

Maz Makes the Tough Play Look So Easy

Grace, Poise Trademarks Of Pirate Keystone Whiz

By LES BIEDERMAN

PITTSBURGH, Pa.

Bill Mazeroski has backed himself into a corner, but you have to admit he's still in an enviable position as probably the best second baseman in the major leagues today.

Maz is so good that he can't get much better because he has left himself hardly any room for improvement.

Pirate teammates tend to take Maz for granted because he does everything with such consummate ease and grace. Seldom spectacular, always steady and reliable. That's Bill Mazeroski.

Baseball people seeing Maz for the first time can't believe he's that good. They want to see him again to make sure. But they always come back to join his fan club.

Johnny Pesky came to the Pirates a year ago, after spending his entire career in the American League. In his time, he has seen some dandy second basemen.

Pesky played with Bobby Doerr in Boston and against Joe Gordon and watched Bobby Richardson and others in recent years. But he took off his cap to Maz.

"He's the best I ever saw," Pesky said in praise of Maz, even before the 1965 season ended.

Pesky Marvels at Skill

Day after day, Maz makes plays that Pesky applauds in the dugout. "He makes fielding look so easy," Pesky said one day. "He has the best arm of any second baseman I ever saw. He seems to be in the right spot at the right time and the tough chance becomes routine to Maz.

"Maz surprised me with his all-round skills. I never realized he was as fast as he is and never thought he could handle a bat the way he does. He seldom strikes out, is a good bunter, a good hit-and-run man and can stroke the ball with power, too."

With all these skills, the best asset Maz owns is his disposition. He is never ruffled and seldom gets excited.

It's difficult to believe this young man of 29 is starting his eleventh year with the Pirates. He signed with the Bucs in 1954 at the age of 17 and, two years later, he was called from Hollywood, then in the Pacific Coast League, to join the Bucs in June of 1956.

He has lived in Ohio towns with

Eager Maz-Couldn't Stand To Waste Time on Bench

PITTSBURGH, Pa. — Bill Mazeroski has big hips and thick legs. Early in his career, he had a great deal of trouble with pulled leg muscles.

He was benched one day with such an injury and became restless.

Mazeroski kept agitating Danny Murtaugh to put him back in the lineup.

Murtaugh, who later was to appoint Maz captain of the Pirates, succeeding Dick Groat, asked Maz how he felt.

"Like a colt," Maz answered eagerly.

Murtaugh nodded, then told Maz:

"Let me know when you feel like a second baseman."

