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**THE HOUSTON COLT .45's:
THE OTHER EXPANSION TEAM OF 1962**

by Ron Briley

The date is October 15, 1986, and the scene is the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. Astros outfielder Kevin Bass steps to the plate with two out and tying run Denny Walling waiting at second base. Bass, facing veteran New York Mets relief pitcher Jesse Orosco, works the count full. Orosco delivers a wicked slider, and Bass is unable to make contact. The Mets win seven to six, clinching the National League pennant. The Orosco-Bass confrontation put the finishing touch on a sixteen-inning, four-hour and forty-two minute spectacular which sportswriter Jerry Izenberg termed "the greatest game ever played."¹ The New York franchise would go on to appear in its third World Series, defeating Boston in seven games. Houston would once again remain at home and play second fiddle to the Mets, just as they had when the two franchises entered the National League twenty-five years earlier.

The 1962 season was viewed as a very important one by officials of organized baseball. Despite the 1961 drama surrounding the assaults of Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris on the sixty homerun mark of Babe Ruth, baseball attendance declined slightly. Attendance was down 5.6 percent from 1960, and only the Tigers, Yankees, and Reds demonstrated any significant increases. Meanwhile, the National Football League set an attendance record in 1961. The Associated Press followed these box office receipts with a poll of sportswriters and broadcasters as to whether professional football would replace baseball as the nation's number-one sport in the next ten to twenty years. In a narrow decision of over 200 individuals polled, football won by three votes. In response, Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick observed that baseball, unlike other sports, was not seasonal and maintained year-around interest, playing only a lesser role than God and school in American families. Faced with the threat of the Continental League attempting to form a third major league and Congress looking into depriving baseball of its anti-trust exemption, Frick also placed considerable faith in franchise expansion, observing, "Getting New York and Houston into the National League was a good move and its going to help increase attendance throughout the country in 1962."² But the two new franchises failed to receive equal attention from the nation's media. While in 1986 Houston was defeated on the playing field by an eventual world champion, in 1962, Houston, fielding a competent expansion entry, was overlooked by sportswriters and fans in favor of a New York Mets team which established modern day records for futility.

Of course, there were many reasons for the national attention focused on the 1962 Mets. They resided in the nation's media center and were able to attract such skilled chroniclers as Jimmy Breslin. The Mets were also

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well represented by General Manager George Weiss and Manager Casey Stengel who recalled the glory days of the New York Yankees in the 1950s. Having to compete with the popular Yankees for the New York market, Weiss decided that the Mets would draft well-established veterans to fill the expansion roster. Players such as Gil Hodges, Don Zimmer, Charley Neal, Gus Bell, and Richie Ashburn adorned the roster, providing the Mets with older hands who were household names to baseball fans in New York and throughout the country. While the team was old and short of pitching, Stengel remained quotable, and the nation became infatuated with such lovable losers as former Yankee "Marvelous" Marvin Throneberry.³ Indeed, the Mets proved to be so bad that they did restore some of the interest in baseball which many in the game feared was being lost to professional football.

Meanwhile, ignored in the national hoopla over Stengel and the Mets, a solid first year expansion franchise had been established in Houston. While not as frustrating for Houston fans as Bass's swing and miss in 1986, the overshadowing of Houston by the Mets in 1962 remains disconcerting. The story of Houston's workmanlike, professional approach to fielding an expansion team deserves an audience.

Appealing to the frontier images still associated with Texas and its largest city, the initial logo for the Houston team was the Colt .45s, often shortened to Colts, a symbol of the gun considered to have played a leading role in the winning of the West. According to historians of Houston this may be a fitting image for the city. Francisco A. Rosales and Barry J. Kaplan maintain nineteenth-century values have retained a stronghold in Houston, remarking, "Individualism, opportunity, capitalism, and limited government, virtual dogma in American government before the 1929 crash, have remained sacred in Houston." The Houstonian sense of individualism has also been apparent in the desire to conquer a harsh environment. In his history of the city, David G. McComb described Houston as the most air-conditioned city in the world, stating, "There is nothing closer to hell in modern America than to be caught after a rain in a Houston jam at midday in an unair-conditioned car. It is possible, at that moment, to appreciate the plight of a steamed clam, and the situation does nothing to improve human temperament."⁴ The Houston way of coping with this environment has been to build huge structures of steel and concrete, while paying little attention to zoning and creation of open spaces.

This approach was evident in Houston's initial efforts to capture a National League franchise. In 1958, Harris County voters approved a \$20 million dollar revenue bond issue for a combined football-baseball stadium, but when interest developed in an indoor, air-conditioned facility, it was necessary in 1961 to go back to the electorate and get approval for \$22 million dollars in general obligation bonds. With the bond issues indicating popular support, the Houston Sports Association, led by George Kirksey, Craig Cullinan, and William Kirkland, applied for a major league franchise

and agreed to lease the proposed facility at a rent sufficient to pay off the bonds. The Harris County Domed Stadium, or the Astrodome, as it would eventually be called, was not ready for the inaugural 1962 campaign. The Colt .45s would have to compete against the Mets without the publicity of the world's first indoor park for baseball.⁵

Instead, the Colt .45s played in a temporary structure, Colt Stadium, with a seating capacity of 32,000 and located on the same lot as the projected domed stadium. The playing dimensions of Colt Stadium were 360 feet down the foul lines, 420 feet in center, and 395 feet in left and right power alleys. In jest, the *Sporting News* reported, "Our scouts tell us that Colt Stadium extends from the Pecos on the west to the Sabine on the east, and from the Red River on the north to the Gulf of Mexico on the south. The Gulf side is the comparatively short fence because even Texas peters out in this southerly direction."⁶ This playing surface dictated a decision to invest in young players who could run, catch, and throw.

