



Gene Freese

He was so small when he was playing for Wheeling High School that he was labeled "The Microbe" but Gene Freese grew into a big leaguer.

Graduated from Wheeling High School in 1951, he went on to perform in three sports at West Liberty State College and then signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates, who already owned the contract of his older brother, George "Bud" Freese. Offered a \$200 bonus for signing, the brash youngster held out for \$250.

After a two-year apprenticeship in the minors, he was promoted from the New Orleans Pelicans to the Pittsburgh Pirates with brother George in 1955 and went on to play 12 seasons in the majors.

He wore the uniform of the Pirates, Chicago White Sox, St. Louis Cardinals, Philadelphia Phillies, Cincinnati Reds, and Houston Astros. In all, he played in 1,115 big league games.

Eugene Lewis Freese arrived in the majors as a second baseman but soon switched to third and played "the hot corner" for the rest of his colorful career. He hit 14 home runs as a rookie on a Pirate team that won only 60 games. His first big-league hit was off the Dodgers' Carl Erskine in a pinch-hit role at Ebbets Field.

Slumping the next season, he was shipped to Hollywood in the Pacific Coast League in mid-season. But in '57, he returned to the Pirates and batted a solid .283.

In 1958, the peppercorn from Wheeling was shipped to St. Louis in a trade and the Cardinals subsequently sent him to the Phillies in a deal for Solly Hemus, who was to become the Cards' manager. In '59, he smashed five pinch-hit home runs for the

Phillies during the first six weeks of the season.

That clutch hitting won him a place in the every-day lineup and he went on to lead the team with 23 homers — three of them grand slams.

The next winter, he was dealt to the Chicago White Sox for outfielder Johnny Callison. He batted .273 with 17 homers and 79 RBIs for the Chisox. After that season, the Cincinnati Reds traded Juan Pizarro and Cal McLish to the Chisox for the youngest of the Brothers Freese. He proved a key factor in the Reds' drive to their first pennant since 1940. He established a home run record for Cincinnati third basemen with 26 and drove in 87 runs. Unfortunately, the Reds lost the World Series to the New York Yankees in just five games.

Rewarded with the best contract of his career (\$40,000), Gene sustained a fractured right ankle in a 1962 exhibition game and was forced to sit out the entire season.

He had enjoyed three successive outstanding years but he was never the same after that injury-enforced layoff. When he didn't hit at the outset of the '63 season, the Reds sent him to San Diego, of the Pacific Coast League, to regain his batting eye. He was recalled but then suffered a broken wrist.

Returned to the Pirates in '64, he shared the third base job with Bob Bailey. He was back to the White Sox in '65 and finished his major league career with the Astros in '66.

Later, he performed in the minors with Hawaii and Tacoma before retiring to the New Orleans area. Latest statistics show him two sons, a daughter, and four grandchildren.