

# BEAT 'EM BUCS

## Personal Reflections on the Rise of the 1960 World Champs

By Dennis N. Ranalli

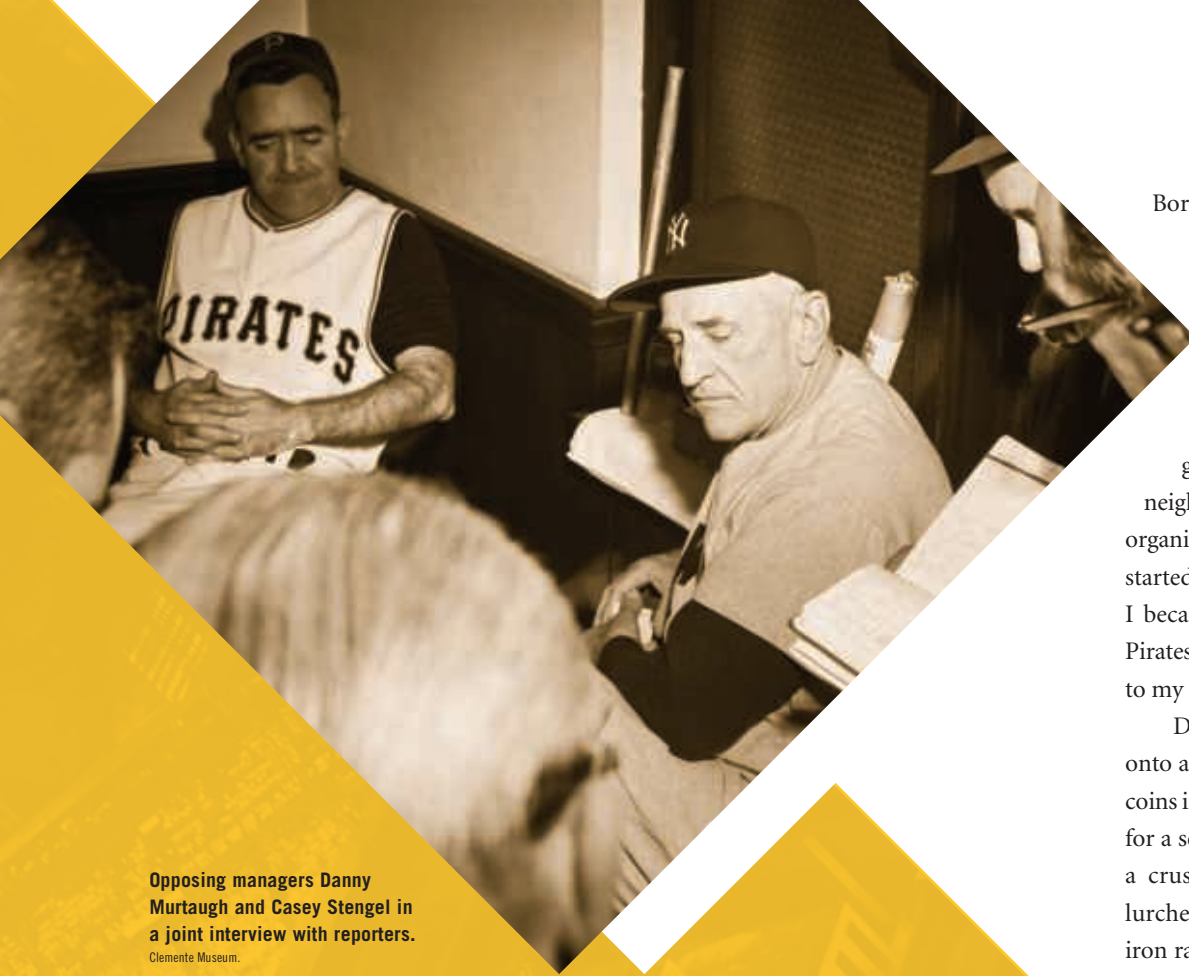
Maz rounding third base  
headed for home.

Pittsburgh Pirates.









Opposing managers Danny Murtaugh and Casey Stengel in a joint interview with reporters. Clemente Museum.