Unlike the Mets, who emphasized name players in the draft, Houston selected younger athletes, many of them out of the talented Los Angeles Dodger system. Among the players assembled by Houston were Dodger products Norm Larker, Bob Lillis, and Bob Aspromonte; former Giants' bonus baby Joe Amalfitano; Boston Red Sox shortstop Don Buddin; and outfielder Al Spangler from the Milwaukee Braves. For pitching the Colts selected such players as veteran Dick Farrell from the Dodgers, Bob Bruce from the Tigers, and knuckleballer Ken Johnson, who had won six while losing two for the National League champion Cincinnati Reds.⁷

To guide this group of young players, Houston management hired former Baltimore Orioles manager Paul Richards as general manager, replacing Gabe Paul who had resigned in late 1961 to join the Cleveland organization, and former journeyman outfielder and skipper of the Kansas City Athletics Harry Craft as manager. Craft had a reputation for handling young players, earned while managing in the Yankee farm system. In fact, Craft had guided Mickey Mantle in his first two professional seasons, and the Yankee outfielder continued to sing the praises of Craft, asserting, "Craft was more like a father to me than a manager. I guess I was lucky to have him my first two years. He started me out right." Houston management believed Craft could exercise patience with their young talent and start them out right. Philosophically, Craft emphasized treating young players with courtesy and respect. Players making mistakes would be dealt with firmly by the manager, but there would be no public criticism. Craft concluded, "Have confidence in your players and win their respect and you've taken a giant stride in the direction of building a winning club."⁸

Taking fifty-four players to training facilities in Apache Junction, Arizona, Craft and his team got off to a rough start in the Cactus League exhibition season, dropping their first two contests. However, working hard under the direction of Richards and Craft, the Colts completed their

Arizona Cactus League schedule in first place with a mark of fourteen wins and seven losses. Craft, not wanting expectations in Houston to run too high, played down the Cactus League success, observing, "We've done a lot of experimenting and so have the other teams. We've played against a lot of people we won't be seeing after April 10 [opening day]. The important thing was that our players really got to work, and their morale was terrific. But I'll tell you we'll take any championship we can get."⁹

While Craft sought to lower expectations, the Colts created additional excitement by starting the season in Houston with a three-game sweep of the Chicago Cubs. The opening day crowd of 25,271 was somewhat of a disappointment, but numbers were held back by threatening weather and unresolved parking problems. Thirty-year old, five-foot seven-inch Bobby Shantz went the distance for the Colts, holding the cubs to just five hits in an 11 to 2 victory. Offensive punch was provided by former Pirate Roman Mejias, who blasted a pair of three-run homeruns.¹⁰ Houston continued its mastery of the Cubs on April 11 and 12 by tossing consecutive shutouts at the overwhelmed Cubs. Hal Woodeschick and Dick Farrell combined for a 2-0 victory, followed by veteran left-hander Dean Stone's three hitter. Judge Roy Hofheinz, emerging as a principal player within the Houston Sports Association, was excited about the Colts sweep, but offered a somewhat backhanded compliment to the players, commenting, "Who'd have thought we could do it? Why Woodeschick and Stone are rejects, retards, and they pitch shutouts for us." The only negative note for the Colts was a threat of rain, including a delay in the second game, which kept total attendance for the Cubs series down to 53, 445.¹¹

The Colts were brought back to earth when they arrived in Philadelphia on April 13 to face the Phillies, who developed into their greatest nemesis. Craft decided to try Farrell in a starting role, and the flame-thrower responded with nine strikeouts while allowing two hits through six innings, but the Colts could muster little offense and went down by a score of 3 to 2. In the final game of the series, Ken Johnson yielded only six hits in seven innings, but was bested by Phillies right-hander Art Mahaffey, who blanked the Colts.

From Philadelphia, the Colts traveled to New York to do battle with their rival new franchise which had started the season with four consecutive losses. Due to rain, the Colts were able to play only one game in New York, but while waiting out the weather, Houston sportswriters had ample opportunity to record the comments of Mets manager Casey Stengel. Responding to his team's poor start, as well as inclement Eastern weather, Stengel observed, "We can't play in rain or snow. My men are high-class ball players, beautifully built. They're all from California. They can't stand this kind of weather. Why this rain and snow has frozen my brain. And my players had on ski outfits." Then, without missing a beat, the Ole' Professor, mused, "You know once you get that dome up, we won't be able to recognize you guys. Now you look good and healthy and tanned. I won't

be able to recognize you after you get light-complected." No wonder the incompetent Mets received more press than the successful Colts. Poor Harry Craft was no match for his quotable opposite in the Mets dugout. But on the field, Houston asserted its superiority over the Mets with a win in eleven innings, climaxed by a three-run homerun by shortstop Don Buddin.¹²

