

Mize Bat, Given by John, Started Scooter Hitting

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

and happy in relation to the fans, his manager and his club owners.

"I was very fortunate to enjoy a splendid position in all these angles. They say, 'Phil, what was your biggest thrill of the season?' Well, I had no biggest thrill. It was one thrill after another as I went bouncing along to my 200 hits.

"However, there is an interesting story behind the season, and you afford me a chance to thank Johnny Mize publicly.

"I had a great training season last spring. Then came the opening of the pennant race. We played three games in Boston, and Rizzuto came up nine times without a hit. I was worried.

"I said to myself, 'Phil, a man could go a whole season without a hit.' "When we returned to New York, to open with Washington, Mize said, 'Phil, your bat is too light. Try mine. I mean it. You might improve, and you certainly could do no worse.'

Helped by Dickey Advice

"Mize was using a 36-inch, 36-ounce bat. It seemed silly for me to try to use it. But I decided to give it a try.

"I got a hit that afternoon, and used that Mize mat until June, when it began to feel much too heavy. By then I was batting .355.

"I switched to a 34-ounce, 36-inch bat, and ended the season with a .33-35.

"The bigger bat, and Bill Dickey's operation on my grip, did the trick. He showed me how to hold the bat so I could break my wrist and get some snap into my drive, instead of lifting the ball into the air.

"I felt great, my legs were fine, so I bunted a lot. More than I had bunted since 1941. I figure I bunted 60 times. I beat out more than a few."

I said, "Phil, there have been stories about your having been chased out of Ebbets Field and other places before you came to the Yankee organization. How much of that is true?"

"Suppose we start from the beginning," Rizzuto suggested. "I interested a few major scouts while I was playing ball for Richmond Hill High School. I had a wonderful coach, Al Kunitz, who had been a 135-pound catcher on the Columbia University team and played minor league ball.

"Kunitz taught me the bunting trick. He gave me the idea that I could become a professional ball player, and that gave me quite a kick.

"Kunitz kept asking scouts to watch me, but I had no professional notions.

"Al kept saying, 'Sure, you are small. But you will fill out. You are fast, a great fielder, you have acute baseball sense.' I shook my head in affirmation and laughed.

"The first major scout to watch me represented the Cardinals. I got three hits that afternoon, played a whale of a game in the field. That was in June, 1935. I weighed 125.

"The ivory hunter deplored my lack of size. He said he was sorry he could not recommend me, but he did do me a big favor. He got me a summer job with the Floral Park semipros, on Long Island.

"Too Small, Too Frail"

"I had a good summer. I hit against Satchel Paige and other good pitchers.

"Then I was invited to go to Ebbets Field, where Casey Stengel was running the Dodgers. This was in 1936.

"There were 150 kids on the field. They lined us up in left and asked us to run into right field.

"The first 50 to finish were told to stay, the rest were invited to go home. A simple system, it struck me, I was one of the early finishers, so I stayed.

"The story is that Stengel chased me out of the park. It is not true. Casey never saw me. One of the Brooklyn coaches told me I was too small. He told me to try something else, and forget baseball as a possible means for a livelihood.

"My experience with the Giants was even briefer. A scout for the club asked me to come to the Polo Grounds. Pancho Snyder took one look at me, refused me a uniform and a tryout, and said, 'Kid, you are too frail for baseball. Stay and watch the Giants play the Reds, if you like, but we can't use you.'

"Next came an invitation from the Yankees. By this time I was fed up with the 'too small, too frail' routine.

"But I went to the Stadium, and there I met Paul Krichell, the first

'Sign or Get the Hell Out,'

Barrow's Greeting to Phil

NEW YORK, N. Y.—Phil Rizzuto will never forget his first meeting with Ed Barrow, who was general manager when the Scooter first joined the Yankees.

"I made the trip to the Yankee offices to sign my contract before going South in 1941, and was ushered into Barrow's office.

"I did not know Barrow. I did not know that the man in the frayed sweater, being shaved by a guy whom he kept calling Goulash, was Barrow.

"I sat silent until Goulash finished. Then the gent who had just been shaved sat up and looked at me hard from under his beetling eyebrows.

"Young man, what is your trouble?" Barrow exclaimed. I told him I wanted more money. He shouted, 'I give you this and no more. If okay, sign. If not, get the hell out of here.'

"I signed."

man from a major league club to give me any encouragement.

"They picked two teams from among the couple of hundred kids in the tryouts, and I was on one of the nines. This was progress.

"We played four or five innings every day. I started at second, shifted to third, and then was placed at short. I remember I hit a couple into the seats.