**The 1960 World Series featured the National League pennant-winning Pittsburgh Pirates versus the mighty New York Yankees, winners of the American League. During the span from 1950–1960, the Yankees won the AL pennant 9 of those 11 times, going on to win the World Series in 6 of those 9 appearances. For Pirates fans, it had been an unbearably long wait since the team had last won a World Series—back to 1925. The Pirates did win the NL pennant again in 1927 but were swept in four games by, of course, the Yankees.**

**While the Yankees were perennial AL pennant winners during the 1950s, the Pirates posted dismal records through 1957. The Bucs finished in last place five times and in seventh place twice in the eight-team NL during that span. No wonder the oddsmakers heavily favored the Yankees to prevail over the Pirates in 1960.**

**That 1960 team and World Series victory are indelibly sealed in my memory.**

**This reflection describes the team's ascent from the depths of the National League in the 1950s to a World Championship as seen through my eyes, a young Pirates fan.**

Born in 1946 during the initial wave of Baby Boomers following World War II, my earliest recollections of baseball include a well-worn fielder's glove and an old wooden bat, both hand-me-downs that I treasured. We played pick-up games on the streets of our Greenhill neighborhood, then later played ball in local organized leagues. As with most of us boys, I started collecting and trading baseball cards. I became enthralled with the game and the Pirates in particular after I had gone with Dad to my first Major League baseball game.

Dad and I climb the three metal steps onto a cream-and-red trolley car, drop several coins into the slot of the glass fare box and look for a seat. There are none, so we stand among a crush of other passengers. The streetcar lurches from side to side as it clanks along iron rails but the press of the crowd holds me steadily on my feet. The distance between our boarding stop in Bloomfield to our destination in Oakland is a short route but as the trolley moves along, I sense an excitement building in those around me.

The streetcar comes to a halt and the doors slide open. We exit with the other fans at the stop nearest to Forbes Field for a Major League baseball game—a night game under the lights. The company where Dad works ordered a block of tickets each season for a Pittsburgh Pirates baseball game and this will be my first time joining them. I'm thrilled!

Clutching onto our tickets we approach a gate where we hand our passes to a ticket-taker who tears off the rain checks then hands the stubs back to us. We proceed through a worn metal turnstile as Dad spots an overhead sign that directs us toward our section of seats.

We walk up a ramp between two sections emerging within a halo of light, and there it is—the infield diamond set within the sloping crown of the playing field. I stand there in awe, spellbound by this wondrous tableau. Forbes Field was rich in history and charming





**Forbes Field under the lights.**  
Pittsburgh Pirates.

in character, a hallowed cathedral for a young fan of the game.

Dad taps me on the shoulder. He hands our ticket stubs to an usher who escorts us to our reserved seats. The usher wipes off the seats with a rag, hands back the stubs, and Dad gives him a tip. As we sit among his co-workers, Dad introduces me to some of them and their kids. We're all anxious for the game to start, although I must admit that as a seven-year old, not many details remain about the actual baseball game. I can't remember the opposing team that night, nor do I recall which team won the game or the final score. I don't believe we even stayed for the entire nine innings.

What I do recollect vividly are memories created through the experience of my senses. I can feel the excitement mount as we approach the ballpark and sense the emotion of sitting in the stands next to Dad cheering on the Bucs. I can visualize the bright lights illuminating the nighttime sky, the manicured lush green infield grass and ivy-covered red brick outfield walls, the Pirates warming-up in their pristine white home uniforms, their black caps with golden "P" monograms.

I can hear the sounds of vendors hawking scorecards, lineups, "beer here," "get your red hots"; the PA announcer introducing starting lineups and the roar of the crowd for home run hero Ralph Kiner;

the umpire yelling "play ball," "strike three," and "you're out." I can smell the aroma of buttered popcorn in the air and the not so pleasant odors of cigarette and cigar smoke. I can taste the crunchy flavor of shelled roasted peanuts, savor the hot dog smothered in Heinz ketchup.

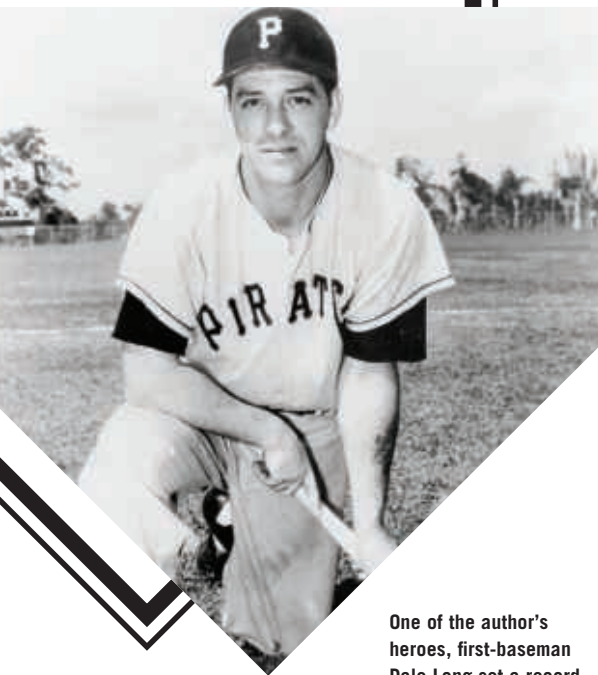
That night I sleep well after my first big league game, and I dream of one day wearing that same uniform as the catcher for the Pittsburgh Pirates. I might have made it except as I grow, I realize that I am too short, too slow, and don't possess all that much baseball talent. It just isn't meant to be. But that summer evening sparks a life-long fascination with the sport.





