

Jody Davis of the Cubs: Catcher With a Mission

Last year, he earned Gold Glove award, but in '87, he'd like to help Chicago rebound and also win MVP honors

By FRED MITCHELL
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JODY DAVIS of the Cubs would like to add a National League Most Valuable Player award to the Gold Glove he won in 1986 as the league's top defensive catcher.

The 30-year-old veteran, who was lumped among the league's worst receivers three years ago when he committed 15 errors and led the majors in passed balls with 21, reduced those totals to eight and 15, respectively, in 1986. But Davis was voted to the prestigious Gold Glove defensive unit, joining Cub second baseman Ryne Sandberg, mainly because of his arm. He threw out 73 of 178 would-be base stealers.

"As a catcher, I think there is more emphasis put on throwing than any other phase of the game," said coach Johnny Oates, who should be credited with Davis' revitalization.

Oates is so in tune to Davis' defensive progress he often uses the collective "we" to describe the development of his disciple.

"If you have a good arm, they say you can learn to do the other things," said Oates. "When we break down each year Jody has been here, there have been years when he has been a good offensive catcher and years when he has performed certain areas of defense well.

"In 1985, we received the ball very

well, blocked the ball well, but we did not throw to the level that we did last year. In 1986, I thought we threw well, but we did not block the ball or receive it like we did in 1985. One of the things we want to work on is calling a better ballgame."

Cub management became so frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the pitching staff late last season that Oates was instructed to call pitches from the dugout in certain situations.

"I think the Gold Glove Jody won last year came basically from his throwing," Oates said. "But there is no doubt in my mind he is capable of being the National League MVP.

"Of course, we have to win. We can't be 70-90. If we're 90-70 and he throws the numbers up there offensively that he's capable of doing . . . he can hit 25-30 home runs, he can drive in 95 runs and he can throw the way he did last year. He can go through the season with only eight or nine passed balls. He's certainly capable of doing all those things."

Davis, who hit .250 with 21 homers and 74 RBI last season, is equally optimistic.

"Those Gold Gloves look good sittin' around the house," said Davis, who caught 145 games last season. "I feel catching 130 games is realistic. Anything more than that is really going to drag my

bat down. To have a great year offensively, the days off are more important. I don't get that dragged down defensively, but my bat gets slow when I get tired.

"I'd like to get 100 RBI, and I feel like I can hit 20 home runs every year. And, defensively, Johnny Oates is the difference for me."

Oates agrees Davis could use more rest. "I'd like to catch him 130 games. I think that's plenty. It will depend on who our No. 2 catcher is. Most of the time Keith Moreland will be playing third, so we can't use him a lot.

"We've probably taken advantage of Jody the last few years because we felt that, in order to win, we had to have him behind the plate—his bat and his glove. It's been a little unfair. I think we could get more out of him in 130 games than if we caught him 140 or 145 games."

Asked if he thought base runners would challenge Davis less this year, Oates said: "I don't think anybody is going to back off because of what Jody did last year. In fact, they might even test him a little bit more. St. Louis, for example, is going to run no matter who is pitching or catching. And the Pirates are going to run with Barry Bonds and R. J. Reynolds and those guys.

"A catcher is only one-third of preventing a steal. If a pitcher doesn't give him time or an infielder makes a bad tag, those things can lead to a stolen base. It's a team



Jody Davis

effort. Jody had a great year last year, but we have to give a lot of credit to our pitching staff.

"Overall, compared to the rest of the league, we have a slow pitching staff as far as delivering to home plate. Guys like Rick Sutcliffe and Dennis Eckersley, and especially Scott Sanderson, worked hard at varying their time on throws to first and

JODY DAVIS RECORD WITH THE CUBS, 1981-1986

Year	HR	RBI	Games Caught	PO	A	E	PB	Runners Thrown Out	Pct. Thrown Out
1981	4	21	56	274	44	9	3	Unavailable	—
1982	12	52	129	598	89	11	10	61 of 149	40.0
1983	24	84	150	730	75	13	21	43 of 166	25.9
1984	19	94	146	811	89	15	10	59 of 173	34.1
1985	17	58	138	694	84	8	14	46 of 161	28.5
1986	21	74	145	885	105	8	15	73 of 178	41.0