

Hal Chase Replays His 'Costliest Error'

Gravely Ill, Ex-First Base Marvel Regrets Failure to Reveal 1919 Series Fix

Admits He Knew Plot in Advance

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Fighting for his life after a stroke and heart attack, Hal Chase, regarded by many as the greatest defensive first baseman of all time, lies in Colusa Memorial Hospital, pondering over his ill-starred career and talking about the mistakes he made during his turbulent days in the game.

"My most costly error was in failing to notify President John Heydler of the National League that an attempt was being made to fix the World's Series of 1919 between the Chicago White Sox and Cincinnati Reds," said Chase. Hal revealed that he had advance knowledge of the gamblers' attempt to rig the Series, but contended that he was not implicated, except in failing to disclose the information.

Chase also said he had bet on ball games in which he participated, but never against his own team, and that, if he had desired, he "could have made a million dollars out of baseball on bets and gambling."

The 64-year-old Chase has been in failing health for a year. He quit drinking in 1940 and moved into a small cabin at Williams, Calif., near Colusa, to be close to his sister, Mrs. Jessie Topham. He was treated for beri-beri and later a kidney ailment developed. Hal described his present ailments as a "mixup of the liver, kidneys and heart."

Late in March, Chase suffered a stroke and little hope was held for his recovery. Then he rallied and regained some strength, but he still is in a grave condition.

Readily Admits Mistakes

I found Chase quite willing to talk about his career in the game, during which he was frequently involved in difficulties and which he left under a cloud. He insists he was wrongfully accused of some things, but readily admitted making mistakes, and hoped that others, particularly young players, would profit from his experiences.

"I would like to keep the record straight as far as my part in the Black Sox scandal in 1919 is concerned," he said. "I was implicated, but I never received a cent from any player or gambler."

"I became implicated because I did not report the Series fix to either President Heydler or to my manager, John McGraw of the Giants."

"I did not want to be what I then called a 'welcher.' I had been involved in all kinds of bets with players and gamblers in the past, and I felt this was no time to run out. I had sat in on many games of chance, but this Series fix was big business."

"The first man to approach me about fixing the 1919 World's Series was William (Lefty) Burns. He had been selling oil stock and was a gambler. He came to my hotel room in Chicago and brought along another man. (Here Chase named a well known sports figure of that time.) Burns did all the talking, and he said, as I recall, 'Would you like to make a lot of easy money?'"