The Colts finished their first road trip of the season by splitting two games with the Cubs. Of their first eight games, Houston had won five. The pitching staff was the talk of the National League, having yielded only thirteen runs. Although not in a league with Stengel, Manager Craft quipped, "If we keep getting this kind of pitching, this is going to be a very interesting summer." Hitting, however, continued to worry the Colts, especially the poor start of outfielder Jim Pendleton, who went only two for fourteen. Pendleton, with a lifetime major league batting average of .260, refused to use race as an excuse for his poor start, although the outfielder was the only African American on the squad, besides the seldom-used Johnny Weekly who was soon optioned to the minors. Pendleton minimized the racial abuses and taunts he received in baseball, insisting, "I turn a deaf ear, that's the best way."¹³

Pendleton broke out of his slump with a three-for-four performance when the Colts returned home, but the Phillies continued their domination, defeating the Colts 3-1. The Phillies completed a sweep of their two-game series with a narrow triumph on April 22, and for the first time some reporters suggested that the Philadelphia team had a hex over the Colts. The homestand concluded with the Colts dropping three out of five contests with the Cardinals and Braves. After the first eleven home games of the season, the Colts had drawn 202,400 fans for an average of 18,363 per game, a pace approaching a million and a half for the year. Noting the early season success of the Colts, the *Sporting News* editorialized that there would be a day of reckoning for the new franchise and the Texans should watch their bragging, but meanwhile, "The Colts and their friends are having fun. They're enjoying baseball, winning games and being boisterous. Their attitude is refreshing and admirable."¹⁴

There was a bit of reckoning on the next road trip as the Cards swept a three-game series from the Colts in St. Louis, while the Colts were able to earn a split of a four-game set in Milwaukee. During this road trip the Colts also made their first trade of the young season, sending opening day pitcher Bobby Shantz to the Cardinals in exchange for young prospects Carl Warwick and John Anderson. The transaction made it clear that the Colts were continuing to build for the future and that there was not much room for sentiment in the business of baseball. Shantz had trouble regaining strength in his arm following an injury in New York during his second start. A disappointed Shantz remarked, "I hate to go, but I guess this is the way it is when you get old." The veteran understood the business of baseball and left Houston in a classy fashion, insisting, "I have no complaints. I certainly

have been treated well by this team."¹⁵

The Colts returned home on May 8 to face an important set of games with National League powerhouses Los Angeles and San Francisco. The Colts did not fare well with the coast teams, dropping five of seven contests. Despite being dominated in these games, the Colts drew well, raising their season attendance figure to 350,314, helped by a total of 65,143 for a weekend series with the Giants. After an outstanding start Houston's record had fallen by mid-May to 11 wins against 18 losses. They were in eighth place, eleven and one-half games out of first and only two games ahead of the last place Mets.¹⁶

The Colts had a tough West Coast road trip awaiting them, but they were attired in new traveling uniforms befitting their logo and the Texas frontier heritage. The western style suits featured wide-brimmed cowboy hats, bright blue suits, orange ties, and boots. While these outfits may have turned heads in California, Houston continued to have its difficulties with the Giants and Dodgers, dropping five out of seven contests.¹⁷

On May 21, the Colts returned to the friendly confines of Colt Stadium for the Mets first visit to town. As usual, media attention focused on the irrepressible Casey Stengel. Like his appearances throughout the National League, Stengel was greeted with a standing ovation by the Houston fans. In turn, he developed his theory of pitching to an eager Houston press corps. Stengel explained, "Pitching is like everything else in baseball. Ought to have it. You can't stand out there and catch those balls in the bleachers. Somebody will break a leg. These ballplayers aren't going to break any legs. I will tell you that." But after Houston swept the two-game series with the Mets, Stengel's mood was a little more gruff. He complained that home plate umpire Al Forman "wasn't too familiar with his calls." A frustrated Stengel concluded, "Maybe it is best we get out of town and try our luck against the Dodgers. We probably have a better chance of beating them than this bunch."¹⁸

The Colts completed the homestand by splitting two games with the Cincinnati Reds and dropping two out of three to the Pittsburgh Pirates. Crowds declined during the homestand, with only a little over 8,000 fans attending the second game with the Reds, although for twenty-five games the Colts had drawn 406,516, placing them only behind the Dodgers and Giants in total attendance. Fans applauded the exploits of Dick Farrell, the first four-game winner on the staff; Jim Golde, who had a gaudy 1.80 earned run average for fifty innings; and Roman Mejias, the Cuban outfielder who had hit ten homeruns, three more than his previous major league high.¹⁹

On May 28, the Colts departed Houston for a road trip to Cincinnati, Chicago, and Pittsburgh. After dropping a game to the Reds, the Colts continued to dominate the Cubs, sweeping a two-game series. June 1 found the Colts in seventh place, fourteen games out of first and five games ahead

of the last place Mets. When the team reached Pittsburgh, Craft had to deal with a small player revolt involving the wearing of western suits on the road. Ten players had not worn the suits from Cincinnati to Chicago, complaining the outfits had caused negative comments and contributed to a "circus-like" atmosphere. In Chicago, airline passengers reportedly asked Colts players such questions as "Where is the Rodeo?" and "Where's your horse?" But Craft made clear this was not a negotiable issue. He reminded the players they had voted for the western suits before the season, and they would wear them. The 1960s represented a time period in which management dominated and player options were limited through strict enforcement of the reserve clause. Conformity and compliance were still the watchwords of ballplayers, and player representative catcher Hal Smith announce that the Colts would adhere to the wishes of management. With the great western-suit controversy quashed, the Colts moved on to Pittsburgh where they dropped the first two games of the series, but swept their first doubleheader, scoring ten runs in each of the victories.²⁰

