

GEORGE HALAS

made up the infield. That success would prove to be but a footnote about that play.

“When I slid into third base, I hurt my leg,” Halas told *The Sporting News* in 1976. “I limped on in at the end of the inning, and for two or three more days, it felt like nothing more than a severe charley-horse. But it gave me trouble.”

Without having the advantage of modern medical technology — namely the MRI machine — the Yankees’ trainer, Doc Woods, did what teams would do in similar situations back then. He told Halas to take a few days off.

Filled with what seemed to be blind optimism and hopefulness, Huggins spoke to the writers about Halas on April 3, only two days after his star player injured his hip.

“You may say for me that George Halas will start in right field for the Yankees,” Huggins said. “Of course, I do not know how he will act against American League pitching, but if I am any judge of a

ballplayer, Halas is a star. He has every action of a great player, and so far, he is hitting. That boy learns faster than any youngster I’ve been around, and he is here to stick.”

Despite not being at full health, Halas returned to action on April 8, striking out three times in an exhibition game. A week later, Halas singled in one of the final spring training games, but he experienced hip pain as he got to first base.

That compelled the Yankees to take a slightly more conservative approach, this time keeping Halas off the field for the first eight games of the regular season.

It was at Shibe Park in Philadelphia that Halas made his major league debut on May 6, 1919. Batting leadoff and playing right field, Halas went 1-for-4 with a single in a 3-2 loss to the Philadelphia A’s. Two days later, Halas was back in the lineup for the next game of the series. Again, he went 1-for-4 from the leadoff

spot with a single, this time helping the Yankees to a 2-0 win.

Huggins may have put Halas on a pedestal, declaring that he was the superstar that the Yankees had long wanted. That very praise made the fact that those two singles would be Halas’s only career hits all the more shocking to the baseball world.

Although he didn’t collect another hit, Halas had two more memorable games that month. With future Hall of Famer and eventual 417-game winner Walter Johnson on the mound, the Washington Senators took on the Yankees at the Polo Grounds, then the Yankees’ home ballpark. Batting leadoff, Halas drove Johnson’s first offering of the game, a fastball, deep to right field. Before the baseball landed in the seats, it curved foul. Johnson followed with another fastball, and Halas launched it into the right-field seats, but again, the ball landed in foul territory. Quickly understanding Halas’s ability to hit the



An exhibit at Halas Hall displays the bat “Papa Bear” used a century ago while trying to establish himself with the Yankees. Halas earned the respect of his manager and peers alike, but a hip injury scuttled hopes of a long career in Major League Baseball.