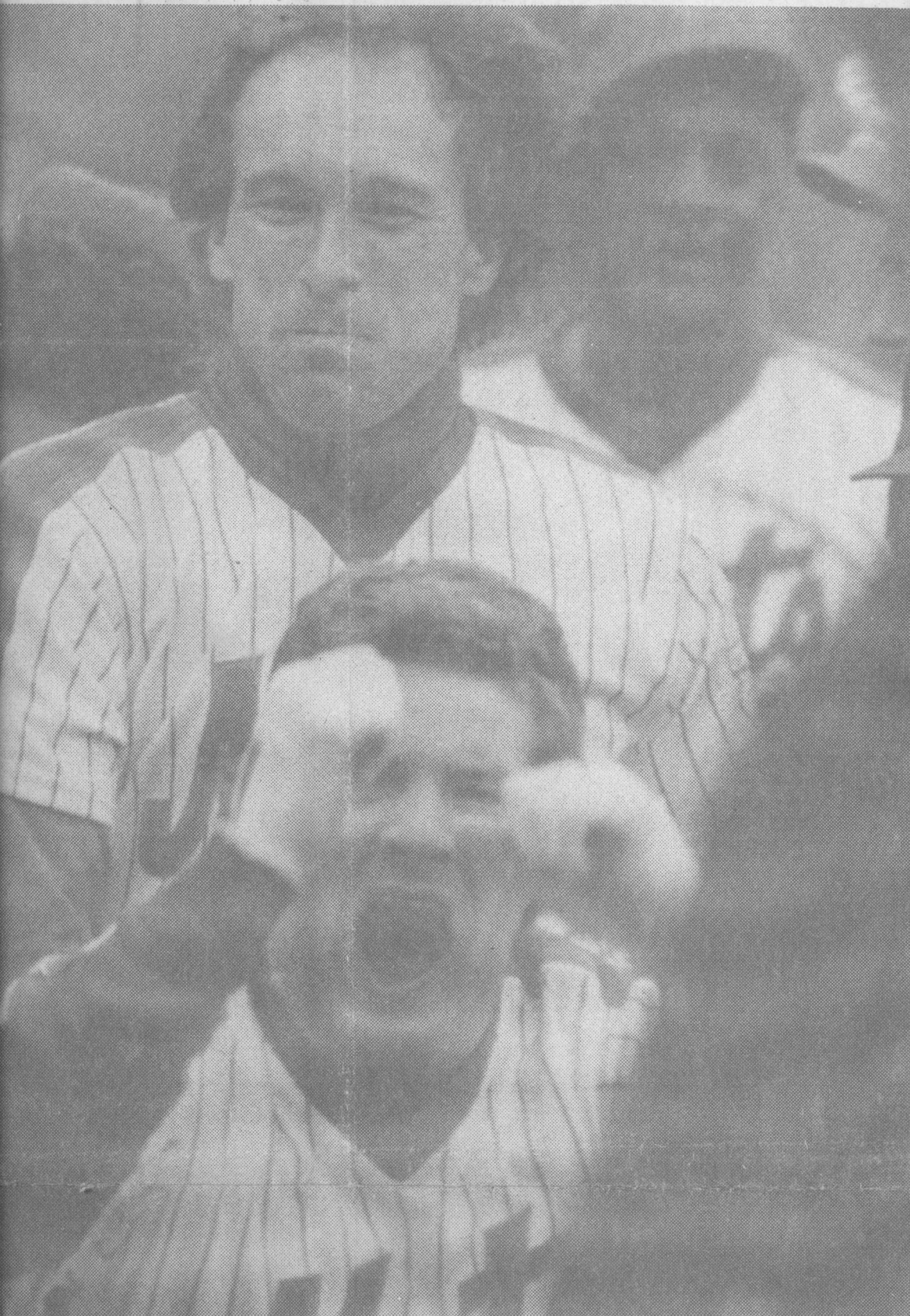


Win, 6-5, on Dykstra Homer



Rally in 9th For 2-1 Lead

By JOSEPH DURSO

The Mets staged their first playoff game in New York in 13 years yesterday and won by 6-5 with two flashes of electrifying theater: a three-run home run by Darryl Strawberry in the sixth inning that tied the Houston Astros, and a two-run home run by Lenny Dykstra in the ninth that beat them.

