

Gus Bell Rings Loud Tune on Pirate Pitching

Red Slugger's Play Makes Deal Mahatma's Big Miss

Batted .369 Against Pittsburgh Last Year, Now at .390; Gives Hornsby Credit For Showing Him Error in Swing

By EARL LAWSON

CINCINNATI, O.

It wasn't long after the Cincinnati Redlegs landed Gus Bell from Pittsburgh back in October of 1952 that former Pirate Manager Bill Meyer was asked by Knoxville, Tenn., sports writer Tom Siler what he thought about the deal.

"I don't care how many more deals Gabe Paul makes before he dies," cracked the wizened-faced Meyer. "He'll never make a better one."

Now, some two years later, Paul, one of the major leagues' youngest executives as well as one of its most active traders, certainly agrees with Meyer. And this despite the fact that Paul, as he terms it, "has been remarkably lucky" in his trading ventures.

The Bell deal rates as one in which Paul, a Branch Rickey protege, outsmarted the old master, a distinguished gentleman who's widely acknowledged as the game's most fabulous David Harum.

Still, there are those who, and not without reason, claim that Rickey, in dealing off the muscular young Bell for Outfielders Cal Abrams and Gail Henley and Catcher Joe Rossi, was guided more by prejudice than by wisdom.

Regardless of Rickey's thinking, the trade ranks as, perhaps, his most conspicuous blunder, one that the disgruntled Pirate followers in Pittsburgh aren't permitting him to forget easily. Neither, for that matter, is Bell.

The differences between Bell and Rickey, which preceded the young outfielder's jump to Cincinnati, have been aired time and again, so much so, in fact, that even Bell, weary of it all, has satisfied himself by taking out what resentment remains against Pirate pitchers.

Loads Up on Pirates

Last year the slugging young outfielder, who at 26 has yet to reach his peak, rapped Pirate pitching at a .369 clip, pounding out 31 hits in 84 trips to the plate. Six of his 30 homers and 25 of his 105 RBIs also came at the expense of Pirate flingers.

This year Bell has shown no indication of slackening his pace against harried Pirate pitchers. In his first 15 games against the Bucs he rapped out 23 hits, three of them homers, in 59 times at bat for a lofty .390 mark.

"I don't know the answer," he frankly admits. "I don't think I try any harder against the Pirates. Still," he mused, "I might not be conscious of a little extra effort."

It wasn't with misgivings that Paul completed the transaction with the Pirates for Bell. He had been convinced all along that Bell would reach the stardom that had been predicted for him when he made the jump to the majors after swatting the ball at a .400 clip with Indianapolis of the American Association.

"If it's wrong for a guy to be in love with his wife and family, then Bell is a bad actor," commented Paul at the time of the trade. It was his answer to the criticism that had been heaped upon the young outfielder.

Points to Rajah's Advice

What's responsible for the amazing transformation that has changed Bell from the .250 hitter he was with the Pirates into the solid rapper he is with the Reds?

"Peace of mind and a friendly batting tip offered by former Redleg Pilot Rogers Hornsby," replies Bell.

Paul, fully realizing the potentialities of Bell, immediately set about making the youngster's life with the Redlegs a happy one. Buzz Boyle, a Redleg scout, found the former Pirate a place in Cincinnati for his wife and family to live. Paul gave him employment in the Redlegs' ticket office during the off-season.

That Paul's efforts to make Bell happy in his new home paid dividends is best borne out by the fine season the once "Peck's Bad Boy" enjoyed in 1953, when he earned a starting berth on the National League all-star team, batted an even .300, swatted 30 homers, and drove home 105 runs to become the first Redleg outfielder in history to top the century figure. Bell's fine comeback in 1953 brought

Birdie Wouldn't Trade Gus for Any N. L. Center Fielder

CINCINNATI, O. — Birdie Tebbets, the present Redleg manager, has nothing but admiration for Gus Bell, his star center fielder. Not so long ago a group of New York sports writers, arguing the respective merits of the New York Giants' Willie Mays and the Brooklyn Dodgers' Duke Snider, tried to draw Tebbets into the discussion by asking how Bell compared with the two Gotham outfield stars. Birdie refused to be lured by the bait.

"I'm not going to rap Mays and I'm not going to rap Snider," replied Tebbets. "They're both great players. All I've got to say is that I wouldn't trade Bell for any center fielder in the league."

to mind a statement he made his first spring with Cincinnati in Tampa. "I sure hope I have a good year," Bell said, "if for no other reason than to show Mr. Paul how much I appreciate what he has done for me."