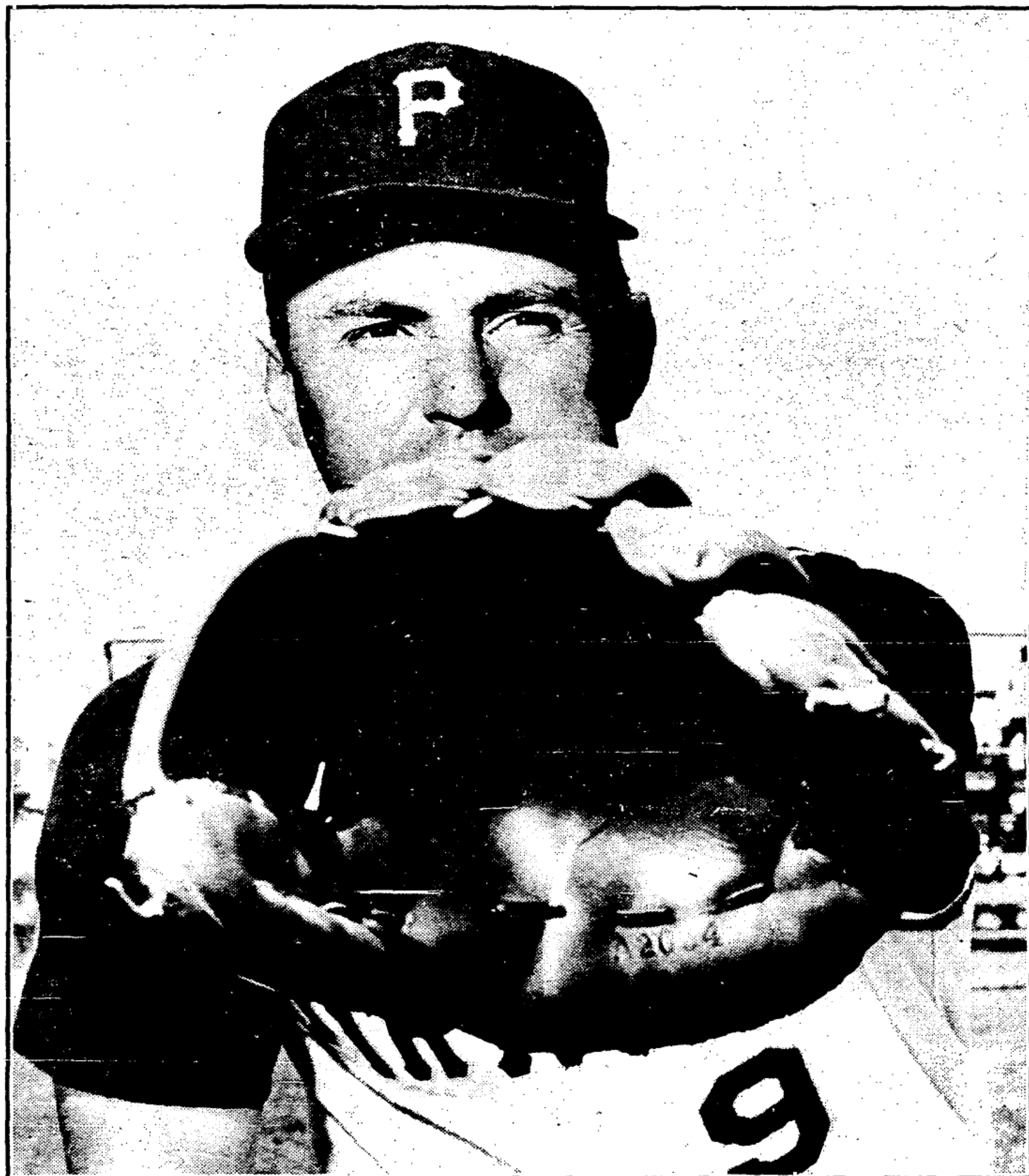
such odd names as Piney Fork, Rush Run, Turkey Point and Skunk Hollow and has followed baseball all his life.

In Tiltonsville (O.) High School, he had the mark of greatness as a freshman.

He was captain of the baseball team as a junior and again as a senior and he was quite a basketball player as well.

He was also known as a pitcher of some promise with a 15-2 record at Tiltonsville and won ten straight games. He even caught a game.

Maz was so good as a basketball player that he had offers from Ohio State, Ohio University and Duquesne, but he was anxious to get into base-



BILL MAZEROSKI . . . Always in Right Place at Right Time

ball. The Pirates signed him for the \$4,000 minimum bonus at the

time and this included his pay for the season.

"I would have liked a college education, but baseball kept me from going to college because I was in a hurry," Maz reflected.

"I've learned more through travel and life than I might have learned from books in college. Maybe I don't have the book knowledge, but I do have the common-sense type."

Maz has matured gracefully. When he joined the Pirates as a 19-year-old infielder in 1956 (soon to be 20), he was shy but eager. He still is basically shy and still is eager.

Deeds Speak for Bill

The captain's role on the Pirates fits him nicely. He leads by deeds and actions, not necessarily by words. Late in a game, when the Pirates are ahead and protecting a slim lead, the chant from the dugout is: "Hit it to Maz." They know a ball going in Maz' direction is a goner. The game is in good hands when the final out is heading for his gifted glove.

Maz was always a Cleveland rooter and Lou Boudreau was always his favorite player—Boudreau and Indian second baseman Joe Gordon.

"I lived in Ohio, near Cleveland, where everybody always rooted for the Indians," Maz said with a soft laugh. "I was a shortstop in high school and, naturally, I rooted for Boudreau since he was the Cleveland shortstop."

