

Mark Bradley

### The Promise of Youth

When last the Atlanta Braves played a home opener, there was less a mood of anticipation than a sense of dread. From the first, it was clear that the '88 Braves had no chance. No non-expansion team has ever been a bigger lock to lose 100 games, a depth the team would ultimately reach with eight days to spare. The '88 Braves began as that worst possible thing, a bad - old team. On Opening Day '88, the Braves' lineup included six guys past 30. The Braves were hoping Damaso Garcia and Ken Griffey would hit early, attract some trade interest and, in the process, buy Ron Gant and Jeff Blauser a few more months in the minors. Talk about hoping against hope. Garcia, 31, was a lazy embarrassment, the 37year-old Griffey a sad reminder of his former fleet self. Goodness knows they weren't the only culprits, but together Garcia and Griffey symbolized how desperate this franchise had become.



# **Smoltz Beats Astros 3-2** Boever Saves Win as Braves Come Home 2-1

Lilliquist in Bullpen, Page 5F
The Braves Report, Page 5F
By Joe Strauss
Staff Writer

HOUSTON — Their bullpen in danger of early burnout, the Atlanta Braves on Thursday night turned to their youngest member, John Smoltz, begging for seven serviceable innings. Instead, they received an inspiration. ninth inning against the Houston Astros then watched as Joe Boever closed out a 3-2 win.

"That is what this team needed," gushed manager Russ Nixon. "This shows everybody else how it's done."

By taking a game into the ninth inning for the first time since his major-league debut last July 23, Smoltz helped lessen the shock of consecutive troubled outings by Zane Smith and Pete Smith. After amassing 28 hits the previous two nights, Houston found itself stifled on six against Smoltz. Smoltz for his timely assortment of pitches. "They weren't getting a whole lot of swings because they couldn't tell what was coming."

The win put the Braves, winners of two of three in Houston, over .500 for the first time since June 1, 1987. It also produced their first winning road trip since May 1987. It wasn't until April 19 that the Braves won their second game last year. More importantly, it gave Atlanta's overworked set-up men a day of rest, after the first two marathon games of the new season altered a rotation before its initial turn. Early

#### **A Zillion Scouts Can't All Be Wrong**

Trying to plug major-league holes while giving his minor-leaguers time to develop, GM Bobby Cox took a chance on two vets. Garcia wound up playing 21 games over two years before being jettisoned. Griffey gave the Braves an OK half-season in '86. Trouble was, there was nobody coming up while Griffey was losing it. So he kept playing, growing worse with every month. No other big-league team would've had Griffey and Garcia doing anything beyond filling out last year's roster. They started for the Braves.

Both were gone by September, their places taken by younger guys. If nothing else, that's cause to greet the '89 home opener with a smidgen of optimism. These Braves may be bad but they won't be old, and when you're young there's always the chance you'll get better. Only three Braves regulars are past 30; the oldest starting pitcher, Zane Smith, is 28. Nothing in baseball spawns hope like young arms, and the Braves surely have those. Can those arms win? Nobody yet knows. The five starters were 21-49 in the bigs last year, are 57-91 lifetime. Still, unless a zillion scouts are flat wrong, the Braves' kids are genuine. Why else would every other organization covet them so? In keeping their kid pitchers, the Braves have done right. To trade a Smoltz or a P. Smith now would be folly. Five years from now, one of them could be pulling a Steve Bedrosian and winning the Cy Young for somebody else. Says Russ Nixon, the Braves' manager: "We've gone this far with these guys; we'd like to see what happens the rest of the way." Maybe they'll all be great. To win big for this team, chances are they'll have to be.

Braves pitcher John Smoltz is congratulated by teammates after scoring on a wild pitch against the Astros.

Showing enough confidence to a throw change-ups in multiples of m three and enough power to over- o whelm a fastball-hitting club, Smoltz carried the Braves into the s

"He totally frustrated them," said catcher Jody Davis, credited by

BRAVES Continued on 5F



#### Can't Match Last Spring's Bleakness

The Braves can't hit much. Maybe they'll improve. Maybe Gant will hit 40 homers and Blauser, bigger and stronger than when he came up for his cup of decaf in '87, will hit 20. Maybe Tommy Gregg and Geronimo Berroa will become what Kal Daniels and Tracy Jones were for the Reds two years back, a young and gifted platoon. That's the beauty of youth. With old guys, you can only hope that they've something left. With kids, hoping comes naturally. When you're as bad as the Braves, better to rustle up all the kids you can find and turn 'em loose. Why not? Could kids possibly do worse than Griffey and Garcia? Alas, the Braves missed their chance over the off-season to import more quality youth. Cox couldn't quite bring himself to part with Dale Murphy. Cox knew he'd need a -ton to justify trading the most beloved player in franchise history, and he couldn't quite get his ton. So Murphy remains a Brave, likely for life. Even if he hits .260 this season - up from last year's .226 - his market value will never again be so high. He's 33, on the penultimate year of his contract. Nobody will give two regulars for such a guy, let alone the three Cox sought. The time for the windfall Murphy deal is gone forever. At the winter meetings, Nixon said he wanted to improve by 20 games. Asked if the Braves could manage that without trading, Nixon said: "No. I think we have to make some type of move." They did nothing major. Somehow, though, the outlook doesn't seem so dark now as in chilly December. Maybe it's the thought of all those young arms in one rotation. Maybe it's the notion of seeing Gant and Blauser and Gregg for full seasons. Maybe it's because it's spring. Who can say? Then again, maybe it's this: No matter how bleak their prospects, nothing will ever match last spring for depth of bleakness. Those Braves, expected to be rotten, started the season 0-10. These Braves needed but two games to win. How's that for new and improved?

isn't a washed-up pitcher at the age of 28.