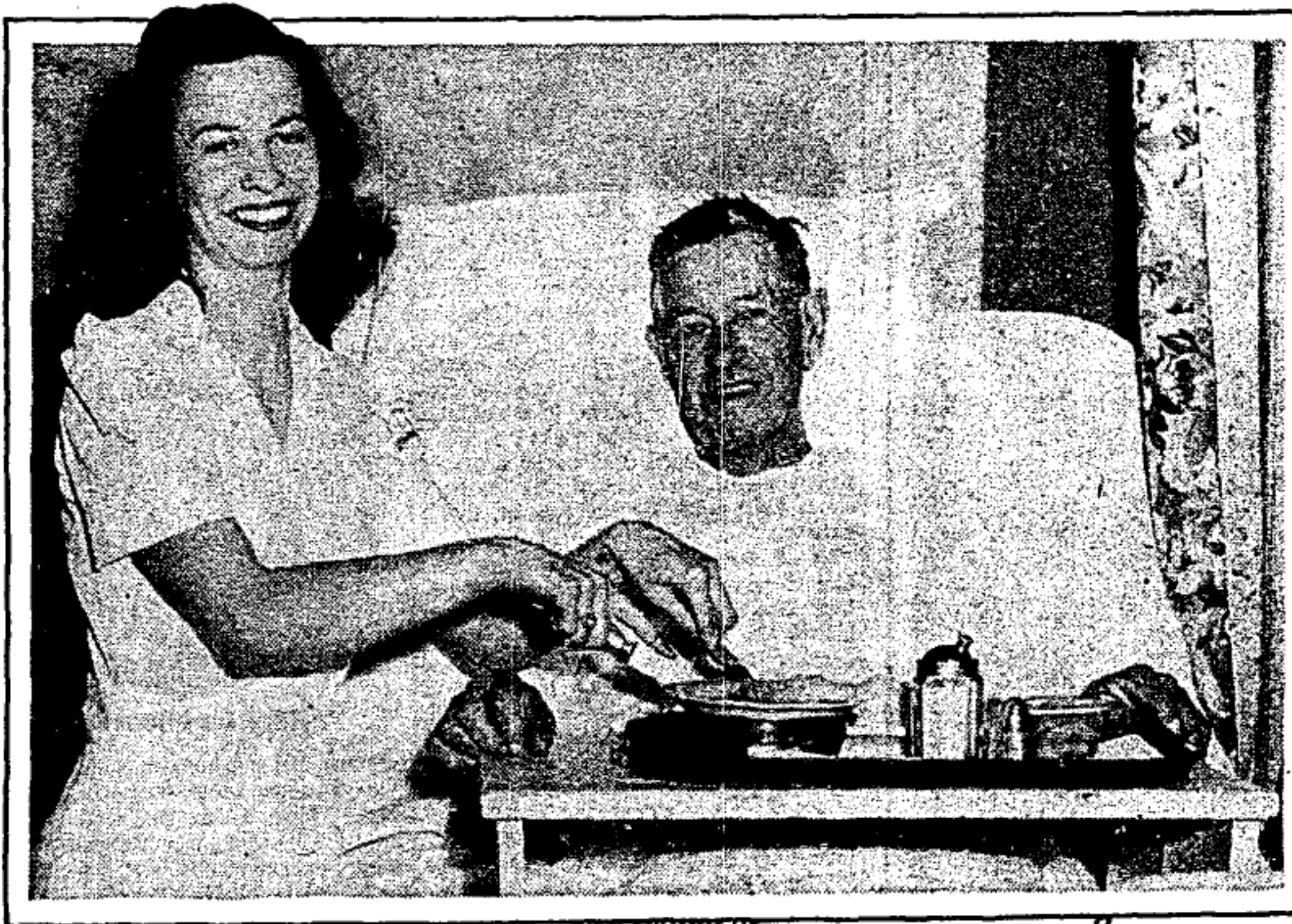
"I told Burns somebody ought to make a lot of money if he could fix the Series, but that I didn't want to get mixed up in it because I had enough trouble at the moment, in-

A Striking Debut

When Hal Chase reported to the Cincinnati Reds in 1916, he made one of the most auspicious debuts ever enjoyed by a player.

Fritz Mollwitz, Cincinnati first baseman, had two strikes on him when he was thrown out of the game for protesting to the plate umpire. Chase was substituted as a batsman, assuming the count of two strikes. He sliced the first pitch down the left field line for a double, was sacrificed to third and then stole home.

Once-Great Player Who Tossed Away Glory



HAL CHASE, once-great first baseman now seriously ill at Colusa Memorial Hospital, Colusa, Calif., is cheered by a visit from Miss Bernice Paradise, hospital office secretary. Miss Paradise said many inquiries are received about Chase, known during his playing days as Prince Hal.

Famed as Fielder, Chase Won N. L. Bat Toga in '16

Hal Chase is generally remembered for having been a great defensive first baseman in the American League, but he also is a former batting champion of the National League. After the collapse of the Federal League in 1915, Ban Johnson, the American League president, allegedly informed his club owners he didn't want Chase back in the league. Hal having jumped from the White Sox to the Buffalo Feds in 1914. However, Garry Herrmann, former head man of the Reds, purchased Chase from Harry Sinclair, who auctioned off the Federal League stars, and the versatile Hal promptly led the old National in 1916 with a .339 mark.

cluding another run-in with my second wife.

"I swear to God I kept out of the fixing of the games, but Burns' companion took over from there and I have always said he was the ringleader and man who led in the fixing. The courts didn't prove this."

Chase said that his roommate (whom he named) was with him when Burns and his companion came to the room and talked about the projected Series fix. Hal and his roommate were to help raise \$100,000 in the plot. Both refused, but Chase said the roommate, like himself, knew what was going on.

Hurt to Keep Mouth Shut

"Some of the boys in the plot wanted to back out and did," said Hal. "My name was tossed around, and I received much of the blame for plotting the fix. That is a lie, but, had I gone to President Heydler or to Manager McGraw, I could have helped baseball and myself. Later it was too late. My name, because of my past, was implicated, and no one wanted to believe my story. That's when a bad name hurts."

"Before the World's Series started. I had gamblers tell me the fix was on. I can't figure why managers and club owners couldn't see the handwriting on the wall."