**Prince conjured-up good luck gimmicks such as “Babushka Power” and the “Green Weenie” that ignited fan enthusiasm**

The Voice of the Pirates,  
“The Gunner” Bob Prince.  
Pittsburgh Pirates.



One of the author's heroes, first-baseman Dale Long set a record by hitting eight home runs in eight consecutive games between May 19 and May 28, 1956.  
Pittsburgh Pirates.

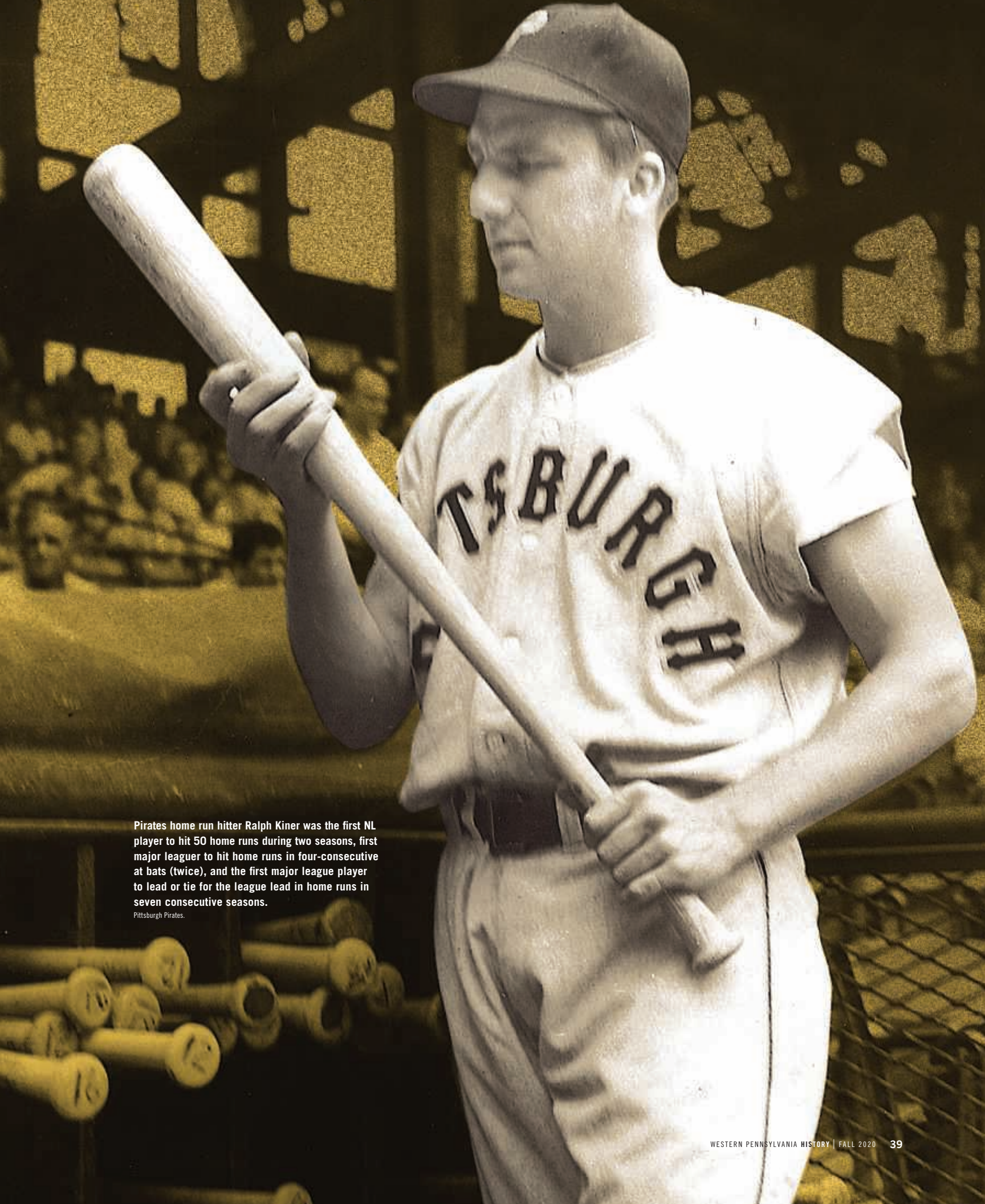
After that first game I was hooked as a young Pirates fan but there were few stars on the teams in the 1950s except for home run king Kiner, who played for the Pirates from 1946–1953. He achieved All-Star status six times and was the National League leader or co-leader in home runs for seven straight seasons before being traded to the Chicago Cubs. Back then fans often attended games not with any expectation that the Pirates might win, but rather with the hope of seeing Kiner hit the long ball out of the sprawling confines of Forbes Field. Fans would leave the ballpark after Kiner’s final at-bat, even before the game was decided.

