

# SPORTS SLANTS

- By Ray Shank

At this writing, Montreal Expos were out of that thrilling, down-to-the-bitter-end National League east division playoff race, Hank Aaron was still two games shy of tying Babe Ruth's home run record, and Bobby Riggs was still trying to figure out a way to get a re-match with Ms. Billy Jean King.

The Expos, while they didn't make it in their fifth year of operation, gave their home-town fans something to cheer about in the last couple of weeks of competition. They finished up with their best won-lost record ever, drew close to 1.5 million fans and, all in all, had a fantastic season.

That 1.5 million figure isn't exact but it's a known fact that their home attendance record was better than more than half the other teams in either the National or American leagues.

That's very encouraging when you consider that they are one of the two youngest teams in the league and at the same time own one of the smaller parks in either league.

Baltimore Orioles (my pick to win the World Series) drew peanuts all season (under 1 million), as did many other clubs -- clubs like Atlanta Braves, who have the most publicized player in baseball (Aaron).

The Expos were in the battle for that east division title until the second last week of the schedule. What killed them was that four-game series against the Pirates in Montreal, when they lost three out of four. Just prior to that they lost two heartbreakers to Chicago Cubs, one of them 8-6, after they (Expos) had taken a 5-0 lead in the first inning.

Expos management felt the team would make it until the last week of the schedule, when nothing short of a miracle would qualify them. Team president John McHale announced just a couple of weeks ago that Jarry Park would be enlarged to 33,000 capacity with construction of 3,000 temporary bleacher seats.

And to prove that Expos appreciated everything the fans had done for them during the season (and that past four years), McHale also assured that all season ticket holders would be able to retain their seats for both the National League playoffs and the World Series.

Expos had over 8,000 subscribers for season games. The most disheartening thing about the fact Expos didn't make it is that one week they were a mere half-game behind the leaders and the next thing you know they were down in fifth place.

That hurts a player and a fan. They've never finished up better than fifth in their division, and it would have been nice to finish second -- or, better still, win a championship. At this writing, though, they were fifth, a familiar spot, and destined not to finish better than fourth, although there was a slight chance they could take third ahead of the Cubs.

1974 will definitely be the Expos' year, mark my words !!!

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