"I was a wise guy, a know-it-all, I guess," Chase continued. "Had I gone to Heydler and told him the story, the whole complexion of my life could have changed."

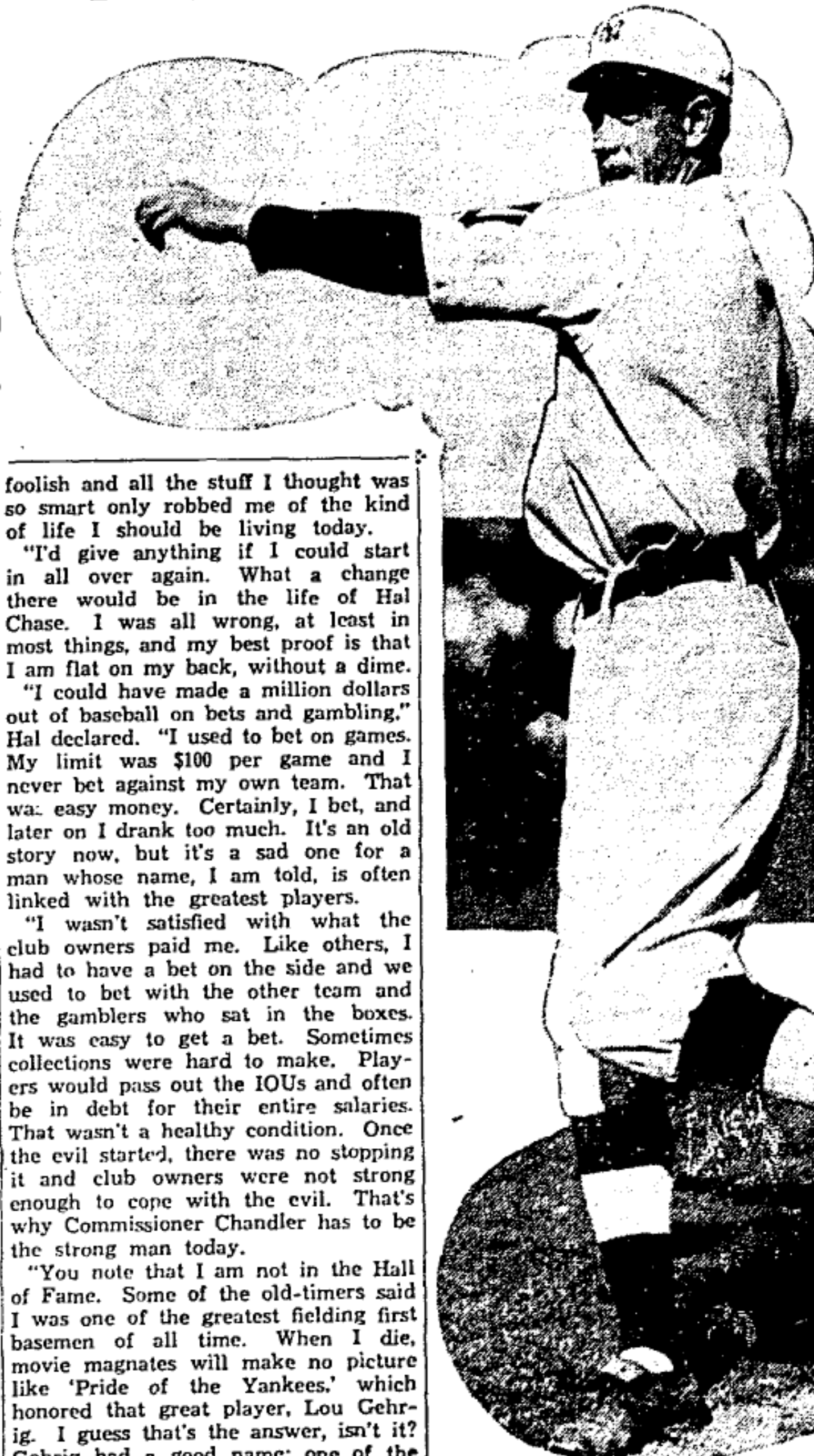
"I didn't get a dime out of the fixed Series. And many of those indicted didn't, either. They were paid, sure enough, but look at the scrape they got into. Their payoff went into fees for lawyers and their bad name broke them. Any form of gambling in baseball is bad and any player who thinks

he can get by with it is badly mistaken."