A few other Pirates of that era who made an impression on me as a young fan were Pittsburgh-native and power-hitter Frank Thomas and Dale Long, who in 1956 hit home runs in eight consecutive games, a feat never before accomplished. Being a little league catcher myself, my attention often was focused on the Pirates catcher Hank Foiles.

Not coincidentally it was about that same time when I got my new catcher’s mitt, “purchased” by trading-in several pages of our family collection of S & H Green Stamps.

But no matter how disappointing those teams were, my interest was kept alive and grew each season through the staccato, machine gun delivery of the Voice of the Pirates—Bob Prince, “the Gunner.” Prince had taken over the broadcasting lead from his mentor, the legendary Rosey Rosewell, who died in 1955. The Gunner had a unique style, mixing in countless stories and peppering in his oft-repeated expressions such as “*That play was as close as fuzz on a tics’s ear,*” “*He was out by a gnat’s eyelash,*” “*We need a bloop and a blast.*” Prince conjured-up good luck gimmicks such as “*Babushka Power*” and the “*Green Weenie*” that ignited fan enthusiasm, while he also bestowed nicknames on players. By the 1960 championship season, the broadcast mates for Prince on KDKA





Pirates home run hitter Ralph Kiner was the first NL player to hit 50 home runs during two seasons, first major leaguer to hit home runs in four-consecutive at bats (twice), and the first major league player to lead or tie for the league lead in home runs in seven consecutive seasons.

Pittsburgh Pirates.





**Catchers on the 1960 Pirates roster included (front) Smokey Burgess and Danny Kravitz, (back) Bob Oldis and Hal Smith.**

Clemente Museum.

**Pirates manager Danny Murtaugh with general manager Joe L. Brown.**

Pittsburgh Pirates.





**Pirates pitchers Harvey Haddix, Bob Friend, Vern Law, Ron Kline, George (Red) Witt. In December 1959 GM Joe L. Brown traded Kline to the St. Louis Cardinals in return for outfielder Gino Cimoli and pitcher Tom Chaney.**

Clemente Museum.

1020-AM radio and on KDKA TV-2 were announcers Jim “The Possum” Woods and Paul Long.

Meanwhile, in the throes of yet another dismal season in 1957, the Pirates removed manager Bobby Bragan in August and replaced him with feisty Danny Murtaugh. Likely because of that managerial change, the 1958 version of the Pirates had a remarkable season, finishing in second place behind the Milwaukee Braves. Expectations were high for fans that the 1959 Pirates might at long last return to the World Series but the team again disappointed, finishing only two games over .500, fourth place in the National League.

The Pirates Vice President was entertainer Bing Crosby and the General Manager was Joe L. Brown, son of comedian Joe E. Brown. Joe L. had a keen eye for baseball talent and was masterful in making trades that improved the 1960 club.

In one such trade he acquired a left-hand pitcher, Wilmer “Vinegar Bend” Mizell, from the St. Louis Cardinals, but Brown’s most notable trade was a multi-player deal involving the Cincinnati Reds that brought third baseman Don “The Tiger” Hoak, catcher Forrest “Smokey” Burgess, and left-hand pitcher Harvey “The Kitten” Haddix onto the team.

At the start of the new season, left-hand hitting Burgess was behind the plate backed-up by right-hand batting catcher Hal Smith. First base duties were platooned by power hitter Dick “Big Stu” Stuart (not known for his glove) and journeyman Rocky “Don’t Knock the Rock” Nelson—always a big wad of chew bulging beneath his cheek.



Second base was owned by Bill “Maz” Mazerowski and shortstop anchored by Dick Groat, a solid infielder with a high batting average who would earn MVP honors in 1960. Groat was backed up by switch hitter Dick “Ducky” Schofield who capably filled in after Groat suffered a broken wrist in September 1960. The hot corner was the domain of scrappy former Marine, third baseman Hoak.

The expansive outfield at Forbes Field was patrolled in left by slugger Bob “Dog” Skinner, and the sleek fielding student of the game Bill “Quail” Virdon ably covered center. The incomparable Roberto Clemente “The Great One” commanded right field. Gino Cimoli and “Hurrying” Joe Christopher were outfield backups.

Clemente was the total package—a virtuoso at fielding the ball and in the same instant pivoting and making a precise throw into the infield; consistently hitting the ball with power or equally spraying the ball in any direction (3,000 career hits); running the bases, particularly his stride rounding second base headed toward third on triples. To this day, Clemente remains the finest all-around player I have ever witnessed.