#### The Home Opener

What: Braves vs. Dodgers.

When: Tonight, 7:40 at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium.

TV/radio: Channel 17, 750 AM.

Starting pitchers: Braves' Tom Glavine vs.

#### By Terence Moore Staff Writer The loudest cheers at Dodger Stadium these days no longer are aimed toward the portly lefthander from Mexico. Fernandomania? It went the way of the hula hoop.

The decline of Fernando Valenzuela, the former Dodgers ace, began during the first three months of 1988 when his iron-man image began to rust. He said he wasn't worried. He said he wasn't hurting, but his rocky performances said otherwise. Less than 24 hours after his left shoulder wouldn't let him reach the fifth inning against the Houston Astros on July 30, Valenzuela was placed on the disabled list. As a result, he missed a starting assignment for the first time since winning the Rookie of the Year and Cy Young awards after joining the Dodgers before the start of the 1981 season.

A fad had ended.

"Fernando was *the* hot item back then. In fact, he was just the way Orel [Hershiser] was last year," said former Dodgers pitcher Don Drysdale, a Hall of Famer and a broadcaster with the team. "They did everything right at the right time during their years."

While Hershiser was winning most of the National League's top pitching honors with a late-season stretch of perfection, Valenzuela could only watch. Having pitched only 32 innings — just seven of them in the regular season — since his Houston start last July, he'll make his 1989 debut tonight at 7:40 in the Atlanta Braves' home opener. "I took two months off when I

didn't throw at all, but I've worked very hard during the off-season, and my arm feels strong now," Valenzuela said in Cincinnati, where the Dodgers opened the season against the Reds. "I don't feel any pain. That's the main thing. Everything involved with my shoulder problems is in the past. I'm confident

Dodgers' Fernando Valenzuela.

Expected crowd: Approximately 28,000 tickets have been sold. The Braves expect a crowd of about 40,000.

Festivities: Former Georgia football coach Vince Dooley will throw out the first pitch. Also, Elisabeth Doubleday Frost, 80, the oldest living relative of Abner Doubleday, will be recognized. Fireworks will follow the game.

**Rose: Not a Problem Gambler** 

RON CODDINGTON/Staff

VALENZUELA Continued on 6F

### Reds' Manager Shrugs Off Lawyers' Gag Order After Ex-Houseboy's Drug Arrest

#### By Terence Moore Staff Writer

CINCINNATI — Cincinnati Reds manager Pete Rose strayed Thursday from his "no comment" posture of recent weeks and admitted his fondness for gambling.

But he emphatically denied he has a problem.

"I don't lose as much as people say I do, and I don't win as much as people say I do, either," said Rose after the Los Angeles Dodgers rolled to a 4 1 victory over the Reds at Riverfront Stadium.

It was one of the few times since Rose came under investigation by the baseball commissioner's office for allegedly betting on baseball games that he has publicly addressed the issue.

Although Rose talked about several aspects of the inquiry by the commissioner's office and the concurrent investigation into his gambling habits by four federal agencies, he refused to say whether he bet on baseball games.

Under major-league rules, if Rose is found guilty of betting on baseball games, he could be banned from the sport for at

**ROSE** Continued on 6F

# Jury Pondering Agents Trial

Panel to Reconvene Today After Deliberating 5½ Hours Without Reaching a Verdict

#### By Chris Mortensen Staff Writer

CHICAGO — The fate of Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom was passed here Thursday to a jury that began to ponder five weeks of testimony and mounds of evidence presented in the first federal prosecution of sports agents.

Walters and Bloom each could face maximum penalties of 70 years in prison, \$2 million in fines and forfeitures of business assets if they are convicted on all racketeering, conspiracy, mail fraud, wire fraud and extortion counts.

The eight-woman, four-man jury began deliberations early Thursday afternoon after receiving 90 minutes of instruction on the law from U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich.

Bloom, who turned 30 Thursday, waited outside the courtroom as the jury began to deliberate. His younger brother, Brant, joined him from New York.

"I'm no criminal, I know that," said Bloom. "There are real criminals ... murderers, dope dealers, rapists ... being tried in this courthouse, and I don't belong

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# Trial of Walters, Bloom Goes to Jury

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#### in the same group."

A grim-faced Walters declined comment as he returned to his hotel room.

The jury deliberated 51/2 hours before going home without a verdict. It will reconvene this morning.

