



TO HIT OR WAIT

TO hit the first ball, or to wait 'em out—that will be the problem confronting all the managers again this season, and, as usual, each manager will follow his own ideas, and force his players to do what he, not they, may think desirable. Volumes might be written, pro and con, upon this topic, and the argument wouldn't be half ended then. Suffice it to say, However, that the wait 'em out idea took root and grew up in the days before the foul-strike rule was introduced—that it is a fossil survival of those ancient times, and that it seems to be a sort of fetish, or idol, with managers who cannot break loose from the traditions of the past.

Twenty years ago, the pitchers were much wilder, as a rule, than at the present

time. They had no foul-strike rule to help them along, and the sharp-clicked foul was, in fact, used against them all the time. Clever batsmen made a practice of tiring out the pitchers by dextrously fouling off the good ones, and thus guarding against the called strikes, till the wearied hurler finally put enough bad shots through to necessitate a pass. Everything favored the batter who was a good waiter, and the idea of waiting 'em out was effective day after day.

It's different now—has been different ever since the foul-strike was introduced—but the managers keep telling their men to wait 'em out and lay off the first one thrown. This is carried to ridiculous extremes, but you can't make them see the folly. Batters are told to wait when facing pitchers whose control is faultless and famous. They used to tell men to wait 'em out on Cy Young and Christy Mathewson—pitchers who didn't average a pass per game, and they are still telling them to wait 'em out on other flingers of almost equal accuracy.

Waiting 'em out on pitchers who are young, inexperienced, nervous, likely to go up in the air at any time, is all to the good. Such pitchers can be direfully worried and fatigued—but even with such pitchers, a judicious admixture of first-ball hitting might add greatly to the discomfiture of the slabster. Good reasons for killing the first one!

The modern pitcher, long accustomed to the wait 'em out stuff, aims always to get the percentage on the batsman. Taking it for granted—and usually correctly—that the batter won't hit at the first one, he tries to drive it right over, grooves it carefully, and rejoices in the called strike that nearly always follows. With this advantage of one strike, he can "work on tho batter" in a scientific style, and even waste a couple in the hopes of drawing him into hitting at a worthless ball.

The batter, if he goes up there determined to hit anything that looks good, can light on that first cripple with tremendous vigor, and knock the tar out of it. If he misses or fouls it, he only gets the same called strike he would have had if he had let it go by—if he hits it, his chance of being put out is certainly no greater than if he hit any other ball that might be handed him. He cannot possibly get the worst of it, and really has all the best of it from the simple fact that the pitcher has deliberately forked a soft one over.

If the batsman gets the reputation of being a first ball hitter, he will be given the percentage on the pitcher every time—the slabman will carefully keep that first ball wide of tho plate, and the batter, if he keeps his head, will simply let it skate along and thus get the advantage of a called ball. With this advantage, the batsman will be in a position either to take a

(Continued on Page 379)



A84
Foundation

TO HIT OR WAIT

(Continued from Page 377)

healthy swing at the next one—which the pitcher will try to put over—or to adopt the wait 'em out policy with much better results than would be possible under other conditions.

A set of five or six first ball hitters, beyond much doubt, would demoralize most pitching opposition. A terrific smash off the first ball; a neat bunt off the next pitch; a savage whack off the third delivery—that sort of stuff would send any but a lion-hearted demon right up in the air, and make him a mark, either for more hitting, or for a quick shift to the wait 'em out policy.

Of course, there are batsmen, good hitters, too, who don't hit at the first ball, through other motives than waiting them out. These batters, as many of them have explained to the writer, like to "look 'em over," settle down at the plate, so to speak, take a good toe-hold, and then bend into a nice one anywhere along the third delivery. Uncle Anson was a good waiter, but not with the idea of getting passes, for Uncle loved his hits. He waited because he didn't get established in business, as it were, till he had been up there for a full minute or so. There have been many others like Uncle—and many who rammed into the first pitch on general principles. When the Philadelphia club was doing such terrific hitting, its athletes made a practice of slaying the first ball—and only light-waisted pitching kept them from the flag year after year. That crowd loved to maul the first one if it came across, and many a game was opened by a roaring triple, double, or home run smashed off the first ball pegged to the lead-off hitter.

In the old, old days, the advantage gained by pasting the first pitch was so generally recognized that the home teams batted first, in hopes of walking right into the new white ball and kicking it all over the lot before it got blackened up. Later, with the development of the foul-off batsmen and rules which made many pitchers extremely erratic—such as the first reduction to four called balls—the wait 'em out system was brought into play, and the managers still worship it, despite its many weaknesses and the advantages which the pitcher has gained since the foul-strike was invented.

OH, well. The Cub rooters oughta cheer up, at that. Why worry over Alexander not winning a few ball games when he's gotta chance to bean a coupla Germans.

THERE'S quite a difference of opinion as to whether Ruth should remain a pitcher or play regularly in the outfield. The batters think he should quit pitching and the pitchers'd like to see him amputate his daily batting.



LA 84
Foundation