The Pirates pitching staff was led by right hand starters Vernon “The Deacon” Law, who would earn Cy Young honors in 1960 and the stalwart Bob Friend. Lefties were the diminutive Haddix and seasoned veteran Mizell. Joe Gibbon and Fred Green added their skills on the mound, and the closer and ace reliever was a forkball-throwing specialist, Roy “The Fireman” Face. The pitching staff would be augmented throughout the season by hurlers such as Tom Cheney, Clem Labine, Jim Umbright and George “Red” Witt.<sup>1</sup>



# An Afternoon with **The Deacon**

By Dennis N. Ranalli

"The Deacon" right-hand pitcher Vernon Law in 1960 was an All-Star, lead the league in complete games, was the winning pitcher of two games in the 1960 World Series, and the Cy Young Award recipient 1960.

Pittsburgh Pirates.

Four decades after he had earned the 1960 Cy Young Award, I had the privilege of spending an afternoon with former Pirates starting pitcher Vernon Law. "The Deacon" (a member of the ordained priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) was one of my heroes on the 1960 championship team.

We met in my office where we exchanged pleasantries and snapped a few digital photos. On a whim, I asked if he had any plans for lunch. Lucky for me he did not.

As we enjoyed our meal at what was then Café Sam in Shadyside, our discussions focused on life in general and baseball in particular. Our extended conversation lasted most of that afternoon. What amazed me most was Law's grasp of minute details that he recalled with ease—strategic game situations, individual batters' tendencies, ball-strike counts, even specific pitches. I was fascinated.

The next day The Deacon sent a Major League baseball with his autograph as well as an autographed publicity photo taken in 1960 of him in his Pittsburgh Pirates uniform.





1960 Pirates starting lineup and batting order for World Series Game 1 on October 5, 1960 at Forbes Field: Bill Virdon CF, Dick Groat SS, Bob Skinner LF, Dick Stuart 1B, Roberto Clemente RF, Smokey Burgess C, Don Hoak 3B, Bill Mazeroski 2B, Vern Law P.

Clemente Museum.



Pennant for the 1960 NL Champions.

HHC Collections, gift of Gregg Ficery, 2012.51.2.

In the spring of 1960, I was a 13-year old finishing eighth grade at St. Ann parochial school in Millvale. That June I played catcher and third base in our community baseball league. Playing ball, swapping baseball cards, and following the Pirates occupied a good portion of my time that summer before starting high school in September at North Catholic on Troy Hill Road. That summer is when I became a diehard Pirates fan.

I listened to nearly every game on a red and gray Raytheon transistor radio that my grandfather had given to me as a gift, and I watched the Bucs every time away games were televised (infrequently) on our black and white TV. I read the sports pages in the afternoon

*Pittsburgh Press* for box scores and statistics, and I went as often as I could to Forbes Field to watch the team play and absorb the excitement as it continued to mount during the pennant race.

I went to more than two dozen Pirates games that season, more than I have attended in any season since then. I recall going on special Saturday afternoons with the Knot Hole Gang and on other afternoons on School Safety Patrol Days. I again went with Dad along with his group of co-workers for their annual night game, but most often I went to games that special season with my late uncle, Ed Rossi, a true baseball fan who was married to Dad's youngest sister Gene.

During that summer there was one unique afternoon that stands out among all others as a group of us learned that someone from the

Pirates might be stopping by for a short visit with a Greenhill neighbor he had known back in Puerto Rico. We gathered near the house and waited. Finally, seeing The Great One, Roberto Clemente, in our neighborhood was an unimaginable rush. We stood there with our baseball gloves and one baseball among us. Clemente looked around and before going in for his visit he stopped to greet each one of us individually, then proceeded to toss the ball back and forth with every boy before he went inside. That singular gesture on his part sealed forever in my mind the greatness of character possessed by this man.

After the All-Star break,<sup>2</sup> anticipation continued to increase. The slogan "Beat 'em Bucs" became an unceasing chant. Signs and bumper stickers with the slogan were posted





Beat 'em Bucs!  
1960 Pirates Team  
Photo sponsored  
by Iron City Beer.  
Clemente Museum.