Enthused with their power show against Pittsburgh, the Colts returned home for a ten-game stretch. They got off to a fine start, taking two out of three contests from the Braves. The Houston team was feeling feisty, and Craft commented on the strong morale of the team, observing, "Our personnel has excellent morale and a measure of confidence. At times talent alone will not get the job done. A team needs morale and we've got it." Morale also remained high among Houston fans, despite the complaints of New York columnist Dick Young that Houston urgently needed the domed stadium due to the "recent mass attack upon players and fans by voracious mosquitoes at the Colt park." After splitting two games with the Dodgers, a doubleheader with Los Angeles on June 10 drew Houston's first sell-out crowd of the year, 33,145, but the fans left disappointed as the Colts lost both games. Fortunately, the New York Mets furnished the opposition for the remainder of the homestand, with Houston taking two out of three games. In the final contest of the series, Houston right-hander Bob Bruce recorded his fifth victory of the year. A disgruntled Stengel was once again glad to get his Mets out of Houston, complaining, "We made four errors and it could have been eight. But the big thing is that we are chasing bad balls or taking good pitches. It really was a bad game to watch."²¹

After a break-even homestand, the Colts departed on June 15 for what proved to be a successful road swing to the West Coast. The Colts took four out of five games from the Dodgers and Giants. Harry Craft insisted the Colts had a solid nucleus with Norm Larker at first, Joey Amalfitano at second, Bob Aspromonte at third, Bob Lillis at shortstop, Al Spangler in left field, Carl Warwick in center, and the bedrock of Roman Mejias with sixteen homeruns and a .300 batting average in right field. The starting staff of Jim Golden, Ken Johnson, Dick Farrell, and Bob Bruce led the National League in shutouts with seven. And with the work of youngsters such as Rusty Staub in the Colt farm system, Craft insisted the Colts were right on

target. A euphoric *Houston Chronicle* stated, "The odds are that back home the ex-politico named Roy Hofheinz who turned to baseball is wondering what it costs for the printing of World Series tickets."²²

The West Coast swing proved to be the highlight of the season for the Colts. The next few months were no picnic for the Houston franchise as reality caught up with the expansion team. After losing two out of three to the Mets, the Colts moved into Philadelphia, where the Phillies swept the three games, extending their winning streak to seven over the Colts. The road trip ended with the Colts dropping six of eleven, and the Phillies replaced the Colts in seventh place. The Colts' lead over ninth place Chicago was only five games.²³

The losing ways continued after the team's return to Houston. After blowing a June 28 exhibition contest to a Texas League all-star team, the Colts made several roster changes, adding veteran pinch hitter Bob Cerv, "bonus baby" Ernie Fazio from Santa Clara University, and former Cub pitcher Dick Drott, who had completed his military service. But roster changes provided little relief for the slump, and the accounts of Colt games began to sound more like those of the floundering Mets. After dropping the first game of the homestand on June 30 to the Reds, the Colts broke a five-game losing streak when Bob Bruce beat the Cincinnati club in a game shortened to seven innings by a thick fog. The key hit for the Colts was a double by Carl Warwick, which Reds outfielder Marty Keough claimed he never saw. But there were not many other acts of God to bail out the slipping Colts. On July 2, Reds pitcher Joey Jay beat Houston in a game which featured lumbering Bob Cerv failing to score from second base on an Al Spangler triple. It seems that Cerv believed the Spangler hit was foul and had not been running at a full clip. The disastrous homestand was finished with a three-game sweep of the Colts by the Pirates. The Colts had now lost eight of their last ten, and crowds were beginning to dwindle at Colt Stadium. Only a little over 6000 fans, the smallest crowd of the year, witnessed Bob Cerv's unsuccessful dash toward home plate.²⁴

As the Colts prepared for a road trip before the much needed All-Star game break, *Houston Chronicle* sports editor Dick Peebles attempted to place the recent losing ways of the Colts in perspective. Peebles pointed out that the Colts had been predicted to finish tenth, but as the halfway point of the season approached, they were in eighth place, only one game out of seventh. All the Colts had to do to finish in seventh was beat the Phillies, and certainly before the season started, Houston fans would have been well satisfied with any position above tenth place. Early success had simply spoiled Colt fans a bit. However, the road remained unkind to the Colts, who dropped three out of four games in Cincinnati before the All-Star game.²⁵

On July 9, Dick Farrell, the only Colts player selected to the All-Star classic, lost both ends of a doubleheader. Tired from his work in Cincinnati,

Farrell was not called upon by Reds manager Fred Hutchinson to perform in the interleague contest. Farrell's selection surprised many in the Colt camp. Outfielder Roman Mejias, with nineteen homeruns, forty-eight runs batted-in, and a .311 average through games of July 2, was visibly upset that he was not included on the National League roster. Farrell remarked, "With my record, I've got to be surprised." But Farrell, who had pitched in a number of tough luck games, had a deceiving record. Both starting and relieving, he had appeared in twenty-three games, winning five and losing eight, saving five, and posting a good earned run average of 2.48.²⁶

A two-day vacation did little to change the fortunes of the Colts. They started the second half by losing a single game in Philadelphia and suffered a three-game sweep at the hands of the Pirates. Houston pitching, which had once been the mainstay of the team, collapsed, giving up an average of almost seven runs per game in July. Returning to Houston on July 15, the Colts broke their losing streak, splitting a doubleheader with the Cubs. The crowd was small, 6,907, and the temperature a muggy ninety-five degrees, and the Colts played sloppily, committing nine errors in the two games. A frustrated Craft acknowledged the Colts had played so poorly they did not even deserve a split. An angry Paul Richards threatened a major shakeup of the Houston roster, but after cooling off for a day, recanted, "I don't see how anybody can be disappointed in this team as long as we're ahead of anybody."²⁷