Cincinnati fans readily adopted the handsome youngster from Louisville, Ky., as one of their heroes. And, Bell just as readily, adopted Cincinnati as his home town.

"I've got to give Hornsby credit for improving my hitting," Bell said sincerely. They were words much more generous than those uttered about The Rajah by some of his other former players.

Hornsby Leveled His Swing

But, with Bell and Hornsby it's somewhat of a mutual admiration society. Well remembered is that day of last year when Hornsby, sitting in the dugout chatting with baseball scribes, pointed to Bell out on the field and remarked: "There's a fellow you guys will be writing about for a long time. He can do everything—run, throw, field, hit the long ball and bunt. They told me he was a loafer, but I'll never believe it. No one is a better hustler."

"I used to uppercut the ball all the time and I was strictly a pull hitter," said Bell. "Hornsby helped me level off my swing. He stressed the advantages of hitting to left field. Concentrate on leveling your swing and forget about trying to pull the ball," Hornsby would say. "With your power, your share of home runs will come naturally."

"I don't know whether I would have done as well the past two seasons if I'd remained in Pittsburgh," said Bell, a little reluctant to stir up dying embers. "It was awfully frustrating playing at Pittsburgh and being yanked periodically from the lineup so that they could give a trial to some sandlot phenom. Heck, I was only a young kid myself. I began to wonder what the devil they thought of me."

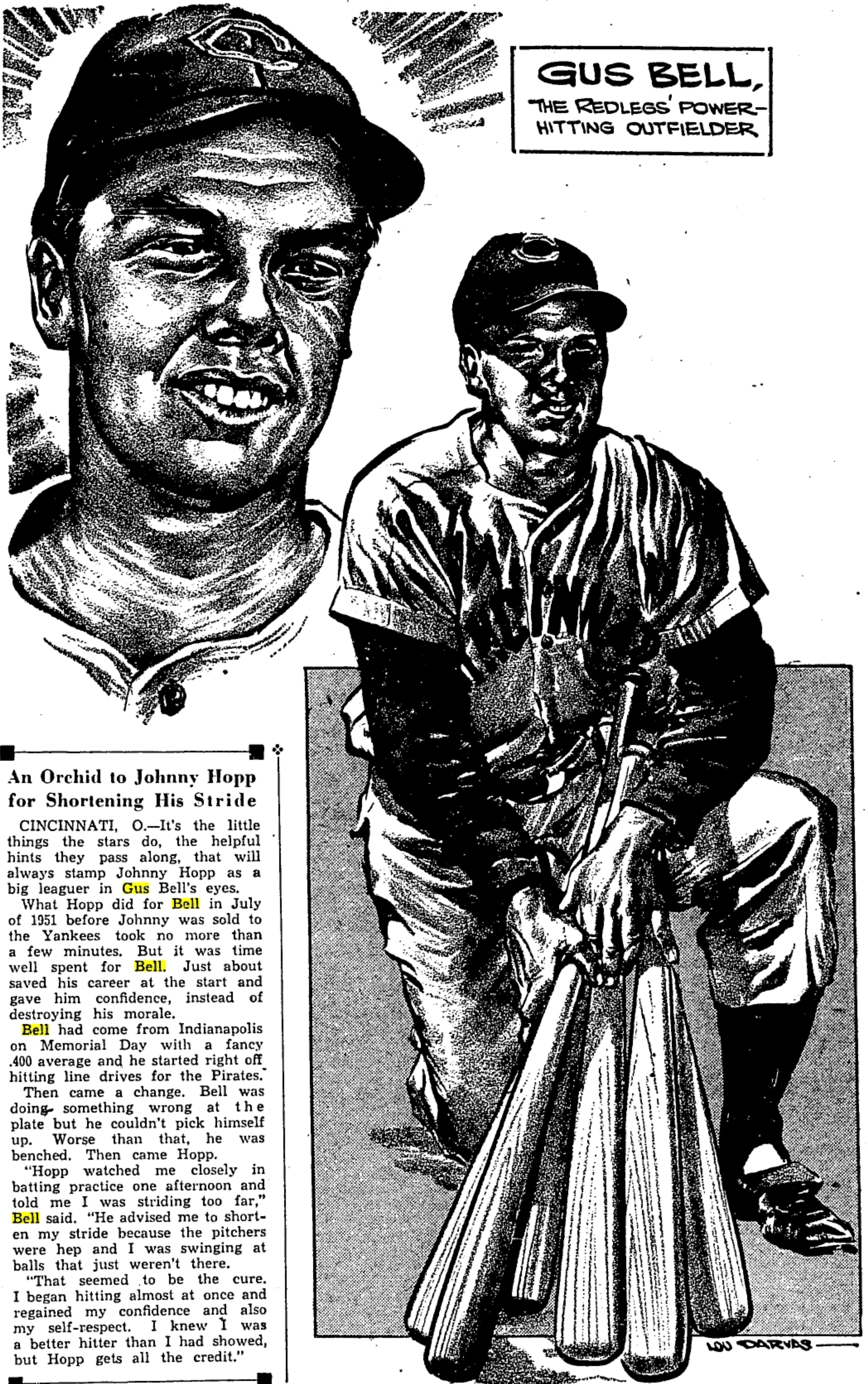
"Let's drop the conversation there," Bell said.

