



Roman in pre-game ceremony after his home-run outburst in Milwaukee

when the Pirates signed him to his first professional contract, he already had a two-year-old daughter. A second child, a boy, was on the way. Rafaela is now 11 and Jose is 9.

Mejias was sent to the Pirates' farm team in Batavia, N.Y., and he will never forget that first year when he was a stranger in a bewildering land—lonely, unable to speak a word of the foreign language, and hungry. He wasn't just hungry to play baseball, but hungry in his stomach.

The Pirate farmhands trained in Georgia that year and Mejias, then 20, was outside the borders of Cuba for the first time in his life. He spoke not a word of English, and he and the other dark-skinned players from Latin America lived apart from the rest of the team.

"I speak no English at all," Roman recalled, "and it is very hard for me. I never expect to be so lonely in the United States. I couldn't eat . . . I thought I would have to go back to Cuba for food.

"Finally, we learn to go into eating place and we go back in kitchen and point with fingers—thees, thees, thees. After while, somebody teach me to say 'hom and eggs' and 'fried chicken,' and I eat that for a long time."

At many points along the way the mild-mannered Cuban was tempted to quit and go back to his job in the sugar cane fields. But he stuck it out. He even learned to cope with the foreign language—that is, he learned to field English on the short hop. Even today when you spring a word on him he hasn't heard before he asks, "How you say that?"

● By coincidence, both of Roman Mejias' favorite ball players are St. Louis Cardinals. One is a Cuban countryman, Minnie Minoso, and the other is everybody's favorite, Stan Musial.

● Consistency is the word for Roman's hitting in the high minor leagues. Three of his five complete minor league campaigns have been in Triple A—one season at Hollywood and two at Columbus. His averages for those seasons: .274 at Hollywood in 1956, .278 at Columbus in 1960 and .278 at Columbus again in '61. What's more, his RBI figures for those years read 71, 71 and 71!

● Last time Mejias found himself in a batting slump he complained: "Thees beisbol will drive you crazy when you do no good. I got to find what I am doing wrong. I am trying to keel the ball, or sumteeng." Keep killing it, Roman, we love it.

Mejias batted .322 in 117 games in his first year in professional baseball. His 156 hits were good for 230 total bases, 30 doubles, 10 triples and 8 home runs. He led the Pony League with 42 stolen bases. The Pirates moved him up to Class B ball in 1954 with Waco in the Big State league. Mejias bettered his rookie record. He hit .354 in 139 games, accounted for 316 total bases with 49 doubles, 12 triples and 15 home runs and he drove in 141 runs.

Not only did he lead the league in doubles but he hit safely in 54 consecutive games. Roman says that figure is not correct. "They alla time put 54 down," he complained, shaking his head. "But that's wrong. It was 55." Whether 54 or 55, the figure still stands as an all-time record for lower classification minor leagues. He began the streak June

16 and was not stopped until August 1.

Mejias was rewarded for his spectacular performance by being brought up to the parent club the following year. The jump from Class B to the majors was too big for Roman and as a Buc rookie he found big league pitching hard to solve. His .216 batting average in 71 games was not good enough to earn major league security and he was back in the minors in 1956. At Hollywood in the Pacific Coast League he earned a return trip to the Pirates with a .274 batting average that included 15 home runs, 71 runs batted in and 32 stolen bases.

In six shuttling years with the Pirates, his batting average ranged from .216 in his worst year to .275 in his best. But no matter how well he did, he always seemed to wind up