"Krichell said to me, 'Rizzuto, I think you might have it. Would you care to go away?' I said that I had a job, but might become interested in a baseball career.

"So they sent me a contract with the Butler, Pa., club, \$75 a month. I kicked. I was getting \$18 a week, and living at home. I was working in a factory making hotel supplies, and played on their team in a Twilight League on the Prospect Park Parade Grounds. I had hit .430 in that league.

"I told Krichell that \$75 was too little to live on. He sent me another contract, with Bassetts, and explained that in the Bi-State League I would have a longer season, giving me an extra \$75.

Recalls Rough Rides

"Well, Herb Karpel, the pitcher, and I went to Bassetts. I could write a book about the bus riding, about the tough living in cheap boarding houses, about the hot dog and hamburger dinners, about how men can grow up under such conditions, and go on to play ball in the major leagues.

"It goes without saying that the Yankees did not pay me a dime for signing. I was glad to get the chance, after having heard so much about my lack of size.

"Ray White, the guy who, as a pitcher at Norfolk, skulled Lou Gehrig, was our manager at Bassetts.

"After two weeks of play, I suffered a terrible leg injury. In running to first I stepped in a hole. Something gave way. For a fortnight, I continued to play on in agony.

"An old umpire took me aside one day and said, 'Look, kid, you are badly hurt, and the sooner you go to a hospital, the better.'

"We were near Roanoke, Va. I went to a hospital there and saw a Dr. Johnson. He said, 'Young man, you have a muscle so badly pulled apart that gangrene has set in. About a week more and you would lose your leg. You will have to have an immediate operation.'

"I called home, and my mom came down, and I was operated on. They took 37 stitches in my leg. My mom said, 'Phillie, you are finished with this baseball business. Come on home and quit.'

"I was out of action for three months. When I came back, I was afraid my career had ended. I had been quite a runner. In high school I used to steal second and third.

"The doctor said, 'Walk a week. Then go out and run as hard as you can. In a minute you will know if you are finished or will be able to continue with your career.'

"I cut loose, the muscle held, and in 1938, they sent me to Norfolk. White had been promoted and again he was my manager. I had a good season. Roberto Estalella, with Charlotte, beat me for the most valuable award by one vote.

"In 1939, I was promoted all the

The King at Home With Medals and Trinkets



PHIL RIZZUTO, New York Yankee shortstop, surrounded by his many awards in the trophy room at his Hillside, N. J., home.

Mates Suggested Little Phil Stand on Stool in Shower

NEW YORK, N. Y.—Phil Rizzuto's size resulted in his being the butt of quips from his big Yankee teammates in his first visit to train with them.

"I remember one day I found a stool under my shower," Phil recalled. "Lefty Gomez said: 'Phil, better leave it there. Without the stool, the hot water takes so long to reach you, it is cold.'"

way to Kansas City. I never will forget that spring training season. The older players made life miserable for me. They played every conceivable trick on me. Buzz Boyle's idea of comedy was to get hold of a letter from your family, tear it to bits, and lay them neatly on the bench near you.

"I ran into tough competition for the shortstop job from Billy Hitchcock. He had a big spring, I rarely look good during training.

"It looked like Hitchcock at short, with Jack Saltzgeber at third. Bill Meyer was our manager.

"I got a break. Hitchcock had a bad knee, a souvenir from his football days at Auburn. The knee bothered him, so I got the job. Later Hitchcock went to third, and Saltzgeber became a coach. Over to my left was Gerry Priddy.

"That season, 1939, I first saw PITCHING. I did well. In 1940, Priddy and I got a lot of publicity. We could do nothing wrong. They wrote us up as the greatest double-play combination in the minors. The Yankees got a few offers for us, but announced that we were to move into the Stadium in 1941.

'How Ya, Dago?'

"Believe me, it was not easy for Gerry Priddy and me in the Yankee camp. For more than a week, the atmosphere was cold. I was after Frankie Crosetti's job, Priddy was aiming at Joe Gordon's, and we had trouble getting our turns in batting practice.

"About a week after we had started work, Joe DiMaggio stopped by at short, shook hands with me, and smiled, 'How ya, Dago?'

"Well, that was Heaven to me. The other players began to warm up to me. In fact, they warmed up much too eagerly. I started to be the butt of their tricks and jokes.

"Soon things changed. Bill Dickey and Red Ruffing, whose lockers flanked mine, took me into the club. Crosetti took me in hand and taught me the tricks of the trade.

