

# Wagner Was Jet in Horse and Buggy Era

## Dutchman Fast on Bases, Ripped Bullets Through Infield

### Hans Pegged All-Time Tops at Shortstop

'Honus Never Had to Learn Anything,' Tribute from Barrow, His Minor Boss

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"Are the ball players of today as good as the men of yesterday?" the veteran sports writer often is asked. Yes, en masse they are as good, often better. But then one adds, "But today there is no Hans Wagner, no Ty Cobb nor a Babe Ruth."

There never could be another Wagner, Pittsburgh's foremost all-time star, whose stature increases with the years and whose statue is across the street from Forbes Field. For one thing, the present game is so different from the one in which Wagner played so gloriously that there is no accurate basis for comparison. During the greater part of his 21-year career in the National League, pitching was in its heyday and managers played for one run, to win the 1 to 0, 2 to 1 and 3 to 2 ball games.

After Honus Wagner retired in 1917 at the age of 43, he had held most of the National League records. Some still survive, even though the late Mel Ott and Stan Musial whittled away others that looked as though they would withstand the sands of time. Only in recent weeks did Stan the Man, product of the same industrial Pennsylvania country that spawned Wagner, pass Honus' National League record of 651 doubles.

#### Hit Only 101 Homers

But, how many doubles could the mighty Wagner have hit if he had done his hitting against the same jackrabbit ball that Ott and Musial have rattled off the fences?

Wagner closed his meritorious National League career with only 101 homers. In only two seasons, 1896 and 1906, did Honus hit as many as ten round-trippers. Ralph Kiner, a later-day Pirate, matched those 101 homers in two successive seasons, 1949 and 1950. Yet, few ball players ever hit a ball harder than the muscular, broad-shouldered, big-armed, 200-pound Dutchman. He hit bullets through the infield, and between the outfielders. Ninety per cent of his hits were line drives. But, with Wagner's natural ball-playing prowess, his adaptability and ability to do anything on a ball field, there is no doubt he could have raised his trajectory had he suddenly been thrust into the home-run era gracing the present day.

Two Wagner records most likely will endure, most National League games, 2,785, and most National League times at bat, 10,427. His records of most National League hits, 3,430, and most triples, 252, also seem well beyond the reach of any present-day National leaguer.

#### Eight Titles Still High

Stan Musial, the great Cardinal star, whose early ambition was to be a Pirate, came close to tying Wagner's mark of eight National League batting championships in 1958. Musial started that season like a whirlwind, hitting well over 400 for the first six weeks, but time and aging limbs took their toll and Stan finished third behind Richie Ashburn and Willie Mays. At the season's end, Wagner's record of eight still endured. It now will be many years before another National leaguer will get a chance to match the mighty Honus' eight National League batting crowns.

Wagner also still holds the record for most National League singles, 2,426, and for most years leading in extra bases on long hits—six. In 1953, Stan Musial tied Wagner's N. L. record of most years leading the league in long hits, seven. Wagner played in 21 National League campaigns, 1897 to 1917, he hit over 300 for 17 consecutive years, 1897 to 1913; and played over 100 games in 19 consecutive seasons, 1898 to 1916. Nothing shows better what a superman Wagner was

### Still Holds Pittsburgh Pinnacle



HONUS WAGNER . . . The Peer of All the Pirates

than the fact that in 1915, at the age of 41 and in his nineteenth National League season, the durable Dutchman played in every one of the Pirates' 158 games. He was practically immune to injury, and as a younger man he never knew what it meant to be sick. Even as a player in his late thirties, he

### A Picture of Power at the Plate



The Batting Form That Made Wagner the Scourge of the N. L.

### Two of His Marks Seem Safe Forever

No Player Likely to Break Ex-Buc's N. L. Record for Games or Times at Plate

told the writer: "I never had a cold. I don't know what people talk about when they say they have colds."

There still is some question as to who was baseball's foremost all-time player. That honor usually is bestowed on Ty Cobb, and Babe Ruth has some vociferous modern boosters. However, two of the greatest minds in baseball history, John McGraw, for three decades the dynamic manager of the New York Giants, and Ed Barrow, former Tiger and Red Sox manager and later business manager and president of the powerful Yankees, gave the distinction to Hans Wagner.

McGraw played and managed against the Dutchman for many years. "He was the greatest because he could do anything — and everything — equally well," said McGraw. "No one that ever lived could touch him at shortstop, but Wagner was so versatile that he could have excelled in any other position the same way that he dominated shortstop. I fought him many times, rode him from the coaching lines, but I always had a deep respect for him and admiration for his amazing accomplishments. In my mind, Honus was the best."

#### A Natural Star

Barrow managed Wagner in Honus' early minor league days, and sold him to the majors. "Wagner never had to learn anything," said Big Ed. "When I had him in Paterson, N. J., when Honus was a youngster, he was just as good a player as when he later starred for the Pirates. I do not think the game of baseball ever had such a player. It was as though he came into pro baseball with all the knack and skill of an experienced big leaguer. He could just naturally hit, field and run. He really had nothing to learn. Honus was the greatest."

As to Wagner's position at shortstop, we can only second McGraw's observation that Honus stood supreme. When one picks an All-Time, All-Star Team, there are numerous candidates for first base, Lou Gehrig, George Sisler, Hal Chase, Bill Terry, Frank Chance. At second base, we have Eddie Collins, Nap Lajoie, Rogers Hornsby, Charley Gehringer, Frankie Frisch. At third base, the voting is fairly even between Jimmy Collins, great third sacker of the old Boston Nationals and modern Red Sox, and Pie Traynor, the third base great of the Pirates. For catcher one could name Bill Dickey, Mickey Cochran, Roger Bresnahan or Buck Ewing with easy conscience. But, at shortstop, it would be profane to speak of any one in the same breath with Wagner. He stands alone, with no one else even close.

#### Speedy Base-Runner

In addition to Wagner's strong batting and stalwart fielding, he was a magnificent base-runner. Honus looked big and clumsy, but when he got under way on his bow legs, he moved with the speed of a great ape. Present-day fans cannot imagine the thrill of watching the bow-legged Dutchman circle the bases. In Wagner's long career, he stole 720 bases, and was top N. L. base-runner five times. In his late years, he ran into those great National League base thieves, Bob Becher and Max Carey.

Apart from Wagner's speed and ability with the bat and glove, there was much about this friendly personality that endeared him to the great American public. He came from a hard-working immigrant German family, went to school only until he was 12 years old, but he was a man of fine character, truly one of the game's noblemen. He bubbled with good nature, and good will. He was like a friendly Newfoundland. That doesn't mean that he didn't play hard, or that he wouldn't

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