Chase has a warning for today's players: "If someone makes a proposition to you, play smart," he advised. "Tell your manager or club owner. I was

the loser, just like all gamblers are. "I lived to make great plays. What did I gain? Nothing. Everything was lost because I raised hell after hours. "Had Judge Landis been in power before 1919, there wouldn't have been

Prince Hal at His Yankee Peak



foolish and all the stuff I thought was so smart only robbed me of the kind of life I should be living today.

"I'd give anything if I could start in all over again. What a change there would be in the life of Hal Chase. I was all wrong, at least in most things, and my best proof is that I am flat on my back, without a dime."

"I could have made a million dollars out of baseball on bets and gambling," Hal declared. "I used to bet on games. My limit was \$100 per game and I never bet against my own team. That was easy money. Certainly, I bet, and later on I drank too much. It's an old story now, but it's a sad one for a man whose name, I am told, is often linked with the greatest players."

"I wasn't satisfied with what the club owners paid me. Like others, I had to have a bet on the side and we used to bet with the other team and the gamblers who sat in the boxes. It was easy to get a bet. Sometimes collections were hard to make. Players would pass out the IOUs and often be in debt for their entire salaries. That wasn't a healthy condition. Once the evil started, there was no stopping it and club owners were not strong enough to cope with the evil. That's why Commissioner Chandler has to be the strong man today."

"You note that I am not in the Hall of Fame. Some of the old-timers said I was one of the greatest fielding first basemen of all time. When I die, movie magnates will make no picture like 'Pride of the Yankees,' which honored that great player, Lou Gehrig. I guess that's the answer, isn't it? Gehrig had a good name; one of the best a man could have. I am an out-cast, and I haven't a good name. I'm

Professes Refusal to Take Part

any Series scandal. Betting on games and gambling on the side would have been out. I wouldn't have been in baseball at all had Landis been commissioner. If I had, I'd have been going straight. Landis saved baseball, and Chandler has to be baseball's G-man."

Married twice, Chase said his first wife resides at Walnut Creek, Calif. His only son, Harold, 36, now resides at Port Angeles, Wash. Hal, Jr., telegraphed his father, March 31, expressing hope for his speedy recovery.

"That was a happy day, hearing from my boy," Hal, Sr., said. "I haven't seen him in a long time."

Chase was reminded that THE SPORTING NEWS was giving him what might be his last opportunity to talk to the baseball world about the scandal.

"I realize all this," he said.

Sitting with him in his ward, while he was being questioned, was his sister, Mrs. Topham. She brought with her several clippings of recent commendatory stories about Chase that appeared in California papers.

Mrs. Topham declared that everything derogatory said about Chase for 28 years added up to one thing: "Make Chase the goat."

"Eased Out" of Picture

Hal Chase, the player equipped by nature to be one of the game's immortals, always has been held up as an example of the fate of a star who took what was believed to be "easy money."

While still a top-ranking first baseman with the Giants in 1919, Chase was mysteriously dropped by the National League and the New York club. No charges were brought against him at the time, but he was quietly "eased out."

However, the previous winter Chase had been tried by President Heydler of the National League on charges preferred by Christy Mathewson, former manager of the Reds, that there were irregularities in Hal's play with Cincinnati during the 1917-18 seasons. Heydler gave Chase a clean bill of health after the hearing, but during the 1919 season the league president obtained further evidence, which he presented to Charles A. Stoneham, president of the Giants. Stoneham acquainted Manager John McGraw with Heydler's findings. The Giants then were on a western trip, and in August, 1919, McGraw withdrew Chase from his lineup, and the club announced Hal had been indefinitely suspended. The suspension was made permanent by the two major leagues and later by Commissioner Landis.

In 1931, Chase wrote Commissioner Landis regarding his status in baseball. In 1943, I wrote to Landis, asking what reply had been given to Hal. The commissioner wrote me as follows:

"I suggest that you ask Mr. Chase to give you a copy of his letter of October 29, 1931, to me, and the original of my letter of November 4, 1931, in reply to his communication. Nothing was ever heard from my letter of November 4, 1931, to him."

Chase could not produce the reply which Landis mentioned. Hal insisted a friend in Arizona had the letter and lost it. He also said he had neglected to answer as requested by Landis.

HAL CHASE . . . ONE OF GAME'S FANCIEST