"You know what happened that spring? McCarthy decided to play me at short, with Priddy at second, and Gordon at first base, where he did not want to work.

"Things went sour from the start. Priddy and I were benched. Johnny Sturm went to first base, Gordon back to second.

"I decided that I would have to spend the season on the bench, and then I got my break.

"Hal Trosky spiked Crosetti in the hand. I was sent to short. I still am there.

"If Crosetti, batting .350 at the time, had not been spiked, what would have become of me? I ask myself that question quite often. You know what happened to Priddy. He was traded to Washington in January, 1943, for Bill Zuber.

"That's my story—all the way up to the sunny cloud."

Will Rizzuto Hit Jackpot? Hickok Award January 22

Yank Star a Candidate in Poll Being Conducted to Name the Professional Athlete of the Year

By FRED J. BENDEL

HILLSIDE, N. J.

A whole room at Phil Rizzuto's home at 239 Windsor Way, Hillside, is filled with trophies which the Scooter has collected throughout his diamond career. However, the stellar Yankee shortstop still hopes to hit the jackpot with the most valuable of all, the \$10,000 Ray Hickok diamond belt award to be given January 22 to the winner of the professional athlete-of-the-year poll now being conducted.

The famous Scooter, most valuable American League player award winner of 1950, qualified with ten other finalists and the nation's leading sports writers and broadcasters will decide the winner.

The group of trophies and statues in his Hillside home are but a portion of the honors bestowed on Phil since he began his career as an athlete at Richmond Hill High School, Long Island, back in 1936. Most of his early school and minor league trophies are at the home of his parents in Richmond Hill. He has scores of medals, amulets and scrolls, and has received two automobiles and hundreds of gifts at special days.

The most unusual is a five-foot, eight-inch columnar trophy, supporting the figure of a ball player, given by Joe Barile, a Newark business man, and his friends at a recent banquet. There is also the prized Newark Athletic Club annual award for 1949 which proclaims Phil as New Jersey's outstanding athlete in 1949.

Back in 1940, as the American Association's most valuable player, he received another handsome trophy from the radio broadcasters of Kansas City and also one from the Hot Stove League fans of that city.

Top Athlete in New York City

Recently, Phil was honored by Temple Israel of Manhattan as the outstanding athlete of New York City. The Village Club of Jersey City presented a plaque for his sports prowess and the New York Chapter of the Baseball Writers' Association of America named him winner of the Sid Mercer plaque last February. Greater Newark Post VFW 6297 also honored "their comrade" with a similar award.

One of Rizzuto's most valued awards is a plaque given him as a member of the Navy team which beat Army in the service world's series in Hawaii in 1944. Phil wore the bell-bottomed trousers for three years during the last war.

His adopted home town, Hillside, turned out recently to pay homage with gifts and another plaque.

There are many scrolls, one for the "outstanding father of the year," to which lovely Mrs. Cora (Esselborn) Rizzuto and their three little daughters heartily concur, for Phil is strictly a home man.

On a late fall tour of nearly three weeks through New England with a barnstorming ball club of major leaguers, Phil came back with another truckload of gifts.

Then there was a trip to Boys Town, Neb., in December, sponsored by the Unity Club of the United States. This is a nationwide organization of citizens of Italian lineage who sponsor and promote sports events for boys throughout the land.

Phil came back impressed by the 800

Phil Quits Banquet Loop; Heads for Florida Vacation

HILLSIDE, N. J. — Explaining that he was "fed up" with numerous banquet invitations and the heavy demands on his time, Phil Rizzuto, the American League's most valuable player of 1950 and chosen by The Sporting News as the top player of the year, has called a halt to his off-season activity.

"I am cancelling all future engagements (except possibly the Hickok Diamond dinner), have turned down an invitation from the Boston sport writers to attend their banquet, February 1, and am taking the family to the east coast of Florida for a much-needed vacation," said the much-wined-and-dined Scooter.

His latest honors came at the Touchdown Club banquet in Washington, D. C., January 6. Present were Vice-President Alben Barkley, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn and Chief Justice Fred Vinson, among other government and civic officials.

Rizzuto thanked the donors and said: "This is one thing they cannot take from me (referring to the newest addition to his trophy room). I may lose 100 points in my batting average next season, but I'll always remember this was my greatest off-season as well as top year of my career."

boys who thrilled at the sight of a major league all-star player.

"I cannot forget the vast auditorium used for sports. It is so big," Phil said, "they play indoor football as well as baseball at the same time. A huge net separates the two fields of action."