"The Pirates made a second baseman out of me and I never had any

A Feat Fans Won't Forget: Bill's HR That Sank Yanks

PITTSBURGH, Pa.—Though he has won the Rawlings Gold Glove Award six times, once hit 19 homers for the Pirates, once batted in 81 runs and has played in six All-Star games, Bill Mazeroski is best remembered for one swing of his bat.

It happened in the ninth inning of the seventh and final World Series game against the Yankees in 1960, when Maz hit a home run over the left field wall to bring the Bucs the title.

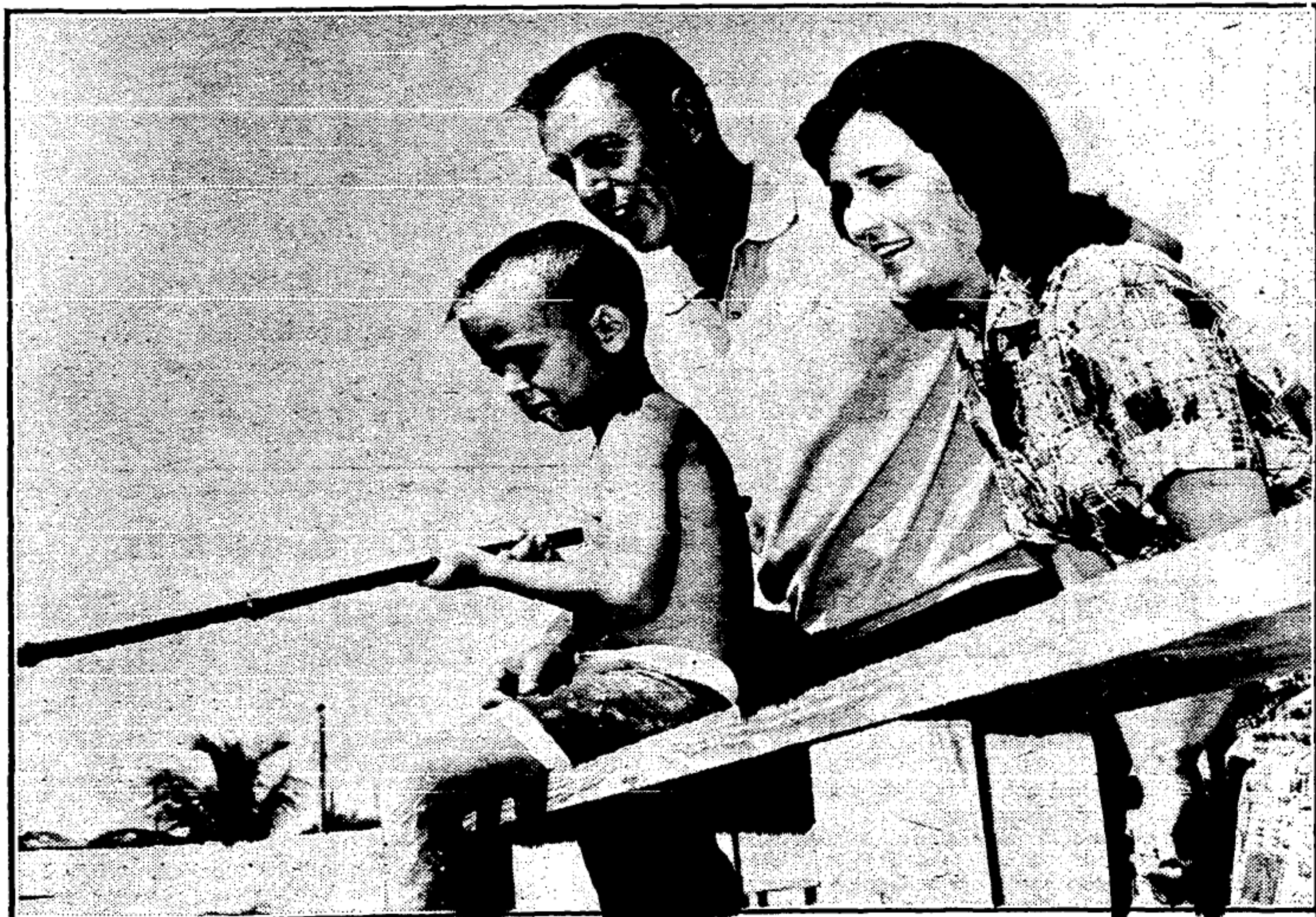
Fans still bring out pictures of Maz circling the bases and crossing home plate and ask him to autograph them. Generally overlooked in that Series was the fact that Maz batted .320, hit two homers and drove in five runs.