The losses continued to mount for the Colts. The Phillies arrived in Houston on July 17 and proceeded to sweep four contests from the helpless Colts, running their winning streak over the Colts to twelve and leaving Houston with a five-game losing streak and twenty-two losses in the last twenty-five games. But Dick Farrell demonstrated a little spunk for the Colts, defeating the Cardinals on July 20 and attempting to keep the team loose with his jokes and bench jockeying. Farrell predicted that the Colts might win fifty of their next seventy games and insisted, "Just wait till we play the big teams. We'll show 'em. We knock off the big ones. Just call us the Houston spoilers." Farrell proved to be a better pitcher than forecaster. Following a four-game split with the first division Cardinals, the Giants moved into town and swept three from the Colts. The last game of the series witnessed some dramatics when popular Houston third baseman Bob Aspromonte fulfilled the request of a nine-year-old blind boy from Arkansas to hit a homerun. Aspromonte connected in the eighth inning off Giants reliever Stu Miller, but the story lacked a true story-book ending as the Colts fell a run short of winning the game. Joining Aspromonte in the spotlight was Farre, who, following a public confession that he had tried to get out Stan Musial with a spitball, hit Willie Mays with a pitch on July 24 after the Giants centerfielder had homered the first two times at bat. Mays insisted that Farrell was a good pitcher but a "bush leaguer" for the beaning. The fireworks of the Giants series pushed season attendance over the 700,000 mark. While the losing ways of the Colts and Houston heat had

caused attendance to slow down, the 700,000 figure surpassed the totals of American League expansion teams in Los Angeles and Washington.²⁸

After dropping two out of three in Chicago, the Colts left the Windy City in ninth place as the team prepared for a short break during the second All-Star game of the season. Again Farrell was Houston's only representative on the National League squad, but this time he did pitch, surrendering a three-run homerun to Rocky Calavito. While he was pleased to be an All-Star, the Houston hurler made it clear that, like many other players, he did not particularly care for playing a second All-Star game.²⁹

The Colts moved into August with a record of thirty-seven wins and sixty-five losses, in ninth place, and thirty-two games behind first place Los Angeles. However, following a six-game split with the Braves and Cardinals on the road, the season dropped to a new low when the Colts returned to Houston for a fourteen-game homestand with the Reds, Braves, Cardinals, and Cubs. The Reds swept a four-game series in which the Colts were held scoreless for thirty-eight innings until they were able to push across an unearned run. The first game of the Reds series was frustrating and seemed to foreshadow the entire homestand. Dick Farrell pitched twelve scoreless innings, but the Colts lost the game in the thirteenth inning when Reds relief pitcher Johnny Klippstein homered. The last game of the homestand, in which the Colts had played poorly and posted only five wins, was the smallest crowd of the year, a total of 4,543 fans. While most of the city was disappointed with the team's August home showing, relief pitcher Russ Kemmerer, an ordained minister, saved two games and was rewarded with an appointment to the staff of Bethany Methodist Church in Houston.³⁰

The Colts could have used divine intervention when they visited their nemesis in Philadelphia. But even the Reverend Kemmerer was unable to pull any strings as the Phillies swept a three-game series from the Colts, extending their winning streak over Houston to fifteen, with an opportunity to sweep the season series the first week in September in Colt Stadium. The Colts' woes continued as the Pirates took two from the hapless Houston club. The longest losing streak of the year hit nine games as the Colts dropped two more games in Cincinnati, but Houston rebounded to take a doubleheader from the Reds on August 27. The Colts followed up this success by winning both games of a two-game set in St. Louis. By prevailing in the last four games, the Colts were able to post a mark of four wins and seven losses on the road before moving into Chicago for two games. Four victories in a row had allowed Houston to recapture eighth place by a half game over the Cubs, and a split allowed Houston to retain this lofty position before moving home to face a showdown with Philadelphia.

Despite regaining eighth place, the August road trip was a difficult one for many Houston players and morale was low. A discouraged Craft confessed, "We've tried all possible infield and outfield combinations.

You'll see a lot of new faces when the player limit is off after August 30." Craft also levied fines against infielders Aspromonte and Larker for throwing their helmets and bats, and many players realized their status for the next season was questionable. Joe Amalfitano, who had started the season as the Colts second baseman, was only hitting .235 and had been benched in favor of Bob Lillis. The former Giant was reconciled to being traded, while first baseman Norm Larker, who also had suffered through a disappointing season, acknowledged, "We're like soldiers, we're all expendable." Harry Craft agreed, insisting, "We'd trade Dick Farrell if we could benefit." This sense of insecurity led to a scuffle between Hal Woodeschick and rookie catcher Jim Campbell before the game on August 26 in Cincinnati.³¹

The disgruntled Colts flew home to face the Phillies and considerable hoopla orchestrated by management to attract fans and end the Phillie hex over Houston. Scheduled to pitch the first game of a September 3 doubleheader with the Phillies, Dick Farrell agreed to swap his regular uniform number "43" for number "13." Ladders were erected in front of the Phillies clubhouse, while Colts fans bringing Arabian prayer rugs, rabbits' feet, four-leaf clovers, or horseshoes were given half-price admission. The finishing touch for Houston management was the hiring of ex-prize fighter Kid Dugan, known for his devastating stare, to put a spell on the Phillies. Kid Dugan confidently told Colts Vice-President George Kirksey that the Philadelphia team "hasn't got a chance."

