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4 clubs deal; Blyleven traded

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A trade of awesome proportions involving four teams and 11 players rocked baseball's winter meetings Thursday night.

Pitchers Bert Blyleven and Jon Matlack and sluggers Willie Montanez and Al Oliver were the key players in the deal involving the New York Mets, the Texas Rangers, the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Atlanta Braves.

The deal was the biggest transaction completed in recent memory and was the first that included players holding complicated, long-term, expensive contracts.

In the deal, the Braves first sent Montanez to Texas in exchange for pitchers Adrian Devine and Tom Boggs and infielder Eddie Miller. Then the Rangers shipped Montanez and outfielder Tom Grieve and a player to be named later to the Mets for Matlack and John Milner. (With Matlack going to Texas, the Mets are not likely to trade Jerry Koosman in a long-discussed deal with Minnesota.)

Texas then swapped Milner and Blyleven to Pittsburgh for Oliver and minor league infielder Nelson Norman.

Blyleven, a right-hander who was acquired by the Rangers from Minnesota two years ago, had a 14-12 record with a 2.72 earned run average last season. He recently signed a long-term contract with Texas that included deferred payments that will obligate his new team well into the 1990s.

The other high-salaried player in the deal was Montanez, a slick-fielding first baseman who batted .287 with 20 home runs and 68 runs batted in for the Braves last season. In seven major league seasons, Montanez, who earns a reported \$300,000 a year, has hit 102 home runs for Philadelphia, San Francisco and Atlanta.

To get him, the Mets surrendered first baseman-outfielder Milner, who batted .255 with 12 home runs and 57 runs batted in, and Matlack, a left-hander who suffered through a disappointing 7-15 season in 1977.

In addition to Montanez, the Mets obtained Grieve, an outfielder. Grieve batted .225 in 79 games for the Rangers last season.

Texas obtained Matlack to replace Blyleven in the starting rotation and also got Oliver, a consistent .300 hitter in 10 seasons with the Pirates. He hit .308 with 19 homers and 82 RBI last season.

To compensate for the loss of Oliver and Norman, Pittsburgh got Blyleven and Milner.

The Braves' end of the deal supplied them with Devine, who had an 11-6 record with 15 saves for the Rangers; Boggs, who split the season between Tucson and Texas, and Miller.