

On Target

By Sturgis Hedrick



PITY NOT THE Eastern Blues. It might appear just a wee bit premature to count out as 1977 champions the winningest warriors in the 4-year history of the Seashore Baseball League.

Many a miracle can come to pass, of course, in the scant 13 days before the league opening Sunday, April 24. But some overly-optimistic title contenders have already written off the Blues as dead ducks.

Color that school of thought as overhasty, to say the very least. Sure they lost an exhibition game right within the lions' roar of their home Smyrna coliseum. The Carteret Tides quelled the thunder from Downeast, 6-3, on April 3.

BUT GRADY WILLIS, veteran Coastal campaigner, has breathed new fire into this year's Tides and they loom right now as the team to beat in this 1977 Seashore donnybrook.

Credit the Carteret champs of 1975 with a penetrating insight that may spin them into a 360-degree orbit that very well could right most of their 1976 wrongs.

The Tides themselves decided they might have suffered last year from a case of too many chiefs and not enough Indians. After all, six of their players hold down coaching or school administrative jobs when they're not competing in the Seashore League.

SO, NONE OTHER than these same Tides met, debated and agreed that what they needed to lead their leaders was one Super Chief. And they picked the best available in Grady Willis.

They even selected their own lion tamer with their eyes wide open and smiling (a bit grimly). Because Grady had managed most of these same players, then the Coastal Stars, to second place in the Coastal Carolina League just 5 years ago.

They knew they were electing to play under a throwback to baseball's days of yore. If Manager Willis doesn't qualify as a legendary John McGraw, put him at least in the category of a Billy Martin or an Iron Major (Ralph Houk).

GRADY CRACKS THE WHIP and, like Houk, comes up with slogans like, "Our fun days lie ahead." Skipper Willis even spells out his program: Togetherness . . . In . . . Duty . . . Enhances . . . Success (T-I-D-E-S).

Most important of all, perhaps, the Tides have a spirited faith in Grady Willis as their Great Emancipator. If Grady can't create full-blown miracles, his players have complete faith that he can. And doesn't that, really, add up to about the same thing?

Because, take them position for position, and these Carteret players add up to much the same squad that finished out of the running last year.

AGGRESSIVE PURSUIT of additional talent makes the main difference. Two new names made a mighty important difference in that April 3 conquest of the Blues.



GRADY WILLIS

Wayne Mobley, a brilliant master-of-all-positions, caught, and Lefty George Viereck, another gifted heads-up player who can do it all, pitched 4 innings of no-hit no-run ball.

And they rounded out a team of all-stars: John Turnage, Rodney Kemp and Donald Leatherman in the outfield; Cecil Lilley, Fletcher Poulk, Don Landingham and Chuck Lewis, moving from third to first in the infield, and fast-balling Rick Heal on the mound. Daimon Lawrence Jr., George Gilbert and Bill Springle complete the promising crew.

Mobley and Viereck probably would not have filled two critical gaps had not Manager Willis gone out and talked them into signing.

THE TIDES HAVE HIGH hopes of two other important additions by early-season. Andy Raynor, whom most everybody remembers as perhaps the best catcher of the 1975 season and a pitcher who won the big ones, will return to the Carteret lineup by June.

With, Andy hopes to bring his kid-brother, Gary, a 22-year-old right-hander who won 9 and lost 2 for Sand Hills Junior College in Pinehurst. He'll give the Tides that extra ace that this year's weekend-concentrated Seashore schedule demands.

BUT THE BIGGEST point of the whole Carteret transformation lies in the abounding confidence the Tides have in Grady Willis. If he can't add Gary Raynor to the staff, the players just know he'll come up with some other pitching ace to fill the gap.

Please stay tuned for additional Seashore details about the Eastern Blues, the Western Red Sox and the always-mysterious Coastal Greys and Salter Path Braves.

Just one additional clue: Manager Donnie Aycock has one colossal problem in training his Red Sox into playing shape. Home-run king Don Zagoraki showed up for practice the other day in Swinson Park. The result: No more baseballs.

Tides Grab 7-3 Win over Braves

THE CARTERET Tides picked up their second Seashore Baseball League exhibition victory Sunday, a 7-3 decision over the Salter Path Braves at Salter Path.

George Viereck got the pitching victory for the Tides, although Rick Heal started and Billy Rhodes finished up on the mound. Together, they struck out 9 Braves, walked 5 and allowed 10 hits.

The loser was Bissett.

THE TIDES, managed by Grady Willis, scored one run in the first inning, 3 in the third, 2 in the fifth and 3 in the seventh. Chuck Lewis led the club with a single and a

home run in 4 trips to the plate. Cecil Lilley was 2 for 4, both singles.

The Braves got all 3 runs in the third inning. Neal Smith paced the home team with a double and 2 singles in 4 at-bats.

The Tides are scheduled to meet UNC-Wilmington at 2 p.m. this coming Sunday at Swinson Park, near Morehead City. It will be a return engagement; the Wilmington club shut out the Tides 9-0 in the first meeting a few weeks ago.