Having signed a new contract for 1951 at a salary of \$50,000, Phil is even more in demand. He was asked to attend a Hot Stove League banquet at Norfolk, Va., last month, where he broke in as a player, but had to pass this one up because he had a television date with Ed Sullivan.

One of the prizes that Rizzuto really cherishes is a baseball bat handed him by Honus Wagner, the "greatest shortstop of them all."

The bow-legged Flying Dutchman of Pirates' fame remarked: "You rate it, boy. One of the great shortstops of all time."

Rizzuto 'Still Walking On Sunny Cloud'

Most Valuable Honor Topped Big Year for Yank

Never Hurt in '50, Kids All Healthy

Partnership in New York Men's Wear Shop Factor in His Security in Future

By DAN DANIEL
NEW YORK, N. Y.

Philip Francis Rizzuto sat in the witness box, all smiles. "Start pitching," he said.

"Well, Philip Francis, how does it feel to be 32, with a splendid family, in possession of the American League Most Valuable Player Award for 1950, with your greatest season behind you, and a big chain about to take you in as a partner in a men's wear shop in this city? How does it feel—huh—how does it feel?"

Rizzuto broke into a laugh. "How does it feel? Well, have you ever walked on a cloud? A bright, sunny cloud?"

"You know, I have won a lot of awards. This I remind you of without boasting."

"In 1939 and 1940, I was voted Kansas City's most popular player. In 1940, The Sporting News called me the No. 1 player of all the minors. Come to think of it, I won the most popular award in Norfolk, too, in 1938."

"Last February, the baseball writers of New York gave me their Player of the Year plaque. In my first six years in baseball, starting with Bassetts in the Bi-State League in 1937, I never was on anything less than a pennant winner."

Everything Broke Right

"But this Most Valuable Player award sure topped them all," chirped Phil. "To think that a committee of 23 writers, representing all the eight cities in the American League, not only voted me the No. 1 guy, but gave it to me by so big a margin!"

"Sure I had hoped to get the award. I thought I might have a chance. But the way it turned out—well, I have been walking on a cloud!"

"Last season was sure my year," Rizzuto continued. "Cora in fine health, I never got an injury all year and played in every one of our 155 games; we got a fine addition to the family—a third girl, and God bless her—all the kids had a healthy, happy year; the Washington Shop in Newark decided to open a Phil Rizzuto Shop for me in New York and make me a substantial partner in that enterprise; I have a lot of radio work in prospect, and a pretty good contract with the New York club for 1951. Walking on a sunny cloud."

Rizzuto stopped talking and just smiled. "You know, I have quite a few years yet as a regular. I don't have to fight weight, and if the Lord keeps me unhurt, why not?"

"However, a man with a growing family has to look into the future."

"For five years I have worked for that shop in Newark during the off-season. I have been learning a great business. That is going to be my future, after baseball."

Pasquel Upset Mex Deal

"Phil, you really are a lucky guy," I broke in. "Suppose you had jumped to the Mexican League? Or was there no serious possibility of that?"

Phil turned pale. "I get scared when I think about that," he replied.

"Was it serious? Man, I practically was right in the Mexican League, and if that Bernardo Pasquel had kept his trap shut, and had not announced that he had me signed up, while I still was in New York, I undoubtedly would have gone down there—against the much better judgment of Mrs. Rizzuto. I haven't often disputed that judgment since."

"You will recollect the 1946 season. Joe McCarthy quit on May 24, Bill Dickey took his place. Things were all topsy-turvy. We finished third. "I came out of the Navy that year,

A Couple of Pages From the Family Album



ROUGHHOUSE at the Rizzuto home, with Phil providing transportation for daughters, Patricia, 6, and Cynthia, 3.



THE RIZZUTOS reading congratulatory wires after Phil's selection as the A. L.'s Most Valuable Player.

Phil Tells of Bargaining That Led to \$50,000 Pay

NEW YORK, N. Y.—In the course of an interview with Dan Daniel, Phil Rizzuto revealed how he reached an agreement on the \$50,000 salary he is to receive this year. "I got \$35,000 for the 1950 season, and when George Weiss called me into the Yankee offices to talk 1951, I asked for a 100 per cent increase," the shortstop explained. "Weiss offered five grand, or forty, and later in the day, after a talk with Dan Topping, he raised the ante to \$45,000."

The compromise for \$50,000 came on November 30.

and hit a terrific .257 in 126 games. I drove in 38 runs, and those weren't easy, either.

"I was worried to death, insecure, hounded and harassed by the fear that I was washing up. No foolin'."

"Well, along comes this Bernardo Pasquel with an offer. He wanted to pay me \$100,000 for three years, one-third deposited in a New York bank immediately."