Dykstra, the hyperactive little center fielder and brat of the team, got into the game as a pinch-hitter in the seventh inning and struck out. But in the ninth, with Walter Backman on second base and one down, he hit the second pitch thrown to him by Dave Smith, who saved 33 games this year as the ace of the Houston bullpen.

The ball shot down the right-field line and cleared the fence as the crowd of 55,000 rocked Shea Stadium. And the Mets, who had started the chilly afternoon four runs down after two innings, suddenly seized the lead for the first time in the game and in the playoffs for the National League pennant. They lead the four-of-seven-game series by two games to one with Game 4 set for tonight at Shea Stadium.

"Dykstra does like to swing for the fences," said Dave Johnson, the manager of the Mets. "I tell him all the time: 'If you line drives, you'd hit .330 every year.' But I forgive him today."

Dykstra, who usually leads off and sets the table for the heavy hitters in the lineup, hit .295 this season with eight home runs. And he conceded that he had been cast in a strange dramatic role with the game on the line as the Mets trailing in their final time at bat.

"The last time I hit a home run to win a game in the bottom of the ninth," he said, "was playing Stratomatic against my brother where you roll the dice. I rolled some good numbers." Stratomatic is a table baseball game.

But none as good as the ones he rolled

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College Scoreboard

Princeton	20	Oklahoma
Columbia	14	Texas
Penn	34	Pittsburgh
Brown	0	Notre Dame
Michigan	27	Army
Michigan State	6	Tennessee
Penn State	23	Miami
Cincinnati	17	West Virginia

Details, pages 4-6

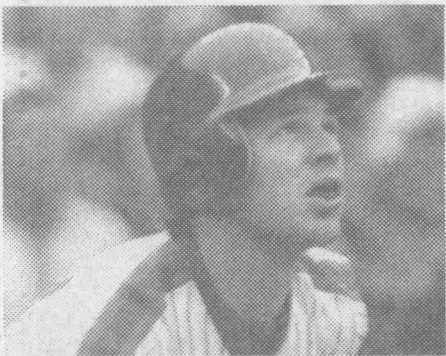
The New York Times/Barton Silverman

in bottom of ninth, Lenny Dykstra holds a private celebration. Gary Carter is behind him.

Dykstra 'Nails' Astros

LEN DYKSTRA hit eight home runs for the Mets during the regular season. But for Davey Johnson, that was eight too many. The Mets' manager preferred his 5-foot-10-inch, 165-pound center fielder to hit line drives for an even higher average than his .295 this year, rather than waste fly balls to the warning track.

"He does like to swing for the fences, I



The New York Times/Barton Silverman

Dykstra watching game-winner exit Shea Stadium.

forgive him today," Johnson was saying with a laugh. "I'm sure he'll be uppercutting bigtime now."

With one out in the bottom of the ninth inning at Shea Stadium yesterday, the 22-year-old Californian lofted a two-run homer off Dave Smith into the right-field bullpen for a 6-5 triumph that provided the Mets with a 2-1 lead in the National League Championship Series going into tonight's fourth game against Mike Scott, the split-fingered fastball pitcher.

"The last time I hit a home run in the bottom of the ninth to win a game," Dykstra said, "I was playing my Stratomatic baseball game, rolling dice against my brother Kevin."

Nicknamed "Nails," as in "as tough as nails," Dykstra remembered his last previous appearance against Smith, the Astros' ace reliever this season with 33 saves.

"It was almost the exact same situation," he said. "He threw me a fastball and I hit a double off the wall to tie the game. I didn't think I'd see another fastball, but he threw me a fastball on the first pitch and I fouled it off. I had a gut feeling then that he'd throw me a forkball next, and he did. I got a pitch I saw real well, and hit it real well."

Johnson had also gambled well, as he has so often in the Mets' total now of 110 victories.

With the Astros starting Bob Knepper, their best left-hander with a 17-12 record, Johnson had Mookie Wilson in center

Met teammates greeting Lenny Dykstra after dramatic two-run home run in the bottom of the ninth yesterday in Game 3 at Shea Stadium.

