# Ernie Banks Played His First Game at 17

## He Favored Other Sports in His Youth

Connie Johnson Urged Sox to Grab Him; Matthews Quick to Outbid Rivals

### By JOHN C. HOFFMAN

CHICAGO, III.

It is all very clear now, but early in 1953 when Connie Johnson, a tall righthanded pitcher who is back with the White Sox again, seemed more interested in the career of Ernie Banks than his own, it was difficult to ex-

Johnson implored Paul Richards, then field boss of the Comiskey team, to have White Sox scouts look at a 22-year-old shortstop with the Kansas City Monarchs.

"He's a major league player right! now," Johnson told Richards, "He can't miss."

"I was more interested in finding out if Johnson could help us," laughed Richards. "But he kept insisting that we look at Banks. So I called our Chicago office from Washington and told them about the boy.

"It was hard to figure out why Johnson was so insistent about Banks. They weren't related or even close friends."

It is now two years later. Banks is not with the White Sox, nor is he with the Yankees, who might have had first search on him if they had been more alert, but he is a member of the Cubs and probably the best shortstop in the National League, if not in both Jengues

#### Compared With Eddie Miller

"He's the greatest shortstop I've seen come into the league in my time," says Clyde McCullough, the veteran Cub catcher.

"I'd compare him with Eddie Miller, who played with the Reds," continued Mac, "and many people think he was the best ever in the majors. I'd say he's as good as or better than Marty Marion was with the Cardinals and certainly he's a better hitter."

To Tom Gordon, business manager of the Cubs' farm club at Macon, Ga., goes the credit for having called the attention of the Chicago club to Banks. And to Wid Matthews, director of player personnel, must go the credit for having persisted in the chase which ultimately wrested the spectacular shortstop from the White Sox and Yankees.

"I'm no baseball expert," Gordon wrote Matthews, "but this kid looks like a natural. He looks great."

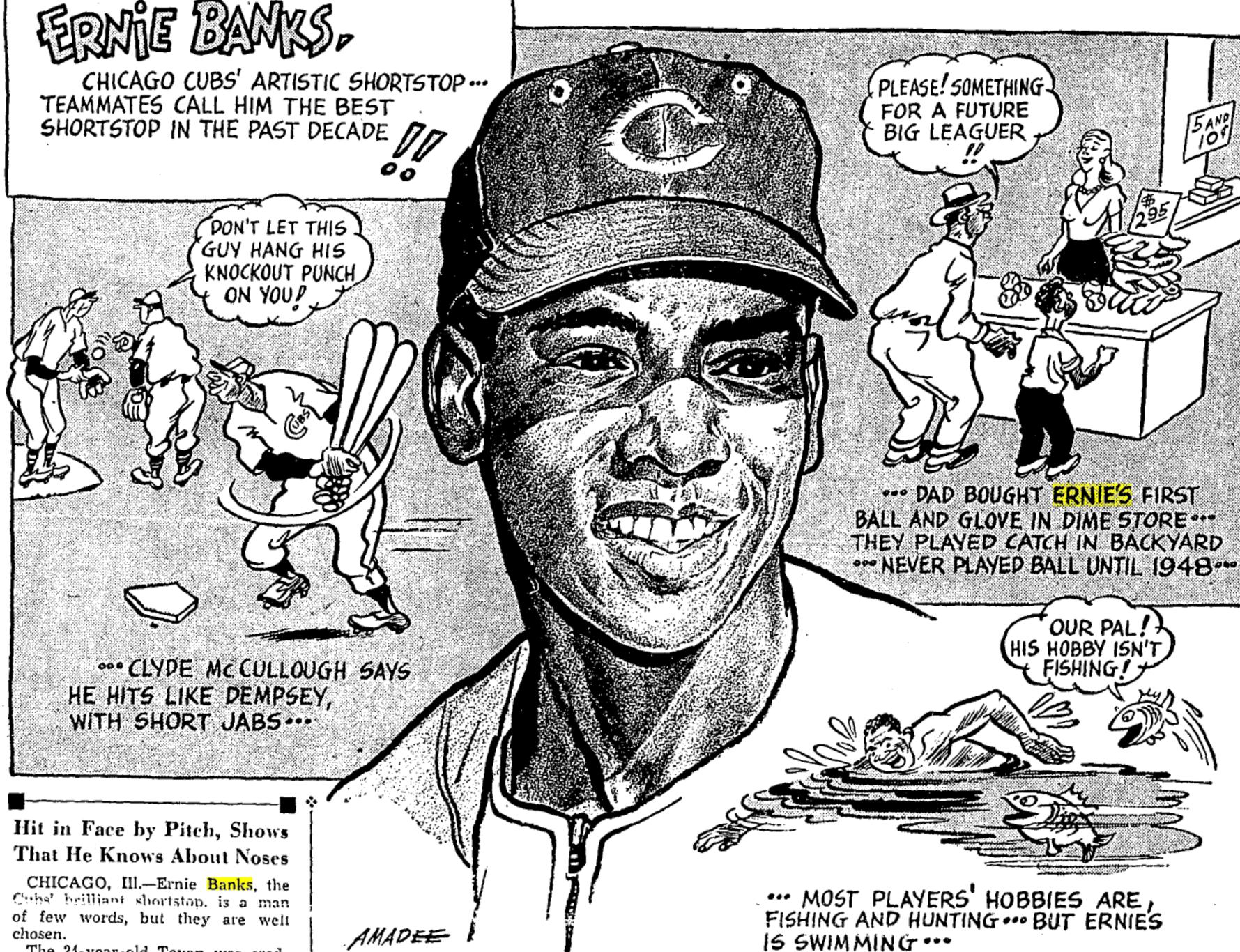
Matthews immediately dispatched Scouts Vedie Himsl, Jimmy Payton and Ray Blades to watch Banks with the Kansas City Monarchs. All were enthusiastic. Came the day after Labor Day in 1953 and Matthews himself saw Banks in an all-star game in Comiskey Park, right under the very noses of White Sox officials and scouts.