idea I'd be in the majors as quickly as I made it. But I'm grateful.

"The best break I ever had was signing for a low bonus and not being tied down on the bench for two years, the rule in those days.

"I'm sure if I had gotten more money, I would have sat around for two years, then would have been shipped to the minors. But I went to the minors right away to learn my trade and my lessons. I'm mak-

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LOOKS LIKE he hooked a big 'un. Daren dad, Bill, and mother, Mifene, as he tried his Mazeroski has an interested audience of his luck at Ft. Myers, Fla., during spring training.

Bill Learned Hard Way— Made Comeback When 24

PITTSBURGH, Pa.—Bill Mazerowski had a pretty good year in 1958. He had poined his Pirates in June of 1956 and, a year and a half later, he batted .275, hit 19 homers and drove in 68 runs. The team finished second and Maz had a big hand in it.

He lived the good life that winter. He attended banquets, although he hates to make speeches, and had a difficult time pushing himself away from the dinner table at home.

When Maz reported to training camp in 1959, he was 15 pounds overweight. And he found it tough to shed the extra pounds. When he did rid himself of the extra weight, he had little or no pep.

The lesson Maz learned stayed with him. In 1959, he had his worst season, batting .241, seven homers and 59 RBIs. Worse yet, he was having trouble getting to grounders he sucked up the year before.

He took a salary cut for 1960 because of what happened in 1959 and found himself making a comeback at the tender age of 24. But he came back stronger, batting .273 with 11 homers and 64 RBIs. He was the old Maz in the field.

Maz Has Hands Like Pickpocket, Bragan Declares

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ing more money today than I ever could with a bonus."

The first few weeks he played in the minors, the 17-year-old Mazerowski thought he was in another world.

"I went from high school to Williamsport, Pa., in the Class A Eastern League. When the fellows started throwing hard, I figured I left high school too soon," he recalled with a laugh.

"But I got used to it. I was baffled when I first played at Hollywood and even more amazed when I first came to the Pirates. But once I settled down, I was able to cope with the situation."

Lightning-Quick Hands

Bobby Bragan, who managed Maz briefly with Hollywood, then had him brought up to the Pirates when he managed the Bucs in 1956, once described his exciting double-play maneuver at second base in this manner:

"If Maz were a pickpocket, he'd be the best in the business. He has quick hands, the quickest I've ever seen."

Maz gives full credit to two men, his late father and Al Burazio, his high school coach.