Bell already is well on his way toward bettering his fine season of last year, which, incidentally, earned him a well justified boost in pay.

The Redleg star, too, is fast mastering the art of playing center field. A right fielder with Pittsburgh and throughout most of his playing career, which dates back to 1947, Bell was switched to center field last year by Hornsby. It was another reason why Bell is grateful to The Rajah.

Cincinnati? They're just grateful that Bell's wearing a Redleg uniform.

Waiting for Turn to Bash Buccos



GUS BELL,
THE REDLEGS' POWER-HITTING OUTFIELDER

An Orchid to Johnny Hopp for Shortening His Stride

CINCINNATI, O.—It's the little things the stars do, the helpful hints they pass along, that will always stamp Johnny Hopp as a big leaguer in Gus Bell's eyes.

What Hopp did for Bell in July of 1951 before Johnny was sold to the Yankees took no more than a few minutes. But it was time well spent for Bell. Just about saved his career at the start and gave him confidence, instead of destroying his morale.

Bell had come from Indianapolis on Memorial Day with a fancy .400 average and he started right off hitting line drives for the Pirates.

Then came a change. Bell was doing something wrong at the plate but he couldn't pick himself up. Worse than that, he was benched. Then came Hopp.

"Hopp watched me closely in batting practice one afternoon and told me I was striding too far," Bell said. "He advised me to shorten my stride because the pitchers were hep and I was swinging at balls that just weren't there."

"That seemed to be the cure. I began hitting almost at once and regained my confidence and also my self-respect. I knew I was a better hitter than I had showed, but Hopp gets all the credit."

Snubbed Red Sox for Pirate Bid

CINCINNATI, O.—Gus Bell is a thoroughbred and he comes from the thoroughbred country—Louisville, Ky. The strange part of his baseball career is not that he didn't wind up with the Red Sox, who own the Louisville team of the American Association, but that he almost became a Dodger.

"The Red Sox were after me, all right, but so were the Cardinals, Dodgers and Pirates," Bell explained.

"I attended Flaget High School in Louisville and we had a Brother Conon there who was a Dodger fan from way back."

"He kept sending clippings of me back to Brooklyn and one day I was told George Sisler was in the stands looking me over. I wasn't so hot that afternoon and Sisler said the best he could do for me was \$125 a month and a chance in a Class D league."

"This didn't appeal to me. I didn't want to enter the Dodger chain at the very bottom and then become the forgotten boy. I wanted to play ball. Two of my friends in Louisville, Ray Doyle and Ed Hasenour, steered me to Bill Hinchman, the Pirate scout."

"He painted a glowing picture of rapid advancement

in the Pirate chain and promised me good treatment. I had my dad sign and my bonus was \$750.

"There was another who had a great deal to do with my signing with the Pirates. His name is Brother John Edward and he was our baseball coach at Flaget High. His home was in Pittsburgh and he made sure I tell into the right hands—Pittsburgh scouts."

"The Cardinal scout was on the phone when I signed and I had to tell him what I had done. But Eddie Martin, now dead, was a Red Sox 'bird dog' in Louisville and a very good friend of mine."

"I had played a little semi-pro ball for him and he asked me not to do anything until he had a chance to make an offer. But Doyle and Hasenour and Hinchman kept talking Pirates and sold me."

"Next day, Martin told me he could have gotten me more money. But at that time, money wasn't uppermost in my mind. The Pirates sent me to Keokuk, Ia., in the Class C Central Association in June of 1947, when I was 18, but it was too fast for me. I was shifted to Leesburg in the Florida State."

And from then on, it was straight up the ladder.