#### \* \* \* "Take It or Leave It" Bid

At the time Banks was batting .300 for the Monarchs. Matthews liked what he saw and immediately contacted Tom Baird, own- the two boys to be in the lobby of the er of the Monarchs, at the Conrad Hilton Hotel. From Baird, Matthews learned the White Sox and Yankees would be given first choice on Banks because the Monarchs and Banks and Dickey became Cubs. were playing some games in Comiskey Dickey is now in the team's minor Park and Yankee Stadium and they league farm system. felt obligated to them.

age Matthews. He gave Baird what en his ability. The Cubs still hadn't amounted to a "take it or leave it of- given up on Roy Smalley, who was in fer." The Cubs would buy Banks and his sixth season with them, and they an 18-year-old pitcher named Bill Dickey for \$35,000. "The offer must at Gene Baker, their shortstop from have sounded good to Baird, because Los Angeles, in the 1954 spring trainnothing specific had come from either ing camp. the White Sox or Yankees and for all he knew maybe they weren't even in- Banks would change all that. He playterested.

### Cub Shortstop's Story From Kid Days





The 24-year-old Texan was credited with the squelch par excellence on June 25 after he had been plunked on the top of his nose near the forehead over the left eye by a pitch thrown by Pittsburgh's Ronnie Kline in Wrigley Field.

Banks hit the dirt, momentarily stunned, and the whole team rushed in to find out if the shortstop had been seriously hurt. Eventually, Banks picked himself up and made a move toward first base.

"How do you feel?" asked Manager Stan Hack.

"All right, and you're not going to take me out," said the durable youth.

Banks remained in the game and there was a lot of kidding about it on the bench after everyone was satisfied the shortstop was all right. And one of the hecklers was Hank Sauer, who good-naturedly suggested that Banks should make an effort to keep his nose out of the way of fast balls.

"True enough," grinned Banks, "but if you had been hit on the nose it would have been a single." Sauer has a schnozzle that out-Durante's the nose of the popular comedian.

thews bid and negotiations were to be completed the next morning in Chicago's Persian Hotel, where Banks and Dickey were staying. Baird instructed hotel at 7 a. m. the next day. Neither knew what was up until the Monarchs' owner had escorted them to Wrigley Field, where the papers were signed

Banks was an immediate success with But none of this served to discour- the Cubs, but not before he had provwere planning to have a second look

As fate would have it, however, ed ten games with the Cubs at the At any rate, it came to be a sore tailend of the 1953 season and batted spot with Richards, who said he never 310. His fielding left nothing to be fans had voted Banks as their favorite could find out whether his bosses had desired. The Cubs were so sure of shortstop. properly scouted the young phenom or, the youth then that they traded Smalif they had, what their findings were. ley to the Braves for Dave Cole, March | more fantastic than the events of his Baird, however, accepted the Mat-121, 1954, even before the season start-1 short major league career would sug-1\*

ed, and Baker became the team's regu- | gest. He never played baseball, as lar second baseman instead of its such, until 1948. shortstop.

Banks played every inning except er shortstop for at least ten years.

In his sophomore season, then, the artistic young infielder had improved so much that he was selected to the National League All-Star team and his teammates were calling him the best shortstop in the past decade, if not longer. By midway of the 1955 season, too, Banks had equalled his total home run output of 1954 and if he could maintain the pace he would drive in 100 runs or more.

