

SPORTS

Fantasy Isn't on Strike

Don't let anyone tell you that the All-Star Game was canceled last week. On the field at Cleveland Stadium, Dave Parker of the Pirates, with three hits including a soaring home run, led the National League to a 15-2 rout. In nearly 100 cities, fans tuned in to a radio account of a 6-0 National League win, starring Manny Trillo of the Phillies. Sports Phone callers in New York and Detroit were told that the American League won, 4-0, on the strength of a homer by Yankee Reggie Jackson. And in Washington, D.C., radio listeners were treated to a vivid play-by-play of a 5-3 NL victory.

With reality on strike, baseball junkies have been turning to fantasy for their fixes, and last week's unplayed All-Star games

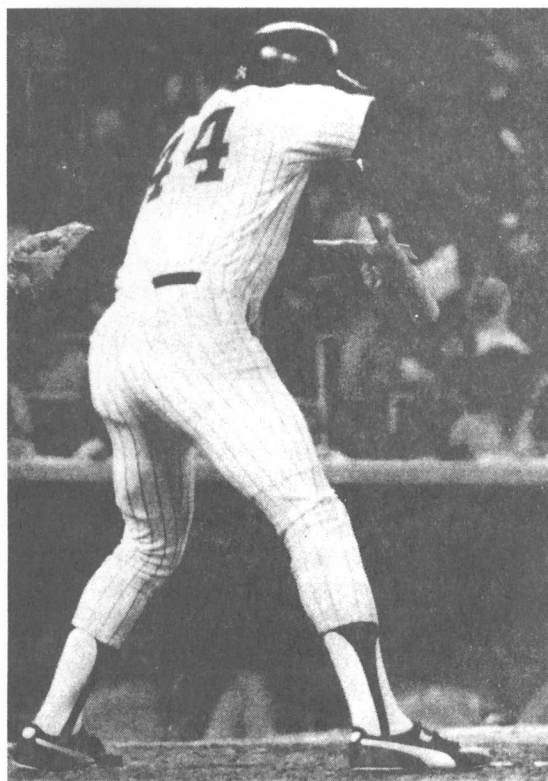
major-league players based on their performances during a given season. The cards describe various probabilities—what a particular left-handed batter might do in a certain situation against a left-handed pitcher, for instance—and the game is played by rolling dice to determine each player's actions. The game in Cleveland Stadium was played that way—before a live crowd of 35—with former Indian pitcher Bob Feller on hand to throw out the first die. Boston radio station WITS produced a Strat-O-Matic All-Star Game that was broadcast in Cleveland and other cities. The station, in fact, has been staging Strat-O-Matic games throughout the strike, occasionally confounding listeners like the one who lives near Fenway Park and called up to insist the strike was over because he could hear the crowd cheering.

There are plenty of other ways to fake a baseball game. One Seattle All-Star clash (NL, 9-4) was based on a computer model developed by a University of Washington staffer. NBC used that version for a "Today" broadcast, adding film pieced together from past games. It produced some unusual effects—like a batter hitting a ball in sunlight to an outfielder catching it at night. The Washington broadcast was more traditional. WEAM announcer Nat Allbright, a veteran sportscaster, described a full game in tantalizing detail much as he used to do from ticker-tape reports.

Delirium: Even before the all-star spoofs, fans across the country were suspending their disbelief and passing the summer in the manner to which they are accustomed. The Chicago Tribune has been reprinting daily accounts of the exploits of the city's last pennant-winning teams (1945 for the Cubbies, 1959 for the Pale Hose). Sometimes, fantasy

can be more gratifying than the real thing. The Padre-powered All-Star Game was but part of an ongoing delirium in San Diego. Since the strike began, team announcers have been broadcasting scores and highlights of scheduled games and the Padres have won each of them, setting a major-league record of 31 straight victories up to the All-Star break. "People are dancing in the streets," proclaims KFMB program director Mark Larson. "If the strike goes on all season, you can plan on hearing the Padres and the Yankees in a simulated World Series."

DENNIS A. WILLIAMS with bureau reports



Jackson's 'winning' bunt: Real photo, unreal game

provided the best opportunity yet for some serious make-believe. Perhaps the most fantastic account was in San Diego, where announcers broadcast a game improbably loaded with players from the pitiful Padres, whose heroics helped the Nationals to a 9-3 win. The New York Post reported a game in which slugger Jackson laid down a suicide squeeze bunt ("I'm a bleeping .199 hitter, ain't I?" he said later), scoring George Brett to win the game in the ninth inning for Yankee reliever Goose Gossage.

Many of these ersatz classics have been staged with the use of a board game called Strat-O-Matic. The game includes cards for