# Champion Mets looking for better cards

By JOSEPH DURSO

NEW YORK (NYT) — Ray Knight, Lenny Dykstra, Wally Backman, Tim Teufel, Lee Mazzilli and absolutely Darryl Strawberry will be back. Mookie Wil-son, Kevin Mitchell, Howard Johnson, Randy Niemann and Danny Heep probably will not.

The 1986 Mets were still hearing the cheers as they were cleaning out their lockers and their memories. But upstairs in Shea Stadium in the office of the gen-eral manager, Frank Cashen was trying to picture the faces he expects in the cast in 1987.

"We don't have a dynasty," Cashen said.
"I think we can win with this team, so we're not going to rebuild a club that won 116 games. But you can't stagnate. We have to make certain changes and we will."

He didn't list the changes and he didn't name any players. But he did hold a conversation with Ray Knight, the most valuable player in the world Series, who has received a contract offer for one year at \$650,000. That is only \$5,000 more than Knight made this year, and he wants more and may get it because he is the first piece in the puzzle.

But Cashen did say that the Mets came out of the World Scries with these

· They need to stabilize the infield.

They now have two players at second base and four at third, and they're not certain who will play shortstop. The main man is Knight, who made a stunning comeback this season at the age of 33. He is eligible to become a free agent, but is more likely to return. But, until he does, several other decisions must wait.

They want a proven right-handed hitter who will probably play left field and reduce their, vulnerability to tough left-handed pitching. If they can get one, then Wilson and Mitchell become available in trades, even though Wilson is a switch hitter and Mitchell is right-handed, and both are popular.

They want to fortify their middle relief pitching. They have five prime starting pitchers: Dwight Gooden, Run Darting, Bob Ojeda, Sid Fernandez and Rick Aguilera. And they have two quality relief pitchers: Roger McDowell and Jesse Orosco. But they sense a gap be-tween the men who start games and the men who finish games.

They expect to make a major trade for what Cashen calls a "foundation player." He has three in that cutegory: Garry Carter, Keith Hernandez and Darry Strawberry. He can now solve two problems at once: He can clean out the traffic jams at third base and in left field by using the excess men in a trade and thereby accurate another. "foundation elayer." quire another "foundation player."

Except for Knight, free agents are not very large in the Mets' thinking. Only two of this year's 24 players are eligible to file for free agency: Heep, who will most likely choose that course, and Knight, who most likely will not. And Cashen repeated his opposition to filling holes on the team by signing free agents.

"I'm not interested in signing free agents, as I've said the last couple of years," Cashen said. "We have a great deal of talent in our farm system pushing to come up. The problem is making room for them on an orderly basis.

"This is going to be basically the same kind of team. We have three so-called foundation players. You build around them. The other parts are interchangeable. By next year, you'd hope to get one or even two more foundation players. Do I mean major players? You look for major players to rebuild."

The groundwork for any trades may

The groundwork for any trades may be laid this weekend when Cashen's chief deputies, Al Harazin and Joe McIlvaine, attend the annual meeting of general managers in Scottsdale, Ariz. Any trades they initiate there can be completed one month later at the winter baseball meetings in Hellowsord Fla. ings in Hollywood, Fla.

Third base will be high in their thinking. Knight, making a dramatic comeback from elbow surgery, won the job this year and hit .298 with 11 home runs and knocked in 76 runs. In the Series, he hit .391 with one home run and knocked in five runs. His success made Howard Johnson excess.

The Meis would like Knight to stay be-cause they need a shepherd for Dave Mag-adan, the rookie heir to the job. Then, in 1988, they could advance Kevin Elster to shortstop in place of Rafael Santana. They don't want to start two rookies on the same side of the infield in the same year.

So, Knight has value beyond his bat

However, the Mets' first offer didn't get raves from Knight. He made \$600,000 this year, plus a bonus of \$45,000 based on plate appearances. They offered him \$650,000 without inrhey offered him 3050,000 without hi-centives. He also wants a two-year con-tract, but the Mets offered only one year plus an option year (their option) for \$700,000. Knight wants either a guaran-teed second year or a guaranteed buyout price for the second year.

"I have no desire to leave if I'm wanted," Knight said W inesday. "Frank's astute and fair. But he offered me basically the same money as this year. I have very strong feelings about Davey and the guys. So I'd like to stay here. But I want to play two more years.

# scoreboard

#### local sports

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Germany AAA regional

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PREP VOLLEYBALL
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