Through it all, Banks was the same unostentatious kid he had been before all this acclaim had come his way.

"I don't know where we'd have been without him last year," said Manager season. He's a very great ball player. T. Washington High School." That's all there is to it."

Together, Banks and his roomie, Baker, comprise the National League's best second base combination and it was only natural that Manager Leo Durocher should have selected Baker as an All-Star second baseman after the

The meteoric rise of Banks is even ball except what little throwing and (CONTINUED ON PAGE 4, COL. 1)

Ernie's father, Eddie, currently a Dallas grocer, was the one who started one of every game in 1954, batted .275, the youngster on the career that was hit 19 home runs and drove in 79 runs to make him famous. Eddie had been in his first full season in Organized a catcher and pitcher with the Dallas Ball. The Cubs would not need anoth- Black Giants in his younger days and he was eager that his boys follow in his footsteps.

#### Five-and-Dime Equipment

\* \* \*

The elder Banks bought a \$2.95 glove and a couple of baseballs in the five-and-dime store in Dallas and he would coax his tenyear-old son to play catch with him in the back yard.

"I wasn't too much interested in baseball then," confesses Ernie. "But dad would toss nickels and dimes my way and I didn't need much more persuasion.

"As I remember it, I was more interested in softball, football, track, Stan Back, "and I know we wouldn't swimming and basketball. We didn't Actually, Ernie was on his way to the be where we are now without him this even have a baseball team at Booker

> During his high school days, Ernie was a good student and in his spare time he was captain and end on the Banks. "And I had admired such playfootball team, captain and forward on ers as Phil Rizzuto, Pee Wee Reese the basketball team and he could highjump five feet, 11 inches. He also was

a 54-second quarter miler in track. years old, he still had played no base-

#### His Punch Like Dempsey's, Says Teammate McCullough

CHICAGO, Ill. - Clyde McCullough, veteran Cub catcher, says that Ernie Banks hits a baseball with the same power that Jack Dempsey delivered a punch.

"Banks doesn't swing the bat around very far, but he is quick and he has strong wrists," said McCullough. "This way he can usually take a little time to judge a

"Ernie doesn't look powerful, but he's strong and wiry. He has big hands, long fingers and supple wrists. He has wonderful rhythm, too. He does everything a ball player should do, off or on the field.

"In the field every hop of the ball is a good one for Ernie, because he's always in the right posi-

"He can afford to play deeper than most shortstops because he has a strong, accurate arm and he can get over quickly to cover second base."

catching he had done with his father in the back yard. He was playing softball on the Booker T. Washington campus one day, however, when he was approached by a stranger who said his name was Bill Blair.

"Would you like a tryout with the Amarillo (Tex.) Colts?" Blair asked him.

Banks said he would have to get his mother's permission. That night she gave her consent and Ernie's father was elated. This was something he had hoped for. That same night Ernic, Blair and another Dallas youth, Marvin Hickman, were off to Amarillo, big leagues, though he says now he thought little of it at the time.

"I had seen some of the big league teams play exhibitions in Dallas," said and Marty Marion. But I never thought I'd ever be a big leaguer."

In 1949 Banks said he saw Chico Car-And so, in 1948, when Ernie was 17 rasquel play with the Fort Worth team

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### Banks' 23 Homers Record for Shortstops in National

CHICAGO, Ill.-Ernie Banks, the Cubs' spectacular sophomore, became the all-time home run king among National League shortstops the night of July 8 in Busch Stadium, St. Louis, when he hit two against the Cardinals.

The 24-year-old native of Dallas, Tex., hit for the circuit in the first inning and then smashed a 4 to 4 deadlock with his twenty-third homer of the season in the eleventh inning; a two-run clout into the left field bleachers.

Banks' second homer of the evening shattered the old mark of 22 set by Glenn Wright in 1930 when he was with the Dodgers.

Alvin Dark of the Giants has a mark of 23 homers, but eight of them were made while he was playing positions other than shortstop. The major league record for homers in one season by a shortstop is 39, set by Vern Stephens in 1949 when he was with the Red Sox.

The most homers ever hit by a Cub shortstop, previous to the mark

set by Banks, was 21 by Roy Smalley in 1950, when Smalley also drove in 85 runs. Wright drove in 126 runs in 1930. Banks probably will exceed Smalley's RBI total, but he will have to hustle to top Wright's mark. Ernie's second homer, July 8, brought his RBI total to 54.

Banks already has exceeded his 19 homer output for the full 1954 season, when he batted .275 and drove in 79 runs.

Banks' two home runs the night of July 8 were hit at the expense of Floyd Wooldridge and Gordon Jones, respectively. His first followed a round-tripper by Jimmy

In the eleventh inning, then, Gene Baker walked, King flied out and Banks exploded his second homer of the night.

