

Salary Doubles, Thomas Pays Bucs Dividends

Came Out of Slump to Star With Pirates

Home Run Splurge and RBI Binge Followed Baffling 39 Whiffs in 72 Trips

By LES BIEDERMAN
PITTSBURGH, Pa.

Frank Thomas isn't interested in becoming the new Ralph Kiner for the Pirates. The home-grown Pittsburgh slugger is merely content with remaining the old Frank Thomas.

He means the Frank Thomas who survived a near demotion to New Orleans at the time of the 1953 All-Star Game but remained to finish the season with a rush that gave him 30 round-trippers and 103 RBIs as a 24-year-old youngster playing his first full campaign in the Big Time.

True, Thomas batted only .255 for the year, but considering that his average was down to .206 at the time of the All-Star Game a year ago and he was almost on a train for New Orleans because he was striking out at a rate of 39 times in 72 trips to the plate, the Pittsburgh kid came back strong.

Thomas jumped his salary from \$6,000 in 1953 to \$12,000 for 1954 and this season has provided one of the few bright spots in an otherwise dull Pirate picture.

The six-foot, two-inch slugger started right in during spring training when he dropped 12 home runs over fences in ball parks from Fort Pierce, Fla., to Charlotte, N. C. In the process, he batted .353 and when the season opened, Thomas was ready.

