



Lenny Dykstra is center of attention as he crosses plate with winning run for Mets in bottom of the ninth inning.

# Reality replaces board game

Dykstra's ninth-inning home run could join Thomson's in baseball lore

NEW YORK — Lenny Dykstra came bunny-hopping his home run home. His arms were up and he hopped once between first and second when the baseball disappeared. The New York fans were making their ballpark quake and the ball was bouncing somewhere behind the blue right-field fence. It was gone, and Lenny hopped again three times between second and third. And then, three more hops and he bounded into the arms of his massed teammates.

He was at home plate.

"The last time I hit a home run like this," said Lenny Dykstra, "was when I was playing Strat-O-Matic with my little brother. You know, when you roll the dice.

"I WAS always Rod Carew. You know, you always give yourself a real player's name.

"Strat-O-Matic, it's a great game. You know, it's a board game. You have lineups. You draft players. You roll the dice.

"I still play it."

He rolled the dice Saturday and the baseball traveled majestically deep to right field. The Mets won this third National League pennant playoff game, 6-5. It was genuine. It wasn't on a board in a family room in a house. It was Shea Stadium, in New York, with the jet planes roaring overhead. And the fans roaring thunderously deep in the grandstands. With one roll, Lenny Dykstra snapped the Astros' morale.

"I always think of Carlton Fisk guiding his home run fair in the World Series," said Dykstra, stubble on his chin and jowls, his hat perched back on his head in Little League fashion. "Mine was going fair. The only question about mine was whether it was long enough."



Jerry Green

IT WAS. It was the bottom of the ninth. The Astros had had control of this game since the first. "Before we even knew it, it was 4-0 against us," said Dykstra.

Then again, after the Mets tied it in the sixth on Darryl Strawberry's home run, the Astros had gone in front 5-4. Another inning and they would have the advantage in the playoff series.

These are the special spots in baseball. These are the moments for history. Bobby Thomson once hit a playoff home run in this town and won a pennant. Bill Mazeroski hit a home run that won a World Series. Fisk hit his home run on a night of high drama in Boston.

AND SATURDAY Lenny Dykstra hit his in the bottom of the ninth and bunny-hopped around the bases. It will be another piece of history. It looms as the ultimate turning-point of these pennant playoffs. The Astros have Mike Scott going again today in the fourth game, on short rest. They may already be doomed. They sure looked it in the agonizing minutes after Dykstra's home run.

Lenny Dykstra — how can he compare with Thomson and Maz and Fisk? How can he be a home-run hero in the town where Babe Ruth played — and where Lou Gehrig, Mel Ott, Mickey Mantle, Duke Snider, Roger Maris, and yes, Darryl

Strawberry, hit them. And Joltin' Joe DiMaggio. And now, Lenny D., No. 4 on the Mets.

Dykstra is a kid with a dirty face. He is more urchin than slugger. He is 23. He is just 5-foot-10, not home-run stature, 160 pounds, marbles champion weight.

"I USED to choke up on the bat," Dykstra said. "I'm not supposed to hit home runs.

"But this year I went down to the end of the bat. Like a real man."

He is from California, the town with the hitting name of Garden Grove. But Dykstra is the embodiment of the boiling streets of New York. He is a self-described pest of a ballplayer.

"I grew up 10 minutes from Anaheim Stadium," Lenny D. said. "Me and my buddy used to ride bikes to Anaheim Stadium and sneak in."

DOWN AROUND the corner of the dungeon corridors of Shea, the Astros stared in tortured silence.

Dave Smith sat there in front of his locker. He was still in uniform, the rainbow colors embroidered on the shoulders. He, too, was a real man. He could have hidden. So many athletes, in distress, do that. But Smith stayed and repeated details of the pitch he had fed to Dykstra.

"I didn't do my job," Smith said. "I'll do it next time. It's my job, and I enjoy my job."

Why, a man asked, did he sit there when others might have taken refuge while suffering their grief?

"I'm not ashamed to be sitting here," said Smith. "I admit I screwed up. I got to take the bad with the good."

A roll of the dice.