

Bo Jackson gets zero when batting against O's

By **SCOTT GREIG**
City Editor

CHARLOTTE — It was billed as "Bo and Beverage Night" at Crockett Park. The Memphis Chicks of the Class AA Southern League had come to town for a weekend series with the Charlotte O's.

It became a showcase for the miseries that have befallen Bo Jackson.

Jackson, as you remember, decided to forego a career in professional football with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for one in professional baseball with the Kansas City Royals organization.

As the Heisman Trophy winner from Auburn University, Jackson was expected to do nothing but great things in the NFL. However, he became the fourth consecutive Heisman winner to pass up the NFL and unfortunately for him and the Royals, he is doing nothing but terrible things in minor-league baseball.

His batting average is somewhere in the realm of .100 and dropping fast, mainly due to the fact that he strikes out more than half of the times he comes to bat.

After Jackson struck out his first time at bat, it became apparent that the emphasis of Charlotte O's owner Frances Crockett's theme night would quickly shift from "Bo" to "Beverage" as the crowd turned on Jackson in an ugly fashion with constant insults.

Jackson, who saw an average of just over four pitches every time up, played one of the worst games imaginable.

His second time up — you guessed it — another strikeout. It was not as bad as it sounds, though; Jackson actually fouled off two balls before watching the third strike sail by.

As he walked back to the dugout following his little fiasco, one of the more symbolic fans tossed a football in his direction. Jackson denied himself the pleasure of picking up said object and the O's first baseman had to fling it into the Chick's dugout. Jackson kept the ball as a souvenir. It was one of the lighter moments in a game that would see Jackson go 0 for 4 with four strikeouts and a fielding error.

Trying to throw a runner out at home plate from right field, Jackson firmly planted the ball about 15 feet above the catcher's head. If it were not for the backstop being so tall, it is a good bet that a Waxhaw farmer would have found the ball on his "back forty" the next morning.

Jackson's chance to redeem himself could have come in the bottom of the ninth inning. Memphis is down

by a run, 9-8, after giving up six runs in the eighth to the O's. The Chicks have runners on first and third with two out. Jackson is on deck with the count three balls and two strikes on Memphis batter Jerry Longenecker. It would have been sweet revenge for Jackson who had endured the crowd up to this point. But like everything else in this game and the season so far, it just was not to be for Bo Jackson. Longenecker struck out, and Jackson followed the dirt to the dugout — a path he has become very familiar with.

Jackson got a single in his first at-bat for the Chicks earlier this season as a designated hitter. Great things to come — not really. He would promptly go 0 for 10 as a DH. Management thought that involving him in the game more would help, so they began starting him in right field. Again, not really. He was at last count 1 for 27 as a starter and his fielding has been less than average and painful to watch.

Jackson's contract will pay him \$100,000 this year including a \$100,000 bonus. In 1987, he will receive \$333,000 and providing the Royals still want him in 1988, he will get \$383,000 and a \$150,000 bonus.

Jackson is a versatile and highly-skilled athlete, but his play at present shows a growing lack of confidence. The consensus is that he needs some exposure in the rookie league to get his confidence up as well as his mastery of the game's fundamentals.

While all that is true, Jackson will not find himself in Kansas City if he keeps up his present journey to the bottom of every major offensive category in the Southern League.

As he has said on numerous occasions when asked why he chose baseball over football, "Bo is going to do what Bo wants to."

Maybe Jackson wants to be the next great sport-switching wash-out like Danny Ainge. Their cases are similar.

Ainge left Brigham Young apparently headed for the National Basketball Association. Somewhere on that road he exited and ended up in the Toronto Blue Jays' organization for four years, where he played shortstop and batted .186.

It has to be remembered also that Ainge's batting average, although gruesome, was achieved against major league pitching. Jackson is struggling against what will be "bad stuff" coming from today's major

league arms.

As an endnote to this story, Jackson has started to come around in his last ten games. He has raised his batting average to .333, cut down on the number of strikeouts,

increased his run production and hit three home runs — one of which was a game-winning grand slam of Ruthian proportions. It measured 554 feet. Maybe "Bo can do whatever Bo wants to do."

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