Among the testimony and evidence the jury will weigh are allegations that Walters and Bloom used the reputation of organized crime boss Michael Franzese to extort entertainment and sports clients. Along with Franzese, an unindicted co-conspirator who testified for the government under immunity, other celebrity witnesses during the trial included former Notre Dame president Father Theodore Hesburgh, Michigan football coach Bo Schembechler and singer Dionne Warwick.

One of the jury's first requests after beginning its deliberations was to listen again to two tape recordings offered into evidence.

One 40-minute tape is from March 1985 of Walters making a face-to-face sales pitch to former ments after the athletes broke NCAA rules and should have been. ineligible.

The Atlanta Immal AND CONSTITUTION

The government may have gotten a boost from Marovich in his instructions to the jury relating to the mail-fraud charge.

"I instruct you that the term 'property' includes tuition, room, board, fees, financial assistance and the right to control the allocation of athletic scholarships," the judge told the jury.

Walters and Bloom are charged with engaging in a scheme to de fraud six colleges: Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Purdue, Notre Dame and Temple.

The government contends that the two agents, together with nine football players from those universities, concealed their contractual agreements in order for the players to stay eligible and receive their scholarship benefits.

C 1986, Triple Crown Productions, Inc.

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Subsequently, the schools mailed false certifications to the NCAA and/or the Big Ten Conference - constituting mail fraud by Walters and Bloom, according to the government's case.

Defense attorneys argued that some of the colleges covered up their own NCAA rules violations to keep the players eligible.

The mail-fraud charges are critical to the overall case. If the jury finds Walters and Bloom not guilty on all mail-fraud counts, the court has said it does not have jurisdiction for the other charges.

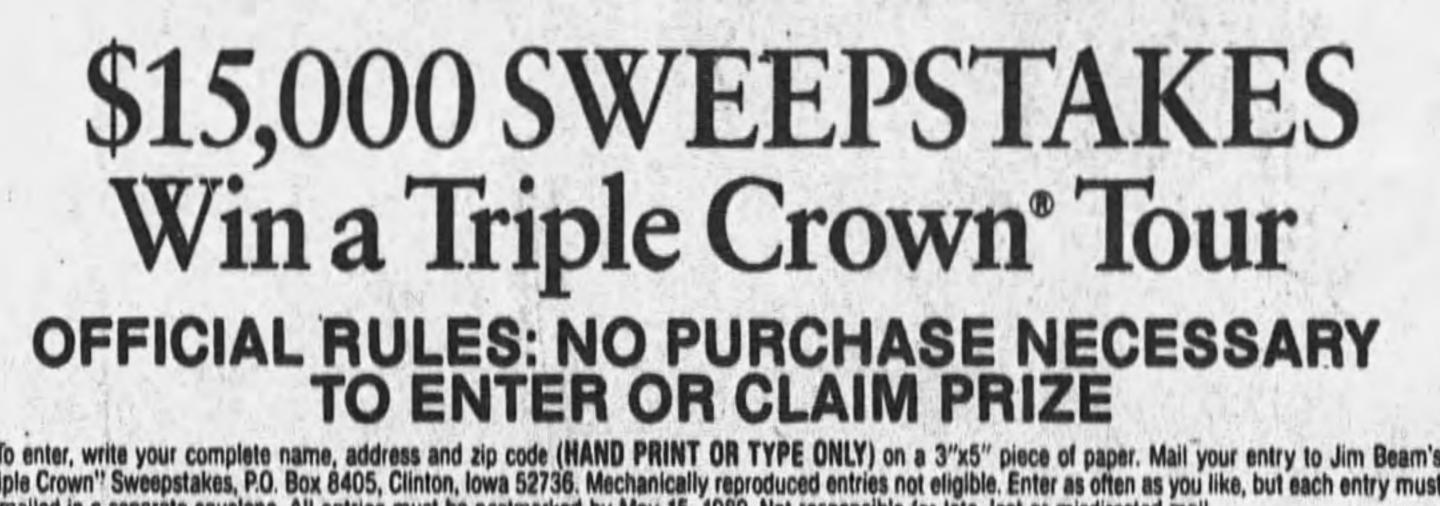
Apart from the Chicago trial, the Associated Press reported Friday that **Bloom** has three felony counts for bad checks awaiting him in California, where police say he operated a "credit restoration business." A trial date was set for late March, but was continued until the Chicago proceedings conclude.



lowa running back Ronnie Harmon. The other tape is a telephone conversation in March 1987 among former University of Pittsburgh linebacker Tony Woods and Walters, Bloom and an unindicted associate. On the tape, Walters and Bloom threaten to expose to the NCAA their dealings with Woods and his younger brother, Darryl, another Pitt player.

Prosecutors asked the jury in closing arguments to listen to the tapes.

Walters and Bloom were indicted Aug. 24, 1988, by a federal grand jury in Chicago. The FBI and the U.S. Attorney's office in Chicago began investigating the agents' relationship with college athletes after rival agent Kathy Clements was



States who are of legal drinking age in their state of residence at time of entry except

Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, 80 proof. Distilled and bottled by James B. Beam Distilling Co., Frankfort, Clermont, Beam, Ky.