The circus-like atmosphere was successful in attracting over 19,000 curious fans, but the Phillies prevailed, sweeping the doubleheader. Kid Dugan expressed shock, explaining, "May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. I'd rather lost my right arm than see what happened tonight." The Phillies streak over the Colts had reached seventeen, and one more victory would allow the Philadelphia franchise to become the first major league team to sweep a season series. However, on September 5, in a contest lacking the exhibitionism of the previous evening and attended by the smallest crowd of the season, the Colts and pitcher Bob Bruce denied the Phillies an opportunity to establish a major league record, defeating Philadelphia 4 to 1. The taciturn Craft summed up the situation succinctly, "You can't lose 'em all." After breaking the Philadelphia jinx, the Colts took two games from the Pirates and three from the Mets, establishing a six-game winning streak and solidifying their hold on eighth place. While only a little over 8,000 spectators showed up for the last three games with the Mets, the Dodgers last visit to Colt Stadium on September 12 drew almost 29,000 fans. But the Colt winning streak was halted as the Dodgers won, with hard luck Ken Johnson taking his fifteenth loss of the season.³²

Before finishing the season with nine games against pennant contenders San Francisco and Los Angeles, the Colts departed on a road trip to Milwaukee and New York. After dropping two one-run decisions to the Braves, the Colts were not excited about playing the Mets, who were

hopelessly mired in tenth place, but they were ready to play the role of spoiler with the coast clubs. Hal Woodeschick summed up Colt attitudes about the New York trip when he quipped, "Wouldn't it be nice if it rained for the next three days." But four games were played with the Mets. The Colts took two twin bills from New York, spoiling Casey Stengel appreciation night. Houston third baseman Bob Aspromonte established a National League record, playing fifty-seven games without an error until he booted a grounder hit by Elia Chacon in the first game of the September 20 doubleheader. The four-game set gave final proof to what had been obvious since April. Despite all the media attention focused on Stengel and the aging stars acquired by the Mets, it was clear the Colts had fielded the better expansion team, finishing twenty games ahead of New York in the standings.³³

The Colts returned home on September 21 to face the Giants for three games. San Francisco won the first game, but Harry Craft was angry because he believed Giants manager Alvin Dark had attempted to run up the score by hit-and-run plays when the Giants held a large lead. Craft predicted, "It'll come back to haunt them." And it did the next evening as a bases-loaded single by Roman Mejias in the ninth propelled the Colts to a 6-5 victory. However, the Giants dominated the Colts in the final home game of the season. The Colts had completed their home season with a record of thirty-two wins and forty-eight losses. The Colts drew 924,456 fans, falling just short of their goal of one million, which had been negated by a team tailspin in July and August and the humid Houston climate. The Colts had also defeated the Mets in the attendance battle, outdrawing the New York club by 1,926 spectators.³⁴

The stage was set for an exciting finish as the Colts moved west to face the Dodgers and Giants for the final six games of the 1962 season. The Giants trailed the Dodgers by three games, and the Colts would have an important say in determining the National League pennant. On September 25, the final road swing of the season opened with Dick Farrell facing his former Dodger teammates. Revenge was sweet as Farrell went ten innings, defeated the Dodgers 3 to 2 and earned his tenth victory of the season. The Dodgers bounced back the next day behind left-hander Johnny Podres who tamed the Colts by a 13 to 1 count. However, the Colts won the series by taking the final game behind some excellent relief pitching by Jim Umbright. The Dodger lead was cut to two games, and a disgruntled crowd showered the field with seat cushions after the final out. After rain on Friday, the Colts faced the Giants in a doubleheader on September 29. The Colts managed to salvage a split with the Giants when Bob Bruce tossed a six hitter in the second game. The Dodgers had dropped two contests to the Cardinals, and Los Angeles entered the final game of the season with a one-game lead over San Francisco. The Colts did their best to play the role of spoiler. They sent staff ace Farrell to face Giant lefty Billy O'Dell before over 40,000 fans. Farrell, as usual, pitched well, but as had been the story

allowed to obscure the memory of the Colt .45s who brought major league baseball to Houston and to Texas in 1962. The ballpark was hot and muggy with numerous mosquitoes, but the achievements of Dick Farrell, Ken Johnson, Bob Bruce, Jim Golden, Hal Woodeschick, Russ Kemmerer, Norm Larker, Bob Lillis, Joe Amalfitano, Bob Aspromonte, Roman Mejias, Carl Warwick, Al Spangler, Hal Smith, and Jim Pendleton are worth remembering.

NOTES

¹Jerry Izenberg, *The Greatest Game Ever Played* (New York, 1987).

²For the problems confronting baseball in 1962 see *Sporting News*, January 24 and 31, 1962.

³On the inaugural season of the New York Mets see *Sporting News*, January 10 and February 14, 1962; Jimmy Breslin, *Can't Anybody Here Play This Game?* (New York, 1963); Leonard Schecter, *Once Upon a Time: The Early Years of the New York Mets* (Garden City, N.Y., 1983); and Robert W. Creamer, *Stengel: The Life and Times* (New York, 1984), pp. 293-303.