One of the most famous Cub shortstops in history, Joe Tinker, who played from 1902 through 1912, hit 12 homers in all the years he was with the Cubs. HOFFMAN.

### Ernie From Large Family, Brother on Monarch Roster

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

and then he saw Chico again when the White Sox would come through Texas from spring training.

Ernie's unobtrusive manner might have been developed during his early childhood. There were seven boys and girls in the family when he departed to play with the Amarillo Colts in 1948. Now he has five brothers and four sisters.

"I guess I could never get a word in anywhere," he laughed. "The others always had plenty to say and I just listened."

Oldest of the Banks is Mrs. Edna Mae Warren of Dallas | Ernic is now 24 and the brother next in line is 21year-old Benjamin, who is in military service and in Europe. Benjamin, too, played with the Kansas City Monarchs before he went into the Army and is planning to resume his baseball career when he is discharged.

The next in line is a sister, Evelyn, 18, then come Estella, 16; Eddie Lee, Jr., 14; Samuel, 12; Frances Marie, 8; Walter Lee, 4, and Grover, 1.

#### Met Wife at Softball Game

There was another who would be a member of the large family. The object of Ernie's affections was Mollye Ector, a high school sweetheart, who is now Mrs. Ernie Banks.

"I was playing softball one afternoon when I noticed this girl on the sidelines," Ernie says, "I went over and talked to her. She gave me her phone number. I guess you'd call it love at first sight, but we went together eight years before we were married."

April, 1953. They have no children as yet, but they are hoping for a boy and a girl.

"Mollye is a wonderful girl," says Ernie. "She worries constantly about my meals and how much rest I get. She is a real good cook, too."

Ernie says his favorite dishes are steak and liver.

Mrs. Banks was a tap dancer in her girlhood and after high school she attended Wiley College in Marshall, Tex. The couple was married in St. Paul Methodist Church in Dallas, where the bride was a member of the choir.

Back in 1949, however, Banks was still busy with his baseball career. Playing with the Amarillo Colts, his travels took him to Memphis, Tex., where the Colts played the Kansas City Monarchs, then managed by James

(Cool Papa) Bell. "I made three or four hits that day," says Ernie, "and after the game Cool physical instructor at the Moorland Papa came up to me and asked me if branch of the Y.M.C.A. in Dallas, but I would like to play with the Monarchs. I couldn't turn down an offer

like that." Banks hit 350 that summer with the Colts. He was approached the next King Cole and Sammy Davis recspring by William (Dizzy) Dismukes, ord albums. He reads very little exan agent for the Monarchs.

"I took Mr. Dismukes home," Ernie | His roomie, Gene Baker, does most related, "and he talked with my moth- of the talking for the two of them. er and father. With their consent I Baker is older and perhaps a bit wiser. signed a 1950 contract for \$300 a month." Ernie calls his roomie "High Pockets" Ernie joined the Monarchs after his and "Sharp Top."

#### Dykes Wagered That Banks Wouldn't Last as '54 Rookie

CHICAGO, Ill. - Yosh Kawano, erudite custodian of Cubs' baseball paraphernalia, is one of Jimmie Dykes' greatest admirers, but he does not regard the former White Sox, Athletics and Orioles manager and current Redleg coach as the personification of perfection.

"In his lifetime, Jimmie has made only two major mistakes," says Yosh, with a knowing gleam in his eye. "He made one mistake when he took that job as manager of the Orioles and he made another when he predicted Ernie Banks would not last in the majors."

It took longer to prove Jimmie was wrong about the Baltimore job than it did to demonstrate he was wrong about Banks. He lasted a year on the Baltimore job.

In the spring of 1954, Dykes bet Edgar Munzel, Chicago Sun-Times baseball writer and a correspondent of The Sporting News, that Banks would not bat .245 in the major leagues and also that he would be gone to the minors before June 15. In each instance it was a dozen golf balls. Jimmie was dead wrong on both counts.

Banks was the Cubs' regular shortstop long before June 15, 1954, and he batted .275 in 154 games. In fact, Banks has never been anything else except the Cubs' regular shortstop since the first day in September, 1953, that he was placed in the lineup.

Ernie and Mollye were married in he arrived the Monarchs played a double-header and he made four hits against the Indianapolis Clowns. In that same season Banks batted .305 | 3 and hit 15 home runs.

#### Served in Germany

Banks was 19 then and Uncle Sam summoned him into military service. He was placed in an antiaircraft group and served in Mannheim, Germany, for two years. During this time he played baseball in all his spare time and was everything on the field except a catcher.

In 1953 Ernie was back with the Monarchs and it was while traveling in the South that he was discovered by Tom Gordon of the Macon club.

