

WE NOW HAVE an answer to the burning question of how long Larry Bowa's patience would last while the Phillies' offense sputtered:

Six games, to be exact.

After the Phillies averaged 2.5 runs in the first week of the season en route to a 1-5 record, the manager mixed up the 3-4-5



Bowa

heart of his order. Jim Thome dropped from third to fourth, Pat Burrell from fourth to fifth and Bobby Abreu went from fifth to third.

"I guess guys feel more comfortable hitting in certain situations," Bowa explained, adding that he had discussed the changes with all three on the plane back from Florida on Sunday evening.

At the same time, Bowa launched into a spirited defense of his lineup.

"This is our lineup and they're going to hit," he said, almost defiantly. "I don't know when. But they're going to hit."

"We're not hitting as a team right now and there's nothing any human being can do to change it. It's tough to hit a baseball. You can beat yourself up at night. You can drive yourself crazy.

"But there's nothing you can do about it. You can hire Greg Gross or Ted Williams or Mike Schmidt. When the hitter gets in the box, though, it's him against the pitcher and he's got to step it up."

The kicker is that this tale did not have a happy ending. In the fairy-tale version, the Phillies would have responded to Bowa's shuffle by throwing double digits on the board to the delight of a sellout crowd at the first official game at Citizens Bank Park.

Since this is a fantasy, we'll also make the weather warm and sunny.

The reality, however, was that the day was cold and raw and wet. And the losing and offensive ineptitude continued with just six hits against Paul Wilson, Phil Norton and Danny Graves in a 4-1 loss to the Cincinnati Reds.

Fate even thoughtfully provid-



DAVID WHALEY/Philadelphia Daily News

A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE

Former Phillies pitcher Steve Carlton unveils statue of himself before the home opener at Citizens Bank Park yesterday.

ed some salt, suitable for rubbing into the wound.

In the new alignment, the left-handed-hitting Abreu and Thome were batting back-to-back instead of having the righthanded Burrell between them. So, the way things have been going, you just knew this was going to happen:

With the Reds up by three going into the bottom of the eighth, Wilson appeared to tire. A leadoff single by pinch-hitter Ricky Ledee and a one-out single by Placido Polanco left the Phillies with runners on first and second with their big guns, all representing the tying run, lined up to follow.

Reds manager Dave Miley brought in lefthander Norton to face Abreu, who had homered in his first at-bat. Abreu flied out.

Now, in the original blueprint, Miley would have had a decision to make. Should he leave Norton, his only lefthanded reliever, in to face Burrell? Because if Burrell

got on, the righthander would have to face Thome.

As it was, there was no decision. Thome took a called third strike and closer Danny Graves came in to polish off the Phillies in the bottom of the ninth.

Afterward, there was little Bowa could do but continue to insist that the tide would turn.

"We're going to hit," he said. "But I can't say when. I come to the park every day thinking this will be the day. If I knew the date, I'd be a genius."

Of course, the date he would have preferred was April 5.

Phillies

Larry Bowa was asked if he would try to manufacture some runs with sacrifices, steals, hit-and-runs, etc. "You can manufacture runs, but we're not getting anybody on base. And, when we do, the meat of the lineup is coming up and I'm not going to bunt

with those guys," he said ... As expected, the bullpen had been reversed by the time the first official game was played yesterday. During two exhibitions a week earlier, the Phillies occupied the upper tier of the bilevel bullpen. But some of the team's relievers expressed concern about the sightlines and the proximity of fans, and asked to be relocated to the lower portion.

Catcher Mike Lieberthal started and played the entire game despite a bruised knee suffered in a home-plate collision on Sunday at Florida's Pro Player Stadium ... Jim Thome, who had 131 runs batted in last season, is still looking for his first RBI after seven games this year ... Jerry Crawford was the plate umpire yesterday, as he was at the final game at Veterans Stadium last September. His father, Shag Crawford, worked the first game at the Vet in 1971. ★

Ashburn clan on hand for 'Whitey' tribute

By PAUL HAGEN
hagen@phillynews.com

The kids, 10 of them, had their picture taken standing at the base of the statue.