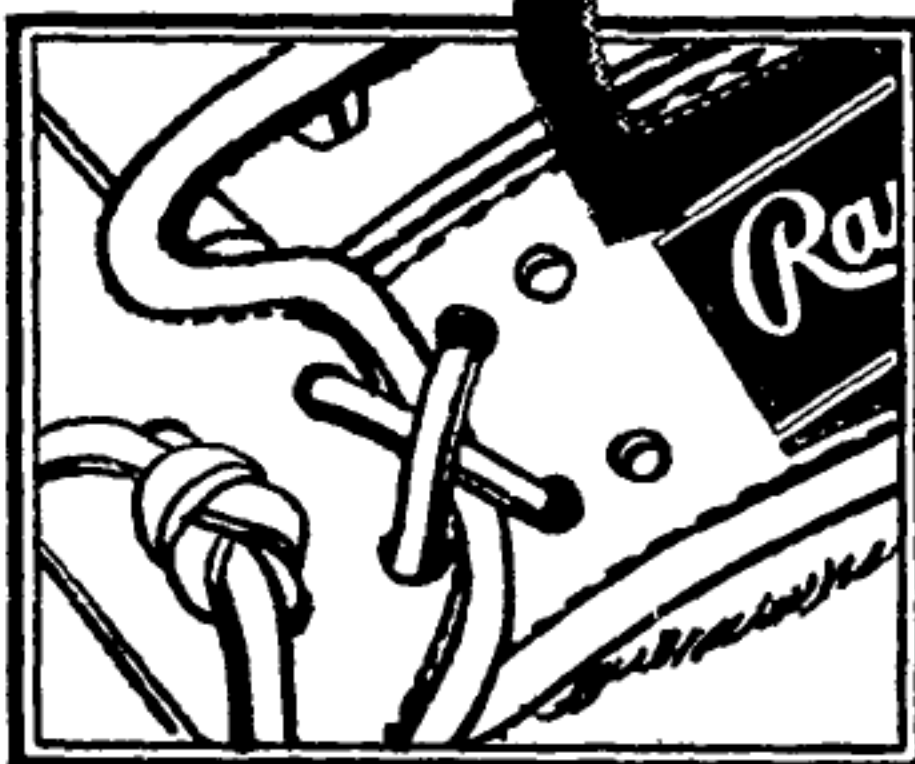
"My dad played a little sandlot ball and worked in the mines," Maz related. "One day, a lump of coal fell on his right foot and smashed it. He was only 17 at the time, but it ruined his baseball career."

"He devoted all his time to me and I can't ever remember being without a ball or a glove or a bat. My coach brought me to Forbes Field for a workout in 1953 when I was just 16 and I came back again in 1954, after I finished high school."

Maz had quite a few offers.

"The Indians, Phils, Red Sox and White Sox were interested and they all wanted me to start in Class D because I was so young. My coach said I was good enough to start in a higher classification and the Pirates agreed to put me in 'A ball.'"

Maz used the \$4,000 bonus money to help buy a home for his parents



Is Rawlings ignoring the buckle, snap and zipper for any good reason?

If all hands and wrists were the same size, Rawlings would probably use a buckle, snap or zipper on wrist straps.

But the Rawlings shearling lined Comfo-Lok wrist strap is designed to give every size hand a custom fit. It can be laced to fit your hand snugly, yet comfortably.

Good wrist fit is vital to glove control—helps you handle a catch from heel to the tip of the web. There are many unique features in



Rawlings gloves that give you full control, but the Comfo-Lok wrist strap is at the bottom of it.

"The Finest In The Field!"

in Barberton, O., where his dad worked for the Goodrich Rubber Co.

Maz was born for baseball and baseball was made for Maz. It was inevitable they would some day meet.

As far back as 1951, when he was just 14 years old, he reported to the high school baseball team as a freshman.

"I was wrapped up in baseball. It was all I ever wanted out of life," he recalled. "I can still remember my coach holding a meeting that day. He pointed to me and said:

"I'm going to make a big leaguer out of you."

He sure did, he sure did.

It Cost Maz \$25 Fine to Learn That Hustle Pays Off in Majors

By LES BIEDERMAN

PITTSBURGH, Pa.

Bobby Bragan, who was Bill Mazerowski's first big league manager, once had to slap a \$25 fine on the second baseman.

However, it turned out to be money well spent for the peerless second baseman.

Maz was 20 and in his first full season with the Pirates in 1957.

He failed to stop a ground ball going through the box. Bragan checked with the pitcher and the catcher and they thought the ball should have been kept

in the infield, preventing the runner from scoring from second.

Bragan told Maz it would cost him \$25.

"You'll thank me some day for this fine," Bragan advised Maz.

"You should dive at those balls."

Maz still remembers.

"The fine did wake me up," he recalled. "Now I dive at those ground balls and keep the runner from scoring. I didn't realize it at the time, but Bragan did me a favor. I learned the hard way."