Ernie's main hobby is swimming, unlike most ball players who find hunting and fishing to their best taste in the off-season. In the winter he is a he'd like to get into the real estate business when he has saved enough to invest.

Another hobby is listening to Nat cept the newspapers.

graduation from high school. The day "He's a sharp guy," says Banks.

## Umps Asking for Trouble Trying to Catch Spitters'

### Stewart Says There Are 'Million Ways' to Cover Up Pitch

#### By AL HIRSHBERG BOSTON, Mass.

Several National League pitchers occasionally throw spitballs, but no umpire in his right mind will go out of his way to stop it unless the opposing manager protests, according to Bill Stewart. Stewart, for years an outstanding man in blue, retired from the National League umpire staff last winter. He probably not only knows as much about pitching cheaters as anyone, but is free to discuss this cheating.

Stewart was talking about Preacher Roe's recent disclosure that he often threw a spitball in clutches. The arbiter says he knew that Roe did it once in awhile, and so did other umpires, as well as managers and ball players, but it was one of those things that everyone talked about but never did anything about.

"Why should the umpires go asking for trouble?" Stewart said. "If a manager squawks that a pitcher is wetting the ball up, the umpire has to call for the ball, but the chances of his detecting anything are nil. And if no manager squawks, there's no reason for the umpire to suspect anything.

#### Dipped Just a Little

"Now, this Preacher Roe business is a laugh. To begin with, Roe's spitball, such as it was, didn't do much of anything. It dipped a little, but nowhere nearly as much as a good knuckleball. Hoyt Wilhelm, for example, can put more on a ball with his legal knuckler than Roe ever could with his so-called spitball. Roe was a great control plicher. He could put a ball where he wanted it. And if he used his spitball as a payoff pitch, he didn't use it

often-maybe once in a blue moon when he had two strikes on a batter and figured he could throw him off balance with that five-cent spitter."

Stewart, although he has no love for Warren Giles, president of the National League, who refused to appoint him supervisor of the loop's umpires, agrees with Giles that the spitter isn't thrown half as much in the league as people think it is, and that Roe himself threw it very seldom.

"If Roe was quoted correctly," said Bill, "he made a mountain out of a molehill. According to the story I read, Preach claimed the spitter saved his career, and that he used it every chance he got. I'll bet he didn't use it more than once a game, if that often.

"No pitcher can use the spitter surreptitiously and make it do anything sensational. I used to be a spitball pitcher in the days when the pitch was legal, and I know what I'm talking about. The pitchers who throw the delivery have to be so careful to keep from getting caught that the pitch loses most of its effectiveness. In order to do the things a spitter should do, the pitcher has to have every opportunity to moisten up the ball properly.

#### No More Zing Than Curve Ball

"Now, Roe explained how he did it, and I don't doubt that he probably did do it that way-chewing gum, spitting onto the heel of his hand and using that as a cache, drawing on it from time to time by wetting the tips of his first two fingers. But he simply couldn't get enough for an effective pitch by doing it that way. The best he could hope for would be a little dipsy-doodle that wouldn't have any more zing to it than a good curve ball. On top of everything else, Roe couldn't hope to get the results from chewing gum that a real spitball pitcher gets from slippery elm, which was the standard ingredient everyone used in the days of the legal spitter.

"In my opinion, there's no sense in the umpires going crazy trying to detect something that isn't half as effective as a knuckler. Sure, if the other manager kicks, you have to look at the ball, but there are a million ways the pitcher or one of his teammates can cover up. If he rolls the ball along the dirt, the moisture is gone by the time it reaches the umpire. He can wipe if off with his glove, or he can throw it to someone else first. Whatever he does, there's so little spit on the ball in the first place that it's doubtful if the ball would be wet even if he threw it directly to the umpire."

In his entire National League career, Stewart caught only one man throwing a spitball, and he did nothing about it except tell the catcher to warn the pitcher to stop. The pitcher was Freddy Frankhouse of the old Boston Braves, and the catcher was Al Lopez, then with the Braves. One day, Stewart, working behind the plate, noticed that Frankhouse's pitch acted too much like a spitter to be anything else. The opposing manager didn't protest, but Frankhouse was throwing

the spitball too openly for comfort. "Look," Stewart told Lopez, "I know what that guy, {

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### Tells His Story



#### Bill Starts New Career

BOSTON, Mass.-Bill Stewart, at 65, is beginning a new and promising business career. He is now in charge of one of the departments of the Ivory System in Peabody, Mass, which reconditions athletic equipment.

Thomas E. Lynch, a close friend of the former National League umpire, is president of the company, which is introducing an athlete's foot preventive called Ivor-San. Sie wart is in charge of the Ivor San division of the company.

is throwing. I can hook him for ten days' suspension without pay, but I'm not after a man's pocketbook. If I go down and tell him to stop throwing that spitter, everyone will raise a terrible fuss. So you go and tell him, If he throws another, I'll have to suspend him."

