

Roman Mejias

mound, Mejias, by this time in a much better frame of mind, waited patiently as Grissom served three called balls. The Giant relief pitcher delivered the next pitch into the strike zone. Mejias, who had gotten the go-ahead signal from the third base coach, ripped into the fast ball and sent it screaming over the center fielder's head among the spectators for his third home run of the game. Not since Ralph Kiner had accomplished it back in 1951 had a Pirate hitter hammered three home runs in a game, although Frank Thomas came along later in the '58 season to duplicate the feat.

Roman was in much better spirits on the bus ride back to the hotel than he had been leaving the Pirates' headquarters. But he still was muttering about "that expensive breakfast."

"What are you griping about, Roman," a teammate said, "you ought to eat the four-dollar breakfast every day."

"Hokay," said Mejias, agreeably, "if the ball club pay for it."

The ball club not only didn't pay for Mejias' breakfast the next morning, but the next night Roman was back on the bench and a suddenly recovered Virdon was in center field.

A Pittsburgh commuter

That was Mejias' life with the Pirates — six years of it. Roman (pronounced Ro-MAHN) was in and out of Pittsburgh like a commuter. Usually, he'd start the season in Pittsburgh and before a few weeks had passed, Mejias (pronounced Muh-HEE-us) would be on

the train, bound either for Hollywood or Columbus, two Pittsburgh minor league farm clubs.

Despite his wanderings, Mejias proved to be a most useful operator for the Pirates — that is, whenever they'd allow him to hang around long enough to help out. In 1957, for instance, Mejias was called upon to fill in for the ailing Roberto Clemente in right field. The likable Cuban did so well that Pittsburgh fans hardly realized Clemente was missing. Roman was the regular right fielder for a full week and batted .400 but, alas, he hurt his side in a game at the Polo Grounds. By the time he was well again, Clemente had gotten over his back miseries and Roman was on his way to Columbus in the International League.

Mejias returned to Pittsburgh later in the season and got into 58 games altogether, hitting a respectable .275. In 1958, Roman was one of the National League's most valuable benchmen. He must have been because the Pirate management didn't send him out for "seasoning."

Although he didn't play regularly, Mejias spelled each of the three regular outfielders at some time during the season, playing left, center and right field or being used as a pinch hitter and late-inning defensive replacement. Mejias always could hit, always could field and always could run, but he never had an opportunity to play regularly. In his trouble-shooting assignments, Mejias maintained a respectable .269 average, hard to do when not seeing regular service. Sometimes he'd come off the bench cold, after not

being in a game for ten days, and yet come through.

Again in 1959, Roman was the Pirates' "Jack of all trades" in the outfield, playing every position at some time or another. He played left field most of April for the injured Bob Skinner, and moved over to right field in May and June when Roberto Clemente was on the disabled list. After that he was used mainly as a pinch hitter and to spell an ailing Skinner in the late innings.



7 MEJIAS BLASTS WORTH \$175 TO LITTLE LEAGUES

Roman Mejias should have plenty of rooters among the small fry around Houston. And with good reason. His home runs in Colt Stadium — seven at this writing — have been worth \$175 to Houston and Harris County Little Leaguers. The Houston Post sends a \$25 check for each Colt .45 home run — at home — to Rotary Activities, Inc., the financial agent for the Rotary Clubs of those counties. They help Little Leaguers defray expenses of field equipment and playing fields.

Big Gun of .45s' Attack

Mejias played only three games with the Pirates in 1960 before being farmed out to Columbus where he batted .278 for the Jets. In 131 games he slammed 11 doubles, 9 triples and 16 home runs, driving in 71 runs. He was recalled near the end of the season by the Pirates, who were on the way to their first National League pennant in 33 years. The weekend before he was to arrive in Pittsburgh, Roman fractured his wrist in a game and went home instead. The wrist must have healed more quickly than expected because less than a month later he was playing winter ball in his native Cuba.

Baseball all year

Mejias has been playing baseball all year round ever since 1953, his first year in professional baseball. Rarely does he play with the same winter league team two years in succession. In the winter of 1957, Roman led the Cuban Winter League in practically every offensive department and was named "Cuba's Man of the Year in Baseball."

It was in Cuba that the Pirates found Mejias. Roman, the son of a Cuban worker, had never played professional baseball. His only baseball experience was three years in high school. That was quite something, at that, going to high school. The youngster, at the age of 15, began working beside his father in the town's only industry, a shoe factory.

He was still two months shy of 18 when he was married to Nicolasa Montero — on June 13, 1950 — and