Bette, the older sister, cried.

The rest of the family beamed with pride after pulling the red shroud off the statue of the most beloved Phillie of all time in centerfield before the first official game at Citizens Bank Park yesterday.

With that, Ashburn Alley was formally dedicated to the memory of Rich "Whitey" Ashburn.

Hall of Fame announcer Harry Kalas, naturally, was the master of ceremonies.

"We know the Statue of Liber-

ty," he said, speaking through a bullhorn. "But this is the Statue of Happiness. It's for a man who brought happiness to all of us as a player and a broadcaster."

In all, 41 relatives were on hand, many coming from Ashburn's native Nebraska.

The statue depicts the speedy leadoff hitter breaking from the batter's box. After it was unveiled, Kalas reached up and touched its right hand. His baby blue eyes were misty. Or maybe it was just the rain sprinkling the concourse at that moment.

A crowd of a couple hundred clapped and cheered for the former Whiz Kids centerfielder and immensely popular ex-broadcaster, who died hours after col-

ling a Phillies-Mets game at Shea Stadium in September 1997.

"This is incredible," said Richard Ashburn, Whitey's oldest son, who wore a replica jersey of his father's No. 1 and later threw out the first pitch, along with Mike Schmidt, Robin Roberts and Steve Carlton, who also had statues unveiled yesterday.

Among those watching in Ashburn Alley was Phillies chairman Bill Giles, who also presided over the opening of Veterans Stadium in 1971.

"This is a little better," he said. "There are more colors, and it takes your breath away. The colors are just so dramatic. At the time, we thought the Vet was special, but it was more of an arena.

This is a ballpark. This is I what I grew up with, Cros Field in Cincinnati."

Kalas, naturally, was near overcome with emotion. When arrived at the park yesterday, noticed that the plaque dedicating the booth at Veterans Stadium had been reattached to the wall outside his new working space.

Then, only a few minutes after the gates opened, it was over. Family members wandered. Some fans milled around, taking pictures of the bronze stat. Long lines already had formed. Tony Luke's, Geno's, Ball's Barbecue, Harry the K's.

Ashburn Alley had been taken over by the fans. Which is as should be. ★

GAME

Continued from Page 76

ing position, ahead of the Expos and the Reds. They exited 164 - still ahead of the Reds, but with four fewer wins.

Bowa shuffled the meat of his lineup at 3-4-5 - Thome, Pat Burrell, Bobby Abreu - to run Abreu, Thome, Burrell. Abreu homered in the first, but the trio combined to strand five runners.

This time, though, the starting pitching faltered. Randy Wolf, the most successful homegrown product in the system to date, gave up four runs in five innings.

"I've seen Randy throw better. I've seen him throw worse," Bowa said. "It's very difficult to pitch every day knowing you don't have runs up there."

Will they ever have runs up there?

"We're not going to score one a game," Bowa promised. Actually, they're averaging 2.29. "We've got some guys who can play. They're going to hit."

Wolf, too, minimized the reality of 1-6.

"If this was to happen in June, it would get lost in the shuffle," he insisted.

Perhaps. Still, to review ...

Real dirt.

Real grass.

Real problems. ★

FAN REACTION Pages 5-7

EDITORIAL Page 23

First quenchers

First things first at the home opener at Citizens Bank Park:

Weather: Yesterday's game-time temperature was 43 degrees with light rain.

Pitch: From Randy Wolf to D'Angelo Jimenez, a called strike, 1:32 p.m.

Hit: Jimenez ground-rule double down the rightfield line in the first.

Out: Barry Larkin, ground out to second baseman Placido Polanco.

Wild pitch: Wolf, first inning.

Boo: After the wild pitch.