So Lopez stopped the game and told Frankhouse to throw no more spitters, and that was that. The Braves' pitcher never did throw another while Stewart was working behind the plate.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In the July 13 issue of THE SPORTING NEWS, Umpire Larry Goetz related that Umpire Babe Pinelli also caught Frankhouse throwing a spitter in a game at Cincinnati.)

#### Potter Was Caught

Nelson Potter was one of the few pitchers ever punished for throwing a spitball. He was caught redhanded while he was still in the American League, and he was very careful from then on.

"Sure, maybe Potter threw some splitters in the National League in 1948, the year the Braves won the pennant," said Stewart. "But he wasn't obvious about it, and I never could prove that he actually did throw the pitch. He had a great knuckleball, though, and, as far as I could see, he didn't need the spitter. It was just like Roe's case—the pitch wasn't too good and couldn't have been very helpful to him.

"The best so-called spitballs of recent years were thrown by Claude Passeau and Rip Sewell, but Passeau's was much better because he had a perfect chance to cover it up. Passeau's left hand was partially withered, and he couran's moisien die hall by mihbing it together in his hands. Because of that, he had special per-

mission to wear his glove when he rubbed up the ball. I never caught him at it and neither did anyone else, but it would have been a simple matter for Passeau to put a little slippery elm into his glove."

Stewart is a member of the let's-revive-the-spitball association. He feels that there's nothing more dangerous about the pitch than about any of the legal pitches, and that, if anything, the knuckler is far more dangerous. Stewart said:

"I think the spitball should be brought back. The hitter gets all the breaks today. The strike zone is smaller, the pitcher has more controls imposed on him and home runs come pretty cheap in some ball parks.

#### Rules Out Tobacco Juice, Licorice

"I don't say you have to legalize the spitter to the point where a fellow can use tobacco juice or licorice. Those things discolor the ball, but slippery elm doesn't, and you can get a good slick on a ball with that. But you have to use more than a smidgeon of slippery elm to have any real advantage from it.

"That's why I don't believe Roe's pitch was so important. He didn't use slippery elm, and no chewing gum in the world will give you an effective shine on a baseball. Even if it did, he never could use enough of the stuff, because he has to be careful not to get caught. Neither can any of the other National League pitchers who occasionally throw a so-called spitter.

"There's one pitcher in the league-and players, umpires and managers all know who he is-who throws a spitter at least as often as Roe did and maybe more so. Like Roe's, his spitter doesn't do a heck of a lotmaybe dip a little, but that's all. Yet the finger's always being pointed at him as being a cheater, which, technically, I suppose he is. But nobody's going to do anything to stop him-unless some manager kicks, And a manager who kicks isn't being too smart, because he may have a guy on his own staff who uses an occasional spitter.

"I've heard it said that something drastic should be done about Roe-even to the point of expunging his games from the record books-but I can't see any purpose to that. He had some good years and won a lot of games, but it was because he was a good pitcher, not because he used the spitter. I don't think that little spitball he threw had much to do with any of his wins. He'd have been a winner without the pitch.

"Why, Roe's spitter-during the few times I ever caw it-didn't look anything like a real spitball. The old masters like Burleigh Grimes and Urban Faber and Eddie Cicotte and guys like that really made the ball do tricks. They all were good pitchers, and if the spitball were brought back legally, you'd see better pitchers now.

"No, sir, I can't get excited over Preacher Roe's socalled confession. He didn't have much to confess. His spitter simply wasn't that good. And, even if it were, the umpires wouldn't have done anything about it-not unless someone on an opposing team got stuffy about it."

## Bruins Hit Bingo on Banks-Baker Combo

## Rookies' Play Recalls Tinker-Evers, Jurges-Herman Acts

## Pair Teamed First Time as **Keystone Duo**

Gene Up From Los Angeles, Ernie From Monarchs of Negro American League

#### By EDGAR MUNZEL CHICAGO, III.

It was a gloomy Monday for the Cubs on September 14, 1953. They were in seventh place with no hope of improving their position with only two weeks left of the season, which had been one bitter disappointment after an-

But in the years to come that date may prove to be one of the brightest in the annals of the Chicago National League club.

It was on that day that two slender young Negroes reported to the Cubs. They were the first of their race to play in a Cub uniform. But that may soon be just incidental.

What will make the date of September 14, 1953, historic is that it meant the merging of a second base combination that within a short time will be etched into Cub lore alongside such keystone duos as Joe Tinker and Johnny Evers and the two Bills, Jurges and Herman.