⁴Francisco A. Rosales and Barry J. Kaplan, eds., *Houston: A Twentieth Century Urban Frontier* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1983), p. 3; and David G. McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin, 1981). Other good background sources on Houston include George Fuermann, *Houston: The Once and Future City* (Garden City, N.Y., 1971); and Don E. Carlton, *Red Scare!: Right-wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin, 1983).

⁵For an in-depth discussion of the efforts to bring major league baseball to Houston see Clark Nealon, Robert Nottebart, Stanley Siegel, and James Tinsley. "The Campaign for Major League Baseball in Houston," *The Houston Review*, 7 (1985), pp. 3-46; and for details on the construction of the Astrodome see McComb, *Houston*, pp. 186-190; "Houston's Big New Bubble," *Sports Illustrated*, 21 (August 10, 1964), pp. 26-27; Hy Peskin. "Baseball Under the Dome," *Sport*, 40 (July, 1968), pp. 22-25; F.X. Talbert. "The Incredible Houston Dome," *Look*, 29 (April 20, 1965), pp. 96-98; and "What a Wonder. What a Blunder: Houston's New Enclosed Baseball Stadium," *Life*, 58 (April 23, 1965), pp. 76-78.

⁶For Colt Stadium see *Sporting News*, January 10 and February 21, 1962; and *Houston Chronicle*, January 11 and 25, 1962.

⁷For early Houston draft selections see Sid Sussman, "Gusher in Houston," *Baseball Monthly*, 1 (March, 1962) pp. 14-18; *Houston Chronicle*, January 7, 1962; and *Sporting News*, February 21, 1962.

⁸For background information on Harry Craft see *Houston Chronicle*, January 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26, 1962.

⁹For the early exhibition schedule see *Houston Chronicle*, March 11, 12, 13, and 14, 1962. For an excellent summary of the Colts exhibition season see *Sporting News*, April 11, 1962.

¹⁰For the Colts home opener see *Sporting News*, April 18, 1962; and *Houston Chronicle*, April 11, 1962. For background information on opening day hero Shantz see Lester J. Biederman, "Wee Shantz Pitched Big," *Baseball Digest*, 24 (March, 1965), pp. 91-93; and June Benefield, "The Bobby Shantz Story," *Zest Magazine: The Houston Chronicle's Magazine of People, Places and Pleasures* (April 8, 1962), pp. 1 and 6.

¹¹*Houston Chronicle*, April 12 and 13, 1962. For background information on Roy Hofheinz see Ray Edgar, *Grand Huckster: Houston's Judge Roy Hofheinz Genius of the Astrodome* (Memphis, Tenn., 1980); and Tay Terrell, "Fast Man with a .45," *Sports Illustrated*, 46 (March 26, 1962) pp. 32-41.

¹²*Houston Chronicle*, April 14, 15, 17, and 18, 1962. For more quotes from Casey Stengel on the 1962 season see Robert Creamer, "The Return of Casey Stengel," *Baseball Monthly*, 1 (March, 1962), pp. 20-21; Gilbert Millstein, "Musings of a Dugout Socrates," *New York Times Magazine* (August 26, 1962), p. 17; and Harry T. Paxton, "Casey the Indestructable," *Saturday Evening Post*, 235 (April 7, 1962), p. 46.

all season, the Houston bats fell silent. The Giants triumphed, and Farrell lost his twentieth contest of the season. The San Francisco victory placed pressure on the Dodgers, who dropped a 1-0 contest to the Cardinals, forcing a play-off between the Dodgers and Giants. The Giants eventually prevailed in the best two-of-three series, and the Colts had played a pivotal role in deciding the outcome of the National League pennant, a fitting conclusion to what was really a rather successful inaugural campaign.³⁵

The Colts compiled a record of fifteen wins and twelve losses for the month of September, their best month of the season. A strong finish and the excitement of being involved in the pennant race tended to erase memories of the Colts' disastrous July and August. Optimism was the watchword for Houston management following the 1962 season. Predicted to finish tenth, the Colts achieved eighth place, completing the year with a record of sixty-four wins and ninety-six defeats. While finishing thirty-six games out of first and sixteen out of seventh – Philadelphia with their domination of Houston was able to gain seventh place – the Colts completed the season six games ahead of ninth-place Chicago and twenty-four ahead of the Mets, who had compiled a record of just forty wins against 120 losses. The Colts' surprising finish was primarily due to a fine pitching staff which achieved an earned run average of 3.80, while compiling a strikeout total of 1,039 and allowing only 467 walks. The hitting star of the franchise was outfielder Roman Mejias with a .286 batting average, twenty-four home-runs, and seventy-six runs-batted in. 1962 was Mejias's only year in a Houston uniform. In the off-season, he was traded to Boston for American League batting champion Pete Runnels. The team also did well at the box office, ending up sixth in National League attendance. Vice-President George Kirksey summed up the year, "Most of our objectives were realized. We did not lose 100 games or finish last. We licked our expansion twin, the Mets, and outdrew them at the box office. We have a foundation to build on, and by blending our upcoming players in with the 1962 team, should begin the long, hard climb up the National League ladder." Similar sentiments were expressed by Roy Hofheinz, who concluded, "We made great progress in a year, and we look forward to continued hard work and progress. No one in the Houston organization will be satisfied until Houston has a world's champion."³⁶

The championship predicted by Hofheinz has eluded the Houston franchise and no pennants fly under the Astrodome. The competent expansion team of 1962 was not a publicity match for the Casey Stengel's "Can't Anybody Here Play This Game" Mets. And the futile swing of Kevin Bass in 1986 allowed the Mets to defeat Houston on the playing field and go on to another world championship. In 1980, Houston fans also suffered the agony of defeat in an excellent National League championship series with their 1962 rivals, the Philadelphia Phillies.