Run: Jimenez scored on the wild pitch.

Strikeout: Ken Griffey Jr., swinging, in the first.

Phillies batter: Marlon Byrd, grounded out to second baseman Jimenez.

Home run: Phillies' Bobby Abreu to leftfield with two out and the bases empty in the bottom of the first. Reds starter Paul Wilson pitching.

Stolen base: Byrd swiped second base in the third.

Fan interference: First inning.

Injury: Cincinnati's Barry Larkin, after sliding awkwardly at home plate while scoring a fifth-inning run.

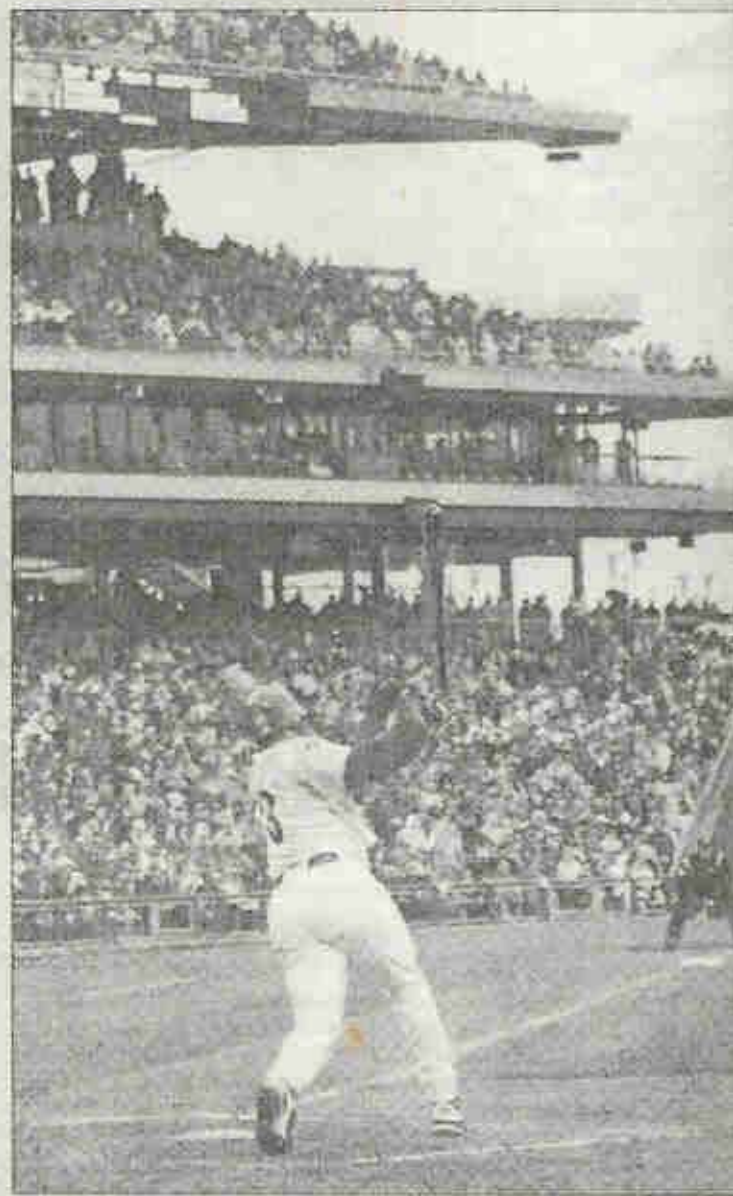
Doubleplay: Tuned by the Phillies (Jimmy Rollins-Polanco-Jim Thome) in the sixth on a ground ball by Jimenez.

Winning pitcher: Wilson.

Losing pitcher: Philadelphia's Randy Wolf.

Attendance: 41,626 (cap. 43,500).

Game time: 2:41.



Bobby Abreu belts the first official home run at new ballpark.

G.W. MILLER/DAILY NEWS