Authority for the statement is Manager Stan Hack, who as third baseman played in the great infield of the '30s that had Jurges and Herman as its heart.

#### First Year as Duo

The present keystone combination consists of Ernie Banks and Gene Baker. They came from two widely divergent points. Baker reported from Los Angeles, where he had starred on the Cub farm club for three years. Banks checked in from Kansas City, where he had been playing for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro American League.

They had never played together before. In fact, they didn't even know each other. Neither had there been a suggestion to either that they were to be paired as a keystone combo.

After all, both of them were shortstops by trade, playing that position from high school on. The first inkling either of them had that their destiny was to be joined came on the day when Baker dropped into Personnel Director Wid Matthews' office upon arrival at Wrigley Field.

"Mr. Matthews told me that during the winter, when I played in the Puerto Rican League, I should fool around at second base whenever I got the opportunity," recalled Baker.

#### Switched to Keystone

"I didn't think very seriously strictly a Billy Herman special. about it," continued Gene, "because I figured they just wanted me to learn something about second base so that I'd be able to fill

learned what was cooking. I re- two rookies. "The pivot is differ- man on first base and I was about to Braves. He had made a fine stop beported with a pulled muscle in the ent on the double play. I had to suggest to Hack that he have him hind second and then pulled Dee Fondy left side and couldn't play immedi- learn that all over again. And move a few steps nearer second base off the bag with a throw a trifle wide. ately. But Banks was okay, so they now I have to backhand the ball so that he could cover for a possible The normal rookie would have betossed him right in at shortstop.

my shot there later. But that van- handed toss. ished in a couple of days, because stop.

"Phil Cavarretta (then manager)

#### Bruins Label Baker-Banks Combination 'Bingo Bango'

CHICAGO, Ill.—The Cubs have begun calling their new second base combination of Ernie Banks and Gene Baker "Bingo Bango."

"The nickname just seemed to pop up and now everybody calls 'em that," explained Catcher Joe Garagiola. "It just seems to fit them, the way they've been playing for us. They've got rhythm."

### Couple of New Friends for Cub Flingers



asked me to come out mornings for special practice at second base. Bob Ramazzotti was assigned to teach me how to play the position. He and Coaches Roy Johnson and Ray Blades worked with me for about a week.

"Then they tossed me into the lineup at Cincinnati in the next-to-last series of the season. I had played only a half-dozen games at second in my life. That was while I was on a service team. I was sort of in a fog out there, but I managed to survive."

Baker not only has survived, but as a result of diligent practice throughout the spring he has made amazing progress as a second sacker. He had only one error in the first 16 games this season and he has made some remarkable plays, including a back-handed stop and glove-hand flip to Banks for the start of a double play that was

#### Had to Learn All Over

in there in case of an emergency, to me at second base," said Baker, day, I saw him playing away over in "In another week, however, I who is the more articulate of the the hole at deep short. There was a the first play of a game against the to second on the short flips in- double play when the batter hit the come a bit jittery and tense. But not "At first I had the idea that I'd get stead of making the natural under- ball.

they started working me regularly at wrong direction occasionally. For in- over to see where Banks was and play. second base in practice. They obvi-stance, at short when I saw a pitch found him standing on second base. ously were satisfied with the way going to the outside half of the plate He actually was there waiting for Ernie was handling himself at short- to a righthander I'd lean to the left Minner's throw to start the double of four. However, two were on wide because it wasn't likely the batter play!" would pull. Now I still do it occa- Coast league folks still can't under- stops. He has the steadiness that makes right.

"Another handicap for Ernie and me

house meeting who pulls the ball and related Clyde McCullough, veteran Cub Baker as a shortstop," explained Matwho is likely to hit-and-run. It's easi- catcher. er when you know the hitters so well "He told me Ernie hit 314 in ten that you do the right thing instinc- games last fall and did a fine job at tively. They can't be watching every shortstop and that this spring he was second to see whether we're in the fielding even better. I explained that right position."

Manager Hack believes Banks is the home and had more confidence.

#### Called Strikes on Outside Puzzle '.270 Hitter' Banks

CHICAGO, Ill.-Ernie Banks never protests to the umpires. However, he was moaning a bit after he returned to the plate following a called third strike recently.

"They can't keep calling that outside pitch a strike on me all the time," groaned Ernie. "Don't they know I'm just a .270 hitter?"

Bill Jurges and he insists Baker will be the finest at second since Herman, just perience at the strange position.

stop move to either side any faster than Banks does." said Coach Bob store and he's ready to play." Scheffing. "And it baffles me because he looks like he's standing flat-footed apart from the average rookie inout there.

"Everything seems backwards "In a game against the Pirates one

sionally at second and then have to stand how Banks could beat out Baker recover because the ball is hit to my for the shortstop job and force him over to second base.

