

Chess buff matches wits with A's ace

By JOHN MURPHY

William F. Ackerman is a management consultant by profession. The Aptos resident, among other responsibilities, has been president of the international subsidiary of the giant Transamerica Corporation, famed for San Francisco's skyscraping pyramid.

Ackerman is also a hobbyist. He's got an appetite for good novels, an intriguing game of chess, foreign beer and Saturday afternoon baseball games.

Baseball has been a passion of Ackerman's ever since he was a small boy playing sandlot ball in New Jersey. Later, when he went to work on Wall Street, he was a frequent visitor to Yankee Stadium where he saw many of the great ones — Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, "Irish" Bob Musuel and countless others.

Ackerman's fondness for our national pastime has not diminished over the years. He is currently serving as the unofficial commissioner of the Aptos Farm League and is helping to keep the Aptos Little League afloat financially by publishing the "Aptos Farmer," a weekly newsletter.

Also an avid chess player, Ackerman competes in United States Chess Federation postal tournaments. In other words, he plays chess by mail against various players from around the country. Currently, Ackerman is competing against "25 or 30" different people — sending them, by postcard, one move at a time and then waiting for their replies.

Several months ago, the Aptos resident began playing postal chess with a man by the name of Brian Kingman from Los Angeles. The name didn't ring a bell for Ackerman — just another faceless com-

petition with which to exchange strategy. He didn't know at the time that Kingman was about to begin his second season as a pitcher for the Oakland A's.

After exchanging several moves, Kingman sent his adversary a postcard that said he'd be making a change of address; he was moving temporarily to Yuma, Arizona. Ackerman jokingly replied that it sounded like Kingman had been sent to the territorial prison.

Responded the A's pitcher:

"Bill — You were close when you guessed Yuma territorial prison! Just being in Yuma is bad enough in itself. Actually, though, I will be in Arizona (Scottsdale) until April 6 or 7 and was only in Yuma for two days (which was more than enough). I am down here for spring training with the Oakland A's and after April 6 or 7 will be in the Oakland area so there will not be such long delays in our games, although I will be in and out of town a lot. — Brian."

Naturally, as a baseball enthusiast, Ackerman was thrilled to find out that he was playing chess with a major league player. Not to mention that fact that he went up at least a couple of notches in the eyes of his baseball crazy grandsons.

So Kingman and Ackerman have been swapping strategies for the past couple of months now, allowing a little extra time between moves for the A's pitcher to return home from road trips and pick up his mail.

They use algebraic notation to correspond. Recently Ackerman got himself into a jam with a bad move and asked Kingman what he had done wrong. Replied Kingman: *"Bill — You've*

asked what you've overlooked in this game. Being just a beginner, all that I can see is possibly your 8th move, QD7, might have been instead, H6, to force my bishop away, or 9BXN then 9QXB leaving your king. As it stands now, the only problem I think you have is that your king is vulnerable on the "G" file. — Brian."

(Don't ask this sportswriter to explain what Kingman meant. I'm still trying to figure out which way a knight can move and what that thing that looks like a castle is called.)

Obviously, it's not every major league player who plays chess by mail. And some may consider Kingman to be a bit of an oddball for spending his time studying chess moves when his buddies are out on the town partying.

"I was looking for something constructive that I could do during my free time," Kingman said. "When you're on a road trip for eight or 10 days you can go to bars with the other players and sit around and talk and get a little buzz going. It's okay once in a while, but if you blow \$20 or \$30 every night then by the end of the road trip you've spent about \$200 and have nothing to show for it."

Kingman's older brother taught him how to play chess as a youngster, but he eventually drifted away from the game as he became more involved in sports. The hard-throwing righthander was a standout at University High in Los Angeles, before moving on to the University of California at Santa Barbara. At UCSB, Kingman tried to renew his interest in chess.

"I joined a chess club down there but everybody was so advanced that they could have

given me two pieces at the start of the game and still beaten me. So I stopped going after a while — nobody likes to be humiliated."

While in the minor leagues, playing in such towns as Boise, Chattanooga and Modesto, Kingman managed to find a couple of teammates who played chess. "It didn't work out too good, though," recalled Kingman. "A lot of the guys on the bus would play cards with no problem, but with chess all of the pieces moved around on the board."

Kingman doesn't have to worry about bumpy bus rides anymore. He was called up to the big leagues from Ogden on June 25 last year and won his first game against the Yankees on July 20. The rookie was the only A's starter to post a winning record in 1978, compiling an 8-7 mark with five complete games in 17 starts.

