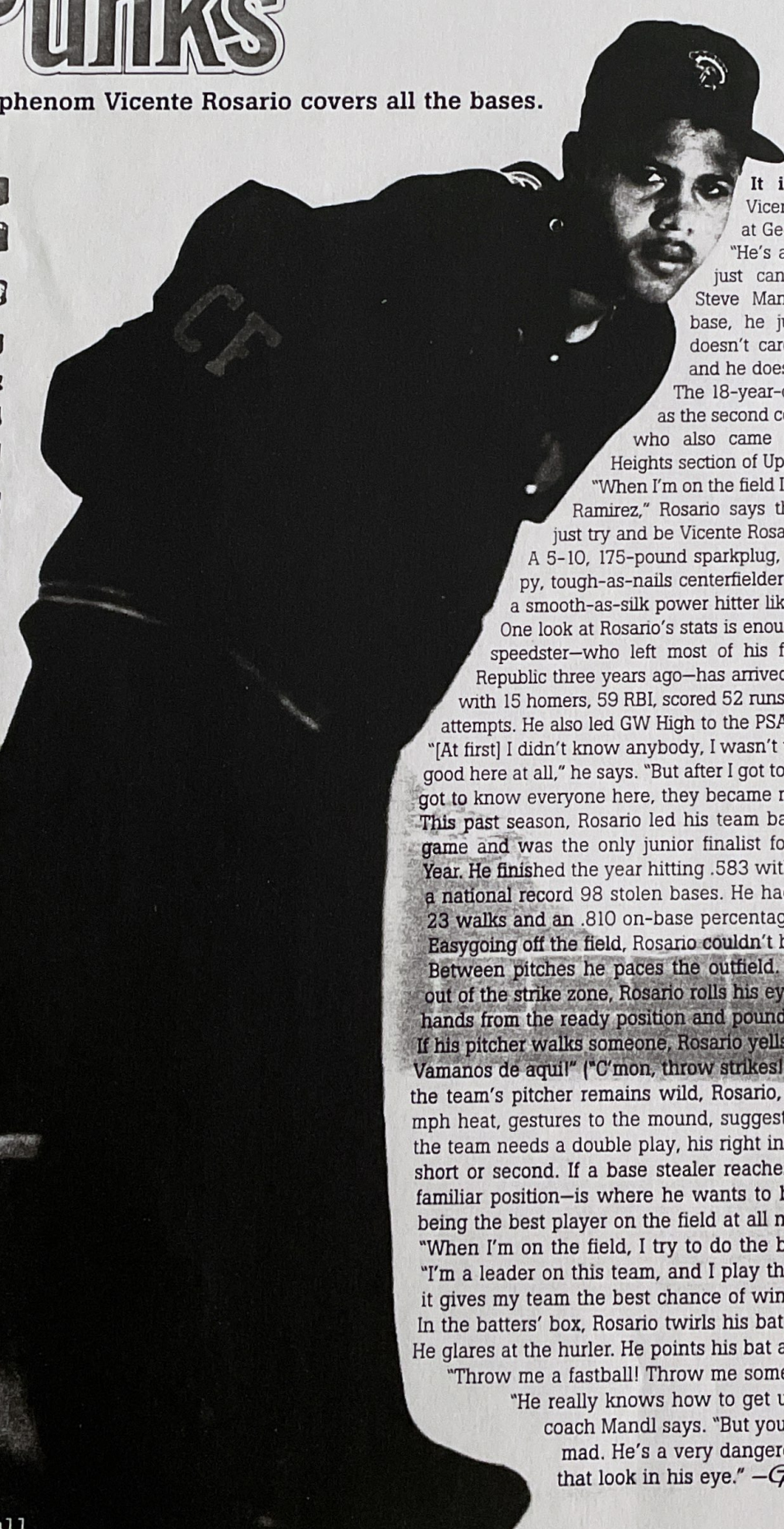


Punks

NYC phenom Vicente Rosario covers all the bases.

MANHATTAN TRANSFER



It isn't difficult to find Vicente Rosario in the outfield at George Washington HS.

"He's a ball of energy that you just can't control," says coach Steve Mandl. "When he gets on base, he just wants to score. He doesn't care how he gets on base and he doesn't care how he scores."

The 18-year-old junior has been billed as the second coming of Manny Ramirez, who also came out of the Washington Heights section of Upper Manhattan.

"When I'm on the field I don't think about Manny Ramirez," Rosario says through an interpreter. "I just try and be Vicente Rosario and give it my best."

A 5-10, 175-pound sparkplug, Rosario is more a scrappy, tough-as-nails centerfielder like Lenny Dykstra than a smooth-as-silk power hitter like Ramirez.

One look at Rosario's stats is enough to see that this young speedster—who left most of his family in the Dominican Republic three years ago—has arrived. In '95, Rosario hit .549 with 15 homers, 59 RBI, scored 52 runs and stole 34 bases in 35 attempts. He also led GW High to the PSAL championship game.

"[At first] I didn't know anybody, I wasn't working and I didn't feel good here at all," he says. "But after I got to George Washington and got to know everyone here, they became my brothers."

This past season, Rosario led his team back to the championship game and was the only junior finalist for National Player of the Year. He finished the year hitting .583 with 13 homers, 72 RBI and a national record 98 stolen bases. He had six triples, 14 doubles, 23 walks and an .810 on-base percentage.

Easygoing off the field, Rosario couldn't be more aggressive on it. Between pitches he paces the outfield. With every ball thrown out of the strike zone, Rosario rolls his eyes in anger, removes his hands from the ready position and pounds his glove.

If his pitcher walks someone, Rosario yells out, "Vamos tira strikes! Vamanos de aqui!" ("C'mon, throw strikes! Let's get out of here!") If the team's pitcher remains wild, Rosario, a right-hander with 90 mph heat, gestures to the mound, suggesting that he pitch. When the team needs a double play, his right index finger points toward short or second. If a base stealer reaches first, catcher—his most familiar position—is where he wants to be. Rosario is capable of being the best player on the field at all nine positions.

"When I'm on the field, I try to do the best that I can," he says. "I'm a leader on this team, and I play the way that I do because it gives my team the best chance of winning."

In the batters' box, Rosario twirls his bat and bangs on the plate. He glares at the hurler. He points his bat at the pitcher and shouts, "Throw me a fastball! Throw me something I can hit!"

"He really knows how to get under the pitcher's skin," coach Mandl says. "But you don't want to make him mad. He's a very dangerous player when he gets that look in his eye." —Grant Glickson