"Pasquel wined and dined us at the Waldorf. He met me after games and urged me to grab the chance. I figured he was doing me a big favor. I was over 21 and well able to make my own decisions, and it was no case of a man from Mexico luring a green rookie off the right path."

"Bernardo said he would pay all expenses of moving us into Mexico City. He promised to pay our living expenses, in a fine apartment down there."

"Cora opposed the scheme. She said that I would do better sticking with the Yankees. She protested against uprooting the family. She said, 'Phil, you jump the Yankees, and you will be a man without a country.'"

"But for her, I would have signed, and been on my way. She made me stop and think. But there was the hundred grand—and security."

"Bernardo said, 'Call McCarthy now, and tell him you are home in bed, with a bad cold. Then we will go down the street, buy a Cadillac, drive down to Mexico, and install you in the Mexican League. I will give the car to you as a gift.'"

"Once down in Mexico, you will

call up McCarthy and tell him the truth."

"Well, this whole arrangement did not appeal to me. I insisted that McCarthy had been very good to me, and that I had to be on the level with him."

"While we were debating, Bernardo pulled a rock. He announced that I had gone to the Mexican League."

"McCarthy called me and warned me that I would regret the move the rest of my life. George Weiss called—oh, a lot of people said, 'Don't do this. The Mexican League is a balloon that will burst.'"

"The Yankees went to court for an injunction, and asked me to sign the papers. I refused. I told Larry MacPhail that Bernardo had tried to help me, and it would be rank ingratitude if I joined in a court action against him."

Handed \$5,000 Raise

"MacPhail said, 'Do you really want to go to Mexico?' I replied, 'No. Why should I want to go, except for the financial advantages involved?'"

"Sure, I am having a bad year. But I will have better ones, and you know the club hasn't been paying me what I am worth. You raise the ante and I will stay."

"MacPhail gave me a check for \$5,000 and promised me a bonus if I would have a fairly good season. I did not have a good season, so I did not get the bonus."

"Yes, sir, it was a close call. Imagine what would have happened if I had jumped to Mexico?"

Rizzuto shuddered, and sat shaking his head for a minute or so. The mere memory of the near misadventure gave him the creeps.

I quickly steered Phil out of 1946, into the present. I reminded him, as if he needed reminding, that in 1950 he had batted .324, tops for the Yankees, with 200 hits, tops for the Yankees, and 125 runs, ditto. He also had had a tremendous year in the field. How come, at 32?

"I am asked that same question everywhere, every day," Rizzuto replied.

"I don't have to tell you how important it is that a player be happy at home, happy in the clubhouse, happy on the bench, happy in the field,

Four-Year-Old Glove Phil's Pride and Joy

By Hugh Bradley of the New York Journal-American
NEW YORK, N. Y.

The baseball possession Phil Rizzuto prizes most is a stained and ragged glove. It looked out of place hanging in the locker of the dapper little shortstop, but he values it far more than a carload of his brightly colored sports shirts.

"Maybe you would call it superstition, or maybe you would tab it as good sense," the Yankee star said. "Nevertheless, I'd just as soon go out on the field without my trousers as without that piece of leather you've been sneering at."

How come?

"That glove and I just seem to go together," he said. "It looked just like any other piece of merchandise when I bought it four years ago, but we have been through so many things together I've become downright attached to it. I had used dozens of them before I got it and I had three or four in the trunk during the season, just in case of need, but I don't believe there ever will be one quite like it."

The secret of the leather Phil carried into his third world's championship in four years is that it can seem to do no wrong. Always esteemed as a top fielder, he has risen to the heights as a defensive player while wearing it.

Last season, for instance, Rizzuto made only 14 errors, eight of them on throws. The Scooter goes after everything within his reach.

The glove aided him in setting a new American League record for fielding. Going through 58 games he accepted 288 chances without an error, ripping apart the old mark of 42 games and 226 chances for shortstops set by Eddie Joost.

"Maybe I could have done it without the glove," Rizzuto said. "But I'm leveling from the heart when I tell you I doubt it."

Suppose the glove wears out, though? Such things can happen. What's Phil going to do about it? He can't replace it as easily as the Johnny Mize type of bat which he began using last spring, and to which he attributes his all-time high average of .324 this year.

"I figure on never letting it wear out," he said. "So far I've had new insides put in it twice and I guess I'll have to get a new outside put on it. But even if that does sound like one of those old Ford car jokes, I'm telling you I wouldn't part with my glove for anything in the world."



"Wouldn't Part With It"

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