Dave Anderson/Sports of The Times

Dykstra 'Nails' the Astros With a Homer

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field. But with the Mets' losing, 5-4, in the seventh, the manager inserted Dykstra, a left-handed hitter, as a pinch-hitter against Knepper for Rick Aguilera, who had relieved Ron Darling in the sixth. Dykstra struck out, but then went to center field as Wilson moved to left.

"I was taking a gamble," Johnson acknowledged. "I called upstairs and found out that Knepper had thrown about 100 pitches. I thought Hal Lanier would probably hook Knepper after that inning and then I'd have Lenny in the game against their right-handed relief pitchers. And when I saw Hal shake Knepper's hand in the dugout after the seventh, I knew I was all right."

Two innings later, Johnson's move had Dykstra batting ninth at the perfect moment — against a right-handed pitcher after Wally Backman's leadoff drag-bunt single and a passed ball.

Hal Lanier, the Astros' manager, disputed Backman's bunt-single, contending that the Mets' second baseman had veered out of the baseline in order to avoid the tag by Glenn Davis, the Astros' first baseman.

Dutch Rennert, the first-base umpire,

ruled that Backman "establishes his own baseline" because he had run beyond where Davis had a play on him.

"I was conscious of the three feet at all times," Rennert said, referring to the lined line three feet to the right of the first-base foul line. "And the home-plate umpire, Frank Pulli, could also call him out, but there was no doubt in my mind."

Johnson knew that Backman had veered away from the foul-line itself.

"Wally was on the borderline," the Mets' manager said. "That's about all they'll let you take."

Backman knew he wasn't allowed to run out of the baseline to avoid a tag.

"But the first baseman was out of my vision behind me," Backman said. "The key for me on that bunt is to make the first baseman field it. And after I got past him, I was just trying to slide head first into the bag and grab it with my left hand."

Danny Heep, pinch-hitting for Rafael Santana, squared to bunt. If successful, the sacrifice would move Backman to second base with one out.

Heep fouled Smith's first pitch. But the second pitch sailed inside, off Alan Ashby's mitt, for a passed ball. Backman hurried to second.

"That's when I thought the momentum changed," Johnson said later. "I don't like to butt and now I didn't have to."

Heep flied out. With an 0-1 count, Dykstra swung at Smith's forkball. As the ball sailed into the Mets' bullpen, the chunky center fielder raised both his arms and circled the bases as his teammates formed a welcoming committee at home plate. Almost magically, Johnson's insertion of Dykstra as a pinch-hitter in the seventh had created a tingling triumph in the ninth.

In contrast, Lanier's move had backfired. After having taken out Knepper, the Astros' manager brought in Charlie Kerfeld, the 235-pound right-hander, to pitch the eighth. Even though Kerfeld got Gary Carter, Darryl Strawberry and Ray Knight in order, Lanier brought in Smith to start the ninth.

"There's no reason," Lanier explained later, "not to bring in my No. 1 man."

To counter that, Johnson had used Dykstra as a pinch-hitter in the seventh.

"Davey didn't say anything to me before that, he doesn't operate that way," Dykstra said, "but as the game goes along, I think along with Davey — he used me knowing that Knepper wasn't going the distance."

It's been that type of year for the Mets and their manager. Sooner or later, almost every move Davey Johnson has made has turned out to be correct.

Some of those same moves didn't work the previous two years. And for one reason or another, they might not work next year. But judging not only by Dykstra's two-run homer in the ninth inning but also by so many other magical moves by the manager throughout the season, this indeed appears to be the Mets' year.

Tonight the Mets must prove it the hard way, swinging against Mike Scott, the ex-Met right-hander who struck out 14 in a 1-0 five-hitter in Wednesday night's opener at the Astrodome.

If the split-fingered fastball is a "feel" pitch, as some hitters believe, Scott might not be able to feel the ball in the chill of Shea Stadium as effectively as he did in the warmth of the dome. Tonight's weather forecast is for "thickening cloudiness with lows in the middle 50's." Look for the Mets to try to jump on Scott early, before he has an opportunity to get into his rhythm.

After all, not even the Mets can expect to win in the ninth inning all the time. Especially on a two-run homer by a center fielder who's supposed to be hitting line drives.