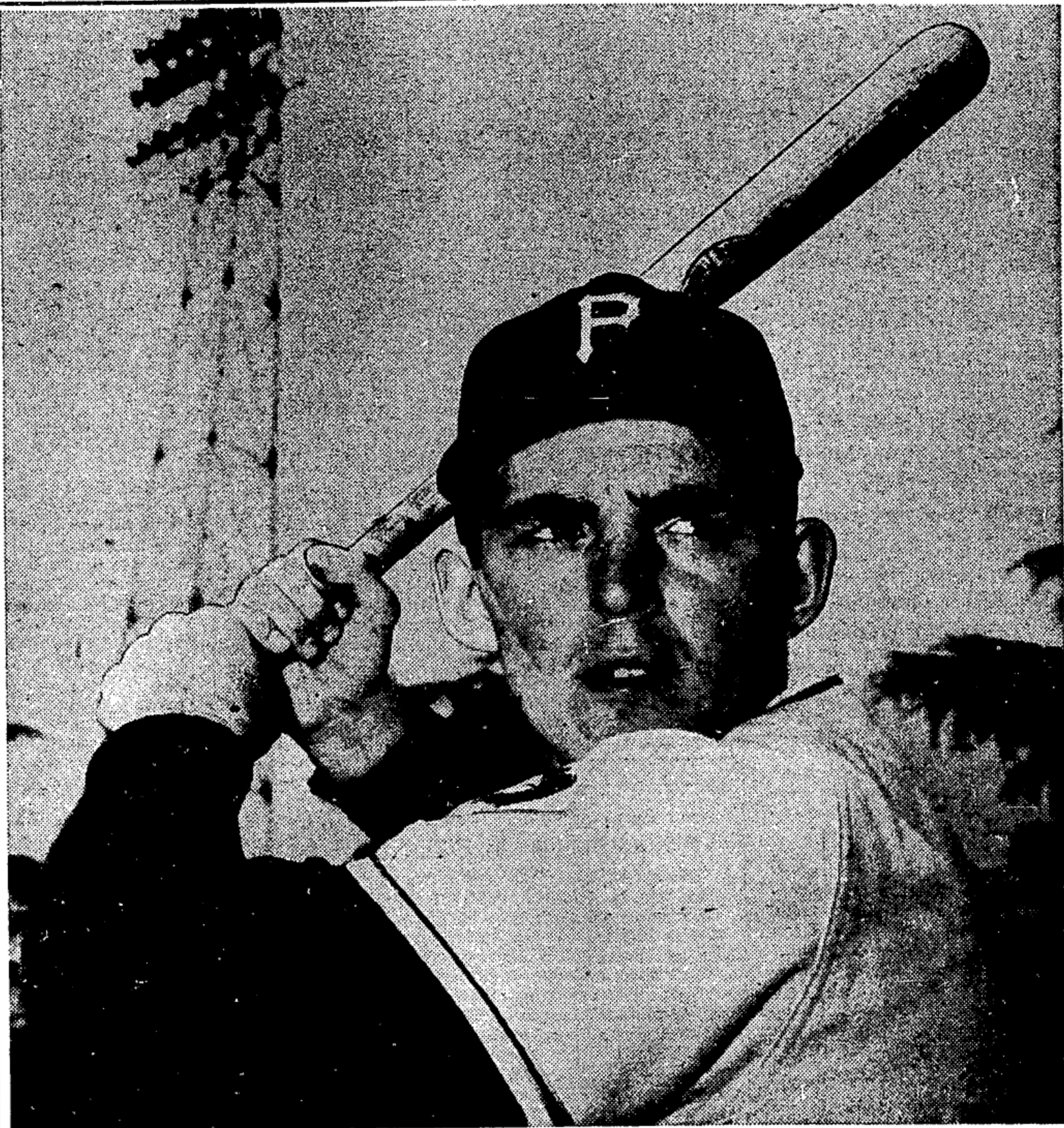
Homer Range Longer

The home runs haven't come with the frequency with which Thomas had anticipated but he now has a barrier at Forbes Field. Greenberg Gardens have been torn down and instead of a 335-foot homer, the pull hitters have a target approaching 400 feet, considering the 40-foot scoreboard that rises above the 365-foot wall.

In the first 60 Pirate games, Thomas checked in with eight homers and 31 RBIs, but best of all, he was batting .306.

His RBI total is down because the runners usually aren't aboard when Thomas or the other power hitters come to the plate. In a recent double-header with the Cardinals, only one runner was on base when Thomas came to bat in the two games, and he was perched on first. Understand-

Beacon Light in Smoky City



FRANK THOMAS . . . Bright figure in dull Pirate picture.

Rickey Would Take Thomas Over Snider or Hodges

PITTSBURGH, Pa.—Branch Rickey, general manager of the Pirates, says he'd prefer to have Frank Thomas as a .300 hitter instead of a home run king.

"If all the home run hitters used the same field, I'd take Thomas

over any of 'em," Rickey declared this spring. "But now that the Gardens are down, Duke Snider, Gil Hodges and Roy Campanella have a better target at Ebbets Field.

"Frankly, I'd rather have Thom-

as hitting .300 than winning the home run title. Hitting .300 would make him a more valuable team man.

"He's certainly one of the coming hitters in baseball at 25," Rickey predicted.

ably, the Bucs blew both games, being shutout in the opener.

Baseball almost lost Thomas before he ever had a chance to stretch his muscles. Born and reared in the shadows of Forbes Field, Frank was torn between a career in baseball and

the priesthood. He first chose the clergy.

"I was an altar boy at St. Agnes Church in Pittsburgh and spent four years preparing for the priesthood," Thomas relates.

"I went to school at Niagara Falls, Ont., and later took six months of my

novitiate at New Baltimore, Pa. Then I decided I couldn't be fair with either myself or the priesthood while baseball was still so much on my mind."

At 17, Thomas was a much sought-after sandlot star in Pittsburgh. Cleveland scouts were camped on his trail

Bucco Belter Once Studied to Be Priest

An Idol of Native Pittsburgh, He Credits His Comeback at Plate to Sisler's Advice

and when he had an offer of \$3,200 to sign with the Indians, he almost jumped.

His parish priest sought out Roy Hamey, then general manager of the Pirates, and Hamey met the Cleveland offer. Thomas took the \$3,200 and helped pay the mortgage on his father's home and started his climb to the big leagues.

George Sisler played an integral part in the reformation of Thomas a year ago, when the Pirates thought he couldn't make the grade in the Big Time and his .206 average seemed to support their way of thinking.

"Sisler noticed I was taking my eye off the ball and had me move back in the batters' box so I could follow the ball better," Thomas said.

Warned Not to Pull Ball

"He told me to hit the ball where it was pitched and warned me not to pull it. I did as instructed and when my timing returned, Sisler moved me back to my normal position and I was off again."

Thomas was all the Pirate fans had to talk about in the final stages of the 1953 season. He hit 17 homers, drove in 54 runs and 24 of his last 53 hits went for extra bases after "Doctor" Sisler worked on him.