*Beat 'em, Bucs*

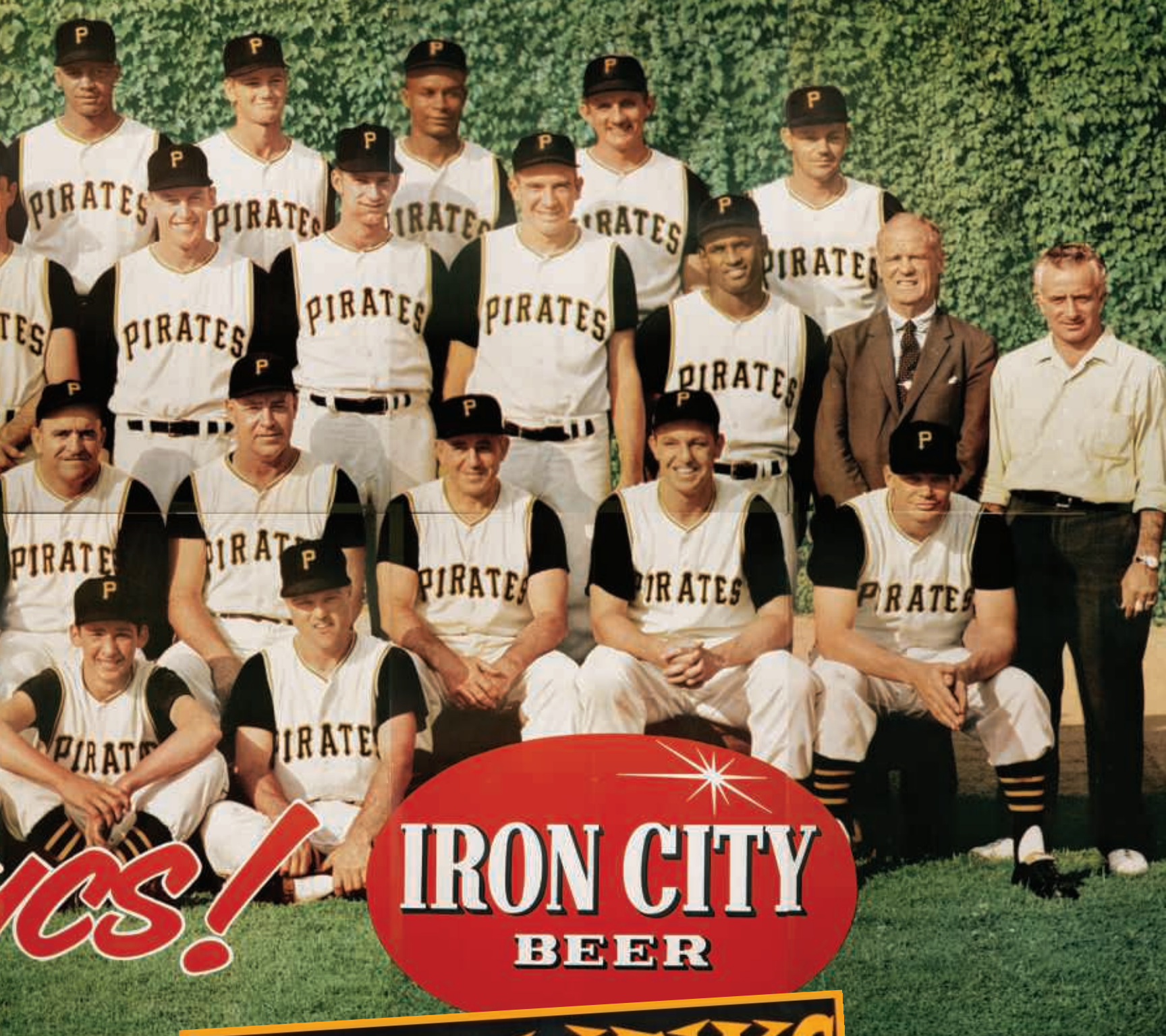
**WE HAVE LAW & FRIEND  
AND VINEGAR BEND  
THEY WILL WIN UNTIL THE END**

**"BEAT'EM.BUCS"**

Bumper sticker for Law, Friend, and "Vinegar Bend" Mizell.

HHC Collections, gift of Ed Foote, 2005.47.28.





