everything right. He's a double pro."

Gilliam learned the hard way, as a kid. He was a bat boy for the Elite Giants of Nashville. At 17, they asked him to join the team as, believe it or not, a utility infielder.

Credits Pair of Tutors

Asked the standard question of who helped him the most, Junior gave a non-standard answer:

"I'd have to say Henry Kimbrough and George Scales." Then he added quickly, "You never heard of them."

Gilliam gives Kimbrough credit for making him the type of hitter he has been for the Dodgers for the past 11 years.

"Henry was a great leadoff man for the Elite Giants. He told me the one thing I must learn was the strike zone.

"He wouldn't swing at a ball an inch off the plate. That's when I learned I couldn't get good wood on a bad pitch.

"George Scales was our coach then and he's the man who gave me confidence and converted me into a switch-hitter. When I started with the club as a utilityman, I batted right-

'Don't Be a Know-It-All,'

Jim Tells Young Players

VERO BEACH, Fla.—Jim Gilliam, the senior statesman of the world champs, has some advice, when asked for it by youngsters embarking on a baseball career.

"Above all, don't be a 'Know-It-All.' Even if you don't like to, or won't take advice, you should listen. I can't make that any more emphatic," said the 35-year-old backbone of the Dodgers.

"Managers and coaches have been around a long time. They know more about the game than you do."

handed. George told me that if I'd learn to switch-hit, I'd never have to go through life as a utilityman," Gilliam said, grinning.

He played the one-day hops of the bus and sandwich leagues for five years with the Elite Giants. In 1951, he joined Montreal and Alston for the first time. He and Walt have never been separated since.

Gilliam, now 35, thinks he has three more "145-game seasons" left, then two years as the utilityman they've always called him. After that, which

Five Ex-Mates on Junior's All-Stars

VERO BEACH, Fla.—Who are the super-stars in the baseball lifetime of Jim Gilliam, the ball players' ball player?

He selected a personal all-time team of men against whom he played or who wore his club's uniform. Among them were five ex-Dodgers, including Sal Maglie, righthanded pitcher, whom Gilliam respected as a friend and foe alike.

Here's his team:

Catcher, Roy Campanella, Dodgers; lefthanded pitcher, Warren Spahn, Braves; righthanded pitcher, Sal Maglie, Giants and Dodgers; relief pitcher, Hoyt Wilhelm, Giants; first baseman, Gil Hodges, Dodgers; second baseman, Red Schoendienst, Cardinals; shortstop, Pee Wee Reese, Dodgers; third baseman, Jackie Robinson, Dodgers; left fielder, Stan Musial, Cardinals; center fielder, Willie Mays, Giants, and right fielder, Hank Aaron, Braves.

"Might have some fun managing that club if you could get 'em all in their prime," Jim mused.

'I Got All Breaks I Had Coming to Me'

VERO BEACH, Fla.—In this day of inflated bonuses to untested kids, does Jim Gilliam, a boy who came up in the bus and sandwich leagues and often played for nothing, harbor any regrets?

"Not at all. I wouldn't change a thing in my career," he told THE SPORTING NEWS. "If I had to do it over, I'd want it to be exactly the same.

"I got all the breaks I had coming when I got a chance to go to camp with a major league club. Remember, I grew up with men who were great players, but never got that chance."

Not 'Regular,' But He Plays 145 Contests

would be a 17-year career, he'd like to coach or manage.

He thinks the fact that, from the starvation days with the Elite Giants, he always has been with older and more experienced players, has been an important factor in his career.

"It seems they always were six or seven years older than I was. It was the same in winter ball in Puerto Rico, then in Triple-A," pointed out Gilliam.

Bargain Price for Junior

When his chance came to break into the majors, Junior was ready. Jackie Robinson had broken the color line and the Dodgers called up Gilliam, along with pitcher Joe Black, from their Montreal (International) farm club.

"Don't get the idea I would have made the majors any quicker," Gilliam was careful to point out. "I needed this time, because I still was making my share of mistakes. But I did learn one important lesson: No one should make the same mistake twice."

Junior's personal log shows he has been a member of five pennant winners and three world champions but, oddly, it was an afternoon at Montreal that he recalls as providing his outstanding personal thrill. It's one that his manager, Alston, recalls vividly, too.

In the first game of a double-header, he had four-for-four, plus a walk. In the nightcap, he also had four-for-four, capping it with a grand-slammer off Lynn Lovenguth.

His second personal triumph was hitting his first World Series home run in, naturally, his first year (1953). You see, it came off Allie (Big Chief) Reynolds, the Yankee who delighted in mashing the Dodgers.

Tribute From Reiser

Another member of the club who broke into the National League as a Dodger, and a good one, was Pete Reiser, now Alston's third base coach. Pete commented recently:

"It's news, big news, when Junior does something wrong."

Buzzie Bavasi, who has turned down a dozen offers for Gilliam's contract, sees Junior this way:

"He's like seven men to me. He's an excellent leadoff man. He's an accomplished second-place hitter. He's a lefthanded and a righthanded hitter. He can play second or third."

Don Drysdale gives ample credit to others, especially Gilliam, for contributing to his success, saying, "Jim's a pro. He knows the game inside and out and how to handle any situation that comes up."

That's baseball's unsung, unheralded—forgotten man.

He's only the guts of the world champion Dodgers.