"When I was in Hollywood this spring is the fact we don't know the hitters for the Kiwanis Crippled Children All- with a lot of carry. Star Game, Bobby Bragan asked me "We have to be told in a club- just how good a shortstop Banks was,"

Ernie probably felt a little more at of greater experience, might be able

best shortstop the Cubs have had since "Bragan then said: That Banks must \*

cludes Pee Wee Reese.'"

Banks has a wonderful pair of hands. The top sport for both was basketthe big bills.

is that he doesn't even have a glove his school, averaging 20 points a game of his own. At the moment he is us- as a forward, ing a glove that belongs to Eddie They also competed in track and Miksis.

#### Never a Prima Donna

"That guy could play bareas soon as he gathers a little more ex- handed out there," says McCullough. "He'll never be a prima "I don't believe I ever saw a short- donna. Just get him any old glove and bat from the corner drug

Another thing that sets Banks fielder is his coolness and complete relaxation.

Not long ago he made an error on this guy. He simply make an even "He knocked it right back to Paul greater stop on the next smash over "I also find myself moving in the Minner in the pitcher's box. I looked second and started a lightning double

> While Baker made only one error in the first 16 games, Banks was guilty throws after he had made spectacular for a top-flight shortstop.

> Banks has the arm, too. It's not the rifle variety like Jurges had, but it's a buggywhip arm that results in a throw

> "It's his arm that really made our scouts give him a shade edge over thews. "We weren't committed to using him over Baker at short, but we thought he had the better chance to make the play from deep short and that Baker, at the same time, because

## Both Former Short Fielders by Profession

But Baker, Shifted to Second Base, Has Made Amazing **Progress at That Position** 

to make the switch to second base easier."

The next question, of course, concerns their hitting possibilities.

Banks lifted his average to .309 with an eight-game streak through May 18 in which he collected 14 hits in 32 times at bat. Baker, at the same point, was batting .279 and had replaced Ralph Kiner in the No. 3 slot because of his speed and ability to hit to right field. Certainly both seem to indicate that they will hit enough to hang onto their jobs.

"I believe Baker is one of the best two-strike hitters I've ever seen," said Cavarretta, before he was dismissed as manager. "The average batter is duck soup for the pitcher after he has two strikes on him. But Baker gets just that much tougher. Then he really bears down."

Banks' main characteristic as a batter is his wonderful wrist action.

"I believe he has about the fastest wrists I've ever seen," said Ralph Kiner, who is a student of hitting. Baker, at 28, is five years older than Banks. They are very similar in build. Both are slender and stand six feet,

### Holds Bat High Like Kiner

one inch, though Ernie is slightly more

muscular and weighs 180 to Gene's 170.

At the plate, Banks stands fairly straight with his bat held high. somewhat in the manner of Kiner. Baker uses a fairly deep crouch. He says he started hitting that way in the Puerto Rican Winter League a year ago and found he could follow the ball better.

Neither of them played high school baseball. They didn't have a baseball be a helluva shortstop to beat out Bak- | tearn at Booker T. Washington High in er. I believe Gene was as good a short- Dallas, where Banks attended, and stop as I've ever seen-and that in- Baker just wasn't interested in baseball at Davenport, Ia.

Bad hops apparently make no differ- ball. Baker made the Iowa all-star ence to him. He just gobbles them team as a guard in 1943. His team finup with the same ease as others spear ished second in the final tournament in 1942 and fourth the following year. The most fantastic thing about him Ernie was captain and high scorer for

> Ernie played some football. In track, Baker was a dashman, doing the 100 in ten flat, and Ernie specialized in the high jump and broad jump.

> Baker graduated in 1943 and the following August went into the Navy. After playing for the Davenport American Legion in 1946 and 1947, he was signed by the Kansas City Monarchs in 1948. Then he was purchased by the Cubs for their farm system in

> Baseball offered quick employment for Ernie, who is one of ten children as contrasted to Baker who is an only child.

> Banks began playing semi-pro ball even before graduating from high school in 1950. Ernie was with the Amarillo Colts from 1947 to 1949. There he was spotted by Dizzy Dismukes, a scout for the Monarchs. He joined the Monarchs in 1950 to replace a shortstop named Gene Baker.

But now the kids' traveling days appear to be over-Wrigley Field will be their address for some years to come.

#### Gene's Main Hobby Is Golf. While Ernie Is a Music Fan

CHICAGO. Ill. - Gene Baker's hobby is golf, and he shoots in the 80s. The main interest of Ernie Banks off the field is music.

"All he does as soon as he gets to the room is turn on the radio and listen to music," says Baker, who is his roomie on the road. "It doesn't matter what kind of music it is, just so it's music."