In his last ten games he clubbed eight homers. In his last 32 games, he responded with 14 homers and batted in 38 runs. He finished in select company in homers and RBIs.

Although Frank batted only .255, his 30 homers put him right behind Duke Snider, Ralph Kiner, Gus Bell and Stan Musial among outfielders who hit 30 or more circuit blows. Snider finished with 42, Kiner 35 and Thomas, Bell and Musial 30 apiece.

Of Thomas' 30 homers, 18 were hit at Forbes Field. And of these, 11 disappeared over the wall and seven dropped into the Gardens. He was one of the few sluggers to hit a homer in every National League park.

Thomas is a complete outfielder. He not only can hit with power but owns a celebrated rifle arm and can cover territory as well as any outfielder in the business.

He's the best of the Pirates and one of the best in the league. Everything is in his favor, including that priceless commodity—youth.

'Frisco Stadium Proposal Clears First Hurdle

By JACK McDONALD

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif.

Keeping pace with Los Angeles' drive for major league baseball, a bond screening group of Mayor Elmer Robinson's "San Francisco Forward Committee" reacted favorably, June 22, to arguments of Supervisor Francis McCarty for a bond issue to build a city-owned stadium here.

It was the biggest step yet taken looking toward a proposed \$5,000,000 stadium, planned primarily for use by a major league club but also to house the Forty-Niner football team of the NFL.

Action by the screening committee is only the first of a series of hurdles to get the bond issue on the November ballot, but it is expected to have a far-reaching effect on other committee hearings to follow. It may facilitate favorable consideration later by two supervisors' committees—city planning, and finance, public buildings and lands—which must also approve.

McCarty drove home a strong point when he said the city attorney of San Francisco had ruled the bond issue could be voted on and release of the bonds for sale held up until a major league actually grants San Francisco a franchise and signs a satisfactory lease with the city. This would preclude all possibility of San Francisco going ahead and building a big league park, only to find out the majors had decided against moving here.

At a major league meeting in New York last fall an official San Francisco committee was told to "get a ball park first;

then we'll talk to you." It was a case then of no park, no franchise. Now San Francisco is saying, no franchise, no park. But now that the two understand each other it sets the stage for action by both the majors and the city.

Tentative site of the proposed new park is a piece of city-owned McLaren Park, at the southern extremity of the city. It is easily accessible to San Franciscans as well as to those of the fast growing peninsula, and close to the San Francisco end of a proposed new bay bridge linking this city with Oakland.

Climatically the site is removed from the city's fog belt and the temperature is from eight to ten degrees warmer than downtown San Francisco.

The ground embraces 50 acres, as compared to Seals Stadium's nine, thus making for ample parking space. McCarty pointed out that one of the reasons for the success of the Milwaukee Braves is a parking area three times larger than the park itself.

Estimates from John J. Gould, well known throughout California as a consulting engineer, are for an adequate major league stadium of 60,000 capacity at a construction cost of \$50 per seat, or \$3,000,000. But an alternative plan for excavating and building down instead of up, in "sunken bowl" fashion, such as Stanford Stadium, would reduce the building costs to as low as \$1,200,000, according to Gould's estimates.

McCarty overcame the bond screening committee's proposal that private enterprise build the new park by saying it

would be too costly for individuals to attempt. Even if private enterprise did attempt to swing the whole deal—build a stadium and operate the franchise as well—the probabilities are that the private corporation would select San Mateo County or Oakland as the site of the park, on the supposition the weather would be more inviting. This impressed the committee, which wants the park built within the San Francisco city limits.

Visions 20-Year Payoff on Park

McCarty said city bonds, if voted, should pay themselves out within 20 years on Forty-Niner football revenue and a major league lease, on the basis of the one the city of Baltimore has with the Orioles. He said the city of Baltimore gets seven per cent of the gross on all admissions, five per cent of the concessions gross, and 50 per cent of the net on parking.

The favorable reaction of the city's bond screening committee was hailed here as the biggest hurdle of a series of committee approvals it will require to get the major league park bond issue on the ballot. After it once gets on, there is the big problem of getting it passed. It takes a two-thirds vote. It will require a lot of whooping it up by newspapers and civic organizations to bring out that kind of a vote, but San Francisco has developed major league fever and is running a temperature for it almost as high as Los Angeles, so anything can happen.