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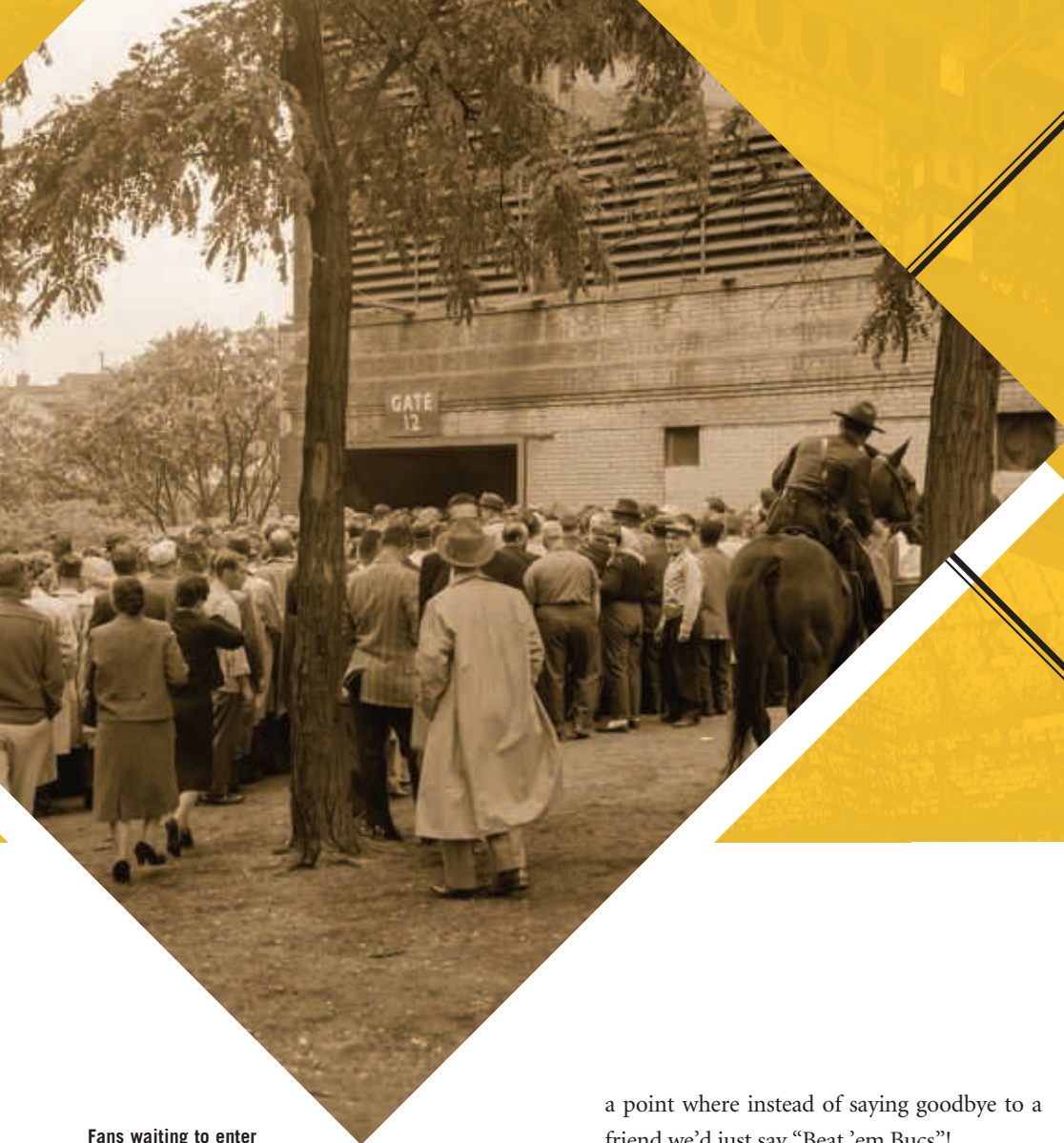
**IRON CITY  
BEER**

**BEAT THOSE YANKS**

**GOT THE  
BUC FEVER**

Bumper stickers helped spread Pirates passion.  
HHC Collections, gift of Ed Foote, 2005.47.32, .24.





Fans waiting to enter the bleacher section along the left field line at Forbes Field.

Clemente Museum.

**My memories most often peak when I reflect on the excitement and thrills that I associate with “my” team—the 1960 World Series Champion Pittsburgh Pirates.**

everywhere throughout the area. “Beat ’em Bucs” evolved from a song title made famous by a local musician named Benny Benack. He and his band played the tune while circulating through the stands during Pirates home games at Forbes Field. Set to a Dixieland musical accompaniment, the lyrics consisted of a repetition of the phrase, “*Oh, the Bucs are going all the way, all the way, all the way, Oh the Bucs are going all the way, all the way this year.*” Played over and over again on radio stations and at the ballpark, the tune caught on as the battle cry for the Pirates. It got to

a point where instead of saying goodbye to a friend we’d just say “Beat ’em Bucs”!

The crescendo peaked on Sunday, September 25. Despite a Pirates loss to the Braves in Milwaukee, a loss by the St. Louis Cardinals clinched the NL Pennant for the Pirates for the first time since 1927. Fans—including my parents and I—poured into downtown to welcome home the Bucs as conquering heroes. At midnight the NL champs arrived from the airport in open convertibles amid a gigantic torchlight parade. I managed to slip through the police line to shake hands with Don Hoak!

