

Shortstop the Hardest Position on the Diamond

Herzog Gives Pointers on How to Play the Busiest Position in the Baseball Infield

R. W. LARDNER in an interview with Charley Herzog in the Boston "American" throws new light on the most difficult position on the diamond.

A few seasons ago major league shortstops of real class were as scarce as orange groves in Maine. There were Hans Wagner, and Hans Wagner, and Hans Wagner, and, possibly, Turner and Wallace, and then Hans Wagner again. You couldn't get more than four fans to agree that anyone else could be spoken of in the same breath with this trio, most of which was Wagner.

This is one of the peculiarities of baseball. For four or five years some certain position will be well stocked with capable performers, only to suffer a dearth of good men during the four or five years following.

Just now there are as many good shortstops in the two major leagues as there are occupants of any other position.

In fact, almost each one of the sixteen teams has either a classy man in that berth or a youngster of great promise.

The two leagues are even in the matter of tried and true short field men, there being five to each circuit. The American has Wallace of the Browns, still a fast and polished player; McBride of Washington, one of the best in the business; Wagner of Boston, Bush of Detroit and Barry of the Athletics. The National boasts of the great Pittsburg Wagner, Tinker of the Cubs, Mike Doolan of the Phillies, Bridwell of the Giants and last, but not least, Charley Herzog of the Rustlers.

The polished, dependable shortstop has

lots of things to attend to outside his own position. In many instances, he gives the signs which govern the entire defense. When an intelligent pitcher is working, it is usually he who flashes the catcher's signals to the outfielders, so that they may know how, when and where to shift for various batsmen.

The good shortstops of the present day are the men who "think baseball," even when they aren't playing it. They are the men who are constantly planning something new to try on unsuspecting opponents, the men who introduce the plays which are subsequently put into general usage.

Such a man is Charley Herzog of the Rustlers, fondly known as "Buck" in the wilds of Maryland. "Herzy" is a born infielder and would make good in any position around the diamond. But short field is his proper sphere, simply because there he can use his baseball brains and his speed to best advantage.

Herzog has mechanical ability in abundance. He also has the other kind. He is a reliable batsman, but would be sure of a regular infield berth if he couldn't hit a balloon with a bass fiddle, because his defensive ability would offset any batting weakness. The fact that he can hit is just an additional thing for which Manager Tenney should be grateful.

"Buck" can cover ground either to the right or left, can come up on a slow hit ball with the best of them, can make the long or the short throw with accuracy, can throw without recovering from an awkward position, can take throws and put them on the runner at second base and can think quickly enough to pull pitchers out of bad holes when the me-

chanical shortstop would see only the obvious play.

"I am learning something new about this position every day," confesses "Herzy." "From the fans' point of view the four positions composing the infield are very much alike in most respects. Interview a player of any of the major league clubs on the subject and he will say each is entirely different from the others and each is a position in itself, requiring constant practice, thought and many hours of hard work.

"As utility man during the season of 1908, while a member of the Giants, I was called on to play every position in the makeup of the fielding end of the infield, so I speak from experience when I say that none requires the ability, quick action and thought demanded of the shortstop.

"To begin with, the shortstop must possess a good throwing arm. This will enable him to play a deep short field, a feature that will help his team wonderfully. He is then capable not only of fielding hits behind the third baseman and over second base, but also is in much better position to take care of short flies, which are beyond the third baseman and out of reach of the outfielders.

"A good arm is also a big help on long hits past the outfielders. Often the occasion demands that the shortstop shall act as a relay between centre and left and the plate. This requires a good arm and a true one, for the plays at the plate are repeatedly the turning or deciding plays of the game.

"Touching runners at second is one of the details of a shortstop's work in which he must be proficient. This requires a man who is fast and able to judge distance quickly. Many plays are lost by a shortstop's inability to shift his body to meet the craft employed by an opposing player who is sliding into second.

"Runners have perfected numerous slides designed to outwit the player at the second base end; the fadeaway slide being the most used. For this reason, it is my opinion that the shortstop should be the man used to make the play at second on the man sliding into the bag.

He can watch the runner not only from his position, but the shortstop is the man to take the throw, from the catcher, while the second baseman must invariably make the play at an angle.

"My experience has been—with a good catcher to give the ball in ample time—that I can make the runner slide to the bag in any way I choose. So I repeat that the shortstop is the man to take the throw, for in almost all cases he has the advantage over the second baseman.

"Slow hit balls past the pitcher and over second base are things a shortstop must be able to play well. Left-handed batters will soon take advantage of a shortstop when they learn that he is weak on this particular play.

"It is my advice to those who contemplate playing shortstop to make the play on a slow hit ball always on a dead run. You gain nothing by slowing up, for the ball will then 'play you.' Always take a chance and play the ball fast, relying on your good judgment and accuracy in throwing the ball to first to complete the play. Don't be discouraged if you continually miss the ball in the beginning, for it is one of the hardest things to learn and something that requires constant practice.

"Accuracy in throwing is a big factor in playing shortstop, but the most important asset is the ability to throw from out of position. A shortstop who can throw from all angles, in every direction and from all positions, has reached his goal and has developed and mastered the hardest task connected with his work. Furthermore, he has become invaluable to his team and has earned the right to be classed as one of the stars of the national game.

"I have played them all, but I would rather play shortstop than any other position. More is expected of you, you are required to do more, by far, than any other player on the infield, you have the privilege of going everywhere on a play and you're never out of place. If you can hit, too, so much the better.

"Who can blame me for wanting to play shortstop on a big league team and hiring a man to run my farm?"