The last thirty-one years have been difficult ones for Houston fans, but the glitter of the Astrodome and frustrations of recent seasons should not be

¹³*Sporting News*, April 25, 1962; and *Houston Chronicle*, April 15, 19, and 20, 1962. For African-Americans in baseball during the 1962 season see William B. Furlong, "A Negro Ballplayer's Life Today," *Sport*, 33 (May, 1962), pp. 38-39.

¹⁴*Sporting News*, May 2 and 9, 1962; and *Houston Chronicle*, April 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30, 1962.

¹⁵For the Shantz trade see *Sporting News*, May 16, 1962; and *Houston Chronicle*, May 7, 1962.

¹⁶*Houston Chronicle*, May 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, 1962; and *Sporting News*, May 23, 1962.

¹⁷*Sporting News*, May 23, 1962; and *Houston Chronicle*, May 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21, 1962.

¹⁸*Houston Chronicle*, May 22 and 23, 1962.

¹⁹*Houston Chronicle*, May 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28, 1962. For profiles of Roman Mejias and Jim Golden see *Sporting News*, June 2 and 9, 1962.

²⁰*Houston Chronicle*, May 29 and 31, June 1, 2, 3, and 4, 1962.

²¹*Houston Chronicle*, June 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 15; and *Sporting News*, June 23, 1962.

²²*Houston Chronicle*, June 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21, 1962; and *Sporting News*, June 23, 1962.

²³*Houston Chronicle*, June 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27, 1962; and *Sporting News*, July 7, 1962.

²⁴*Houston Chronicle*, June 30, July 1, 2, 3, and 5, 1962; and *Sporting News*, July 14, 1962. For background information on Bob Cerv see Charles Dexter, "Cerv-is with a Smile," *Baseball Digest*, 17 (July, 1958), pp. 51-57; and Joe McGuff, "Cerv begins at 32," *Sport*, 37 (February, 1959), pp. 35-37.

²⁵*Houston Chronicle*, July 6, 7, 8, and 9, 1962.

²⁶*Sporting News*, July 14 and 21, 1962. For additional background information on Dick Farrell see Mickey Herskowitz, "Dick Farrell: A Guy Has to Grow Up," *Sport*, 38 (October, 1964) pp. 34-35; and Larry Merchant, "Losing 20 Games Isn't Easy," *Saturday Evening Post*, 236 (June 18, 1962) pp. 58-60.

²⁷*Houston Chronicle*, July 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 18, 1962; and *Sporting News*, July 28, 1962. For profiles of the flashy Bob Aspromonte see Mickey Herskowitz, "No Candy Problem for Aspromonte Now," *Baseball Digest*, 23 (June, 1964) pp. 71-74; and Wilt Browning, "Bob Aspromonte: A Legend in El Dorado," *Baseball Digest*, 28 (July, 1969), pp. 49-51.

²⁸*Houston Chronicle*, July 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26, 1962; and *Sporting News*, August 4, 1962.

²⁹*Houston Chronicle*, July 28, 29, 30, and 31, 1962; and *Sporting News*, August 11, 1962. For negative commentary on the second All-Star game see Jim Brosnan, "Two All-Star Games: The Players' View," *Baseball Monthly*, 1 (July, 1962), p. 1; and Melvin Durslag, "All-Star Baseball Time-Again?," *TV Guide*, 9 (July 28, 1962), pp. 4-5.

³⁰*Houston Chronicle*, August 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, 1962; and *Sporting News*, August 11, 18, and 25, 1962.

³¹*Houston Chronicle*, August 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30, and September 1 and 2, 1962; and *Sporting News*, September 1 and 8, 1962. For background information on Norm Larker see Arnold Hana, "Larker Never Lets Up," *Sport*, 31 (January, 1961) pp. 50-52.

³²*Houston Chronicle*, September 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 13, 1962; and *Sporting News*, September 15 and 22, 1962. On hard luck Ken Johnson see Mickey Herskowitz, "Ken Johnson - A No-Hitter Worth but \$1,350," *Baseball Digest*, 24 (June, 1965) pp. 13-15.

³³*Houston Chronicle*, September 16, 17, 18, 19, and 21, 1962; and *Sporting News*, September 22 and 29, 1962.

³⁴*Houston Chronicle*, September 22, 23, and 24, 1962; and *Sporting News*, October 6, 1962.

³⁵*Houston Chronicle*, September 26, 27, 28, 30, and October 1, 1962; and *Sporting News*, October 6 and 13, 1962. On the Giants-Dodgers rivalry with which Houston was caught up at the

end of the season see Lee Allen. *The Giants and the Dodgers: The Fabulous Story of Baseball's Fiercest Feud* (New York, 1964); Walter Bingham, "The Race is in the West: San Francisco's Giants and Los Angeles' Dodgers," *Sports Illustrated*, 16 (June 4, 1962), pp. 339; and Eric Walker. "The Giants-Dodgers Rivalry." in Laurence J. Hyman, ed., *San Francisco Giants 1958-1982: Silver Anniversary Yearbook* (San Francisco, 1982).

³⁶*Houston Chronicle*, October 1 and 4, 1962; and *Sporting News*, October 13, 1962.