Now what stood between the Pirates and the World Championship were the mighty New York Yankees with the likes of Yogi Berra, Elston Howard, Bobby Richardson, Tony Kubek, Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Bill Skowron, Whitey Ford, and Bobby Shantz. Despite the oddsmakers’ predictions, the 1960

series was hard-fought and unusual in that the Yankees won lopsided victories, but the scrappy Pirates kept bouncing back.<sup>3</sup>

- Game 1: Pirates 6, Yankees 4
- Game 2: Yankees 16, Pirates 3
- Game 3: Yankees 10, Pirates 0
- Game 4: Pirates 3, Yankees 2
- Game 5: Pirates 5, Yankees 2
- Game 6: Yankees 12, Pirates 0

After Game 6 the series was deadlocked at three games each. The seventh and deciding game was scheduled for Thursday, October 13. Back then all World Series games were played in the afternoon. At school that day it was obvious that absenteeism was much higher than usual. For those of us who did attend, our attention became increasingly distracted from classwork. Rumor was that a few students had even sneaked-in transistor radios.



I rushed home just in time to watch the last inning on TV. The score was 9-9 going into the bottom of the ninth. Maz, number 9, was at the plate and hit a shot off a pitch from Yankee Ralph Terry. The ball kept climbing over left fielder Berra's head. Was it possible? Yes, going, going, gone over the left field ivy covered Forbes Field wall. "You can kiss it goodbye!"

Pirates players poured from the dugout onto the field and fans swarmed around Maz as he rounded third toward home plate. Jubilation consumed the Pirates locker room after the game with shouts and cheers, and champagne flowing. Amid this mayhem we watched on TV as The Gunner did his best attempting to interview manager Murtaugh and the players.

After the emotions of that special moment began to settle down, guys in the neighborhood drifted outside to re-live this shared experience. There was a sense of unreality and relief amid the elation. The same thing happened at school the next day, then again at our weekly Sunday evening meal with extended family. We all realized that in some special way that we had become a part of

baseball history, and in return baseball history had become a part of us.

Forbes Field is gone now. All that remains of that hallowed cathedral is a section of the red brick ivy-covered wall—where Maz hit his historic 1960 World Series winning, walk-off home run. Since that day in 1960, fans continue to gather at the Mazeroski wall every October 13 to listen to a recording of Game 7.

So here I am, a septuagenarian Pirates baseball fan. I still enjoy watching games but my memories most often peak when I reflect on the excitement and thrills that I associate with "my" team—the 1960 World Series Champion Pittsburgh Pirates. Yet there will be more games to play, more games to watch, as I look forward to the start of each baseball season ... always with renewed hope. ☀

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**Dr. Ranalli** is Professor Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh, and a previous contributor to this magazine.

The author is grateful to the following individuals who provided photographs for this article: Rob Larson, Rieder Photography; Dan Hart, Director, Media Relations, Pittsburgh Pirates Baseball

Club; and Duane Rieder, Founder, Executive Director, and Curator of the Clemente Museum, established 2007 to commemorate the extraordinary life, baseball career, and humanitarian services of the late Roberto Clemente, and housed in the renovated Engine House No. 25 in Pittsburgh's Lawrenceville neighborhood.

<sup>1</sup> Other players who would appear at various times on the 1960 Pirates roster included catchers Bob Oldis and Danny Kravitz; first basemen R. C. Stevens and Mickey Vernon; infielders Gene Baker, Dick Barone and Harry Bright; outfielder Ramon Mejias; and pitchers Bennie Daniels, Earl Francis, Paul Giel, Don Gross, and Diomedes Olivo.

<sup>2</sup> The 1960 Pirates were well represented on the NL All-Star roster. Catcher Smokey Burgess, second baseman Bill Mazeroski (Hall of Fame 2001), and shortstop Dick Groat (MVP 1960), were joined by outfielders Bob Skinner and Roberto Clemente (Hall of Fame 1973). The All-Star pitching staff included starting pitchers Bob Friend and Vernon Law (Cy Young Award 1960) along with relief pitcher Roy Face.

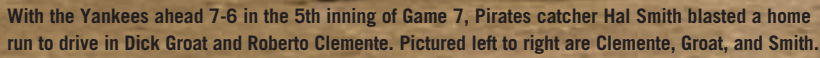
<sup>3</sup> 1960 World Series stats at [www.baseball-reference.com/postseason/1960\\_WS.shtml](http://www.baseball-reference.com/postseason/1960_WS.shtml)

**In Game 7 of the series Pirates left-handed batting first baseman #14 Rocky Nelson, heads to the dugout after blasting a home run with Bob Skinner on base.**

Clemente Museum.







The stage is set for Bill Mazeroski in the bottom half of the 9th inning of Game 7. The Yankees tied the score at 9-9 in the top of the inning. Maz takes his swing at the pitch by Ralph Terry that travels over the head of Yogi Berra in left field and out of the ballpark.

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