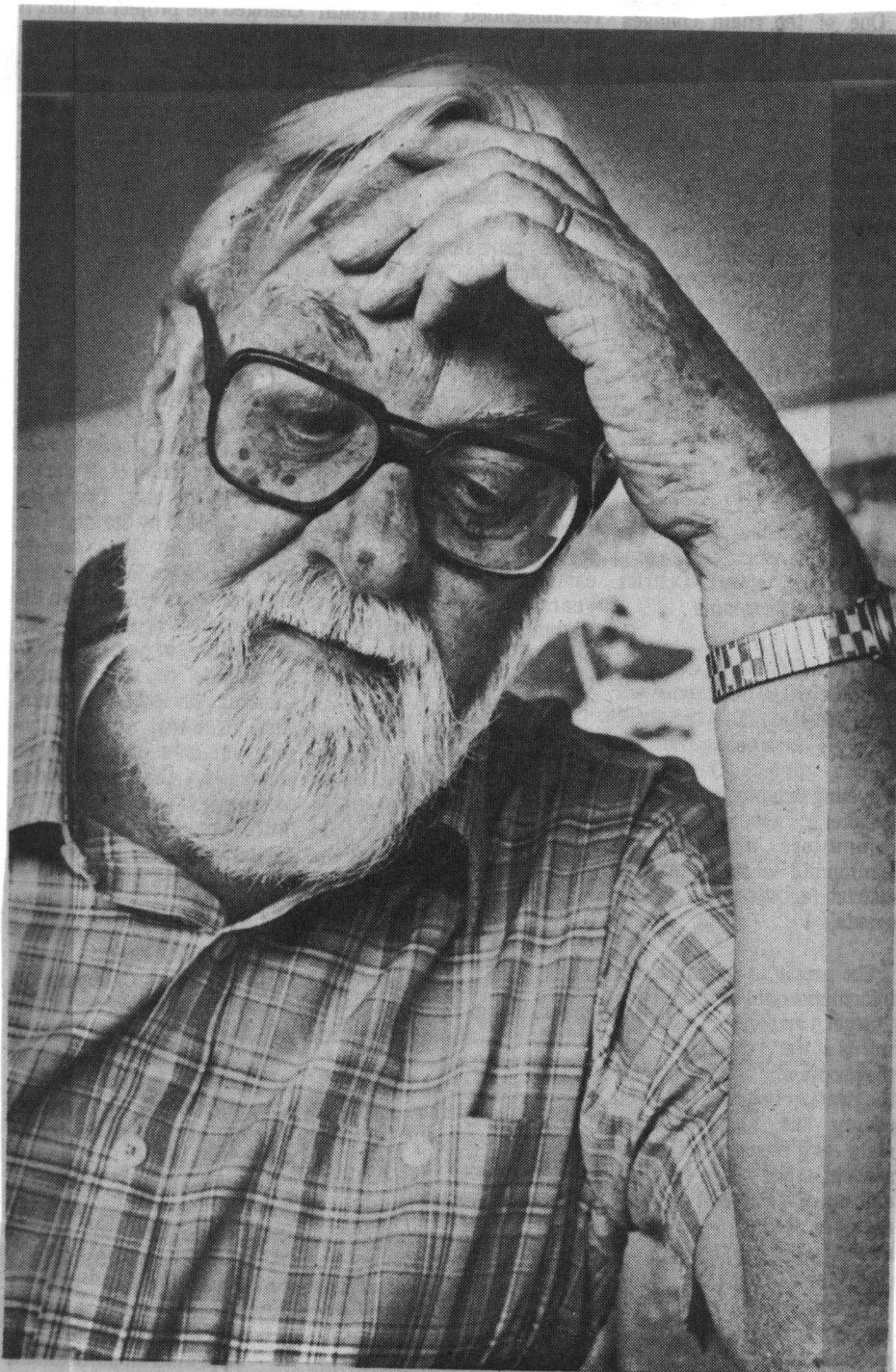
Recently, before 47,000 fans in Oakland, Kingman defeated the Yankees again, going the distance for a 4-3 victory in the first game of a two-night double header.

"I was a little more pumped up tonight with 40 or 50 thousand people in the stands and the Yankees in town. But it's just a win and I'm happy to get it regardless of who it's against. I knew I had to be a little sharper against (Ron) Guidry and we got four runs off him, so that's all I can ask."

The victory was Kingman's first since May 3 when he defeated Detroit.

Luckily, when things aren't going so well, the A's pitcher has an outlet.

"If I have a bad game then I'll have four days between my next start and chess is good for taking my mind off



William Ackerman — King's name didn't ring a bell.

things so that I just don't sit around and brood," he said.

Earlier this season, A's manager Billy Martin gave Kingman and another starter, Steve McCatty, a little more than four days between starts after a disappointing series with Cleveland. Martin chewed the two young pitchers out for making "mental errors" against the Indians and took them out of the rotation for the next three series.

Kingman, obviously, was upset about Martin's decision and hinted that the A's skipper is not the easiest person to relate to. Still, Kingman, expressed admiration for the man who has revived baseball in Oakland.

"He's had more influence on a club than any manager I've ever seen," Kingman said. "He's got us squeezing home runs and stealing home plate. And the way that he positions fielders is uncanny. He moved our shortstop over five feet in one game and on the next pitch there was a line drive hit right to him. It was like ESP or something. His effect has been immeasurable."

Martin's presence has had an impact on attendance as well as the team. The A's drew 121,362 for the four-game series against the Yankees.

And who has the upperhand in the match between the major league pitcher and our own local chess buff?

"Well, I made a bad booboo on my last move and if he sees it then he's going to get a big advantage," Ackerman said.

So it goes in the world of postal chess.