heave baseballs at his rookie third-baseman — presumably to see whether he was alert enough to duck. The rookie third-baseman was alert enough—and sore enough—to run back into the dugout and tell Ball what he thought of him. Ball wasn't listening because he was too busy telling Richards what *he* thought of *him*. It ended with Richards on the night train back to Brooklyn.

Uncle Robbie thereupon sent him to Crisfield in the Eastern Shore League under the same type of cover-up. Crisfield finished next to last, but at the end of the season it was discovered that all the teams above them had been using more higher-classification players than the rule allowed. Their victories were all thrown out and Crisfield stood as a rather inglorious champion. With the contracts being examined that closely, Crisfield had to list Richards on its own reserve list, although it fully intended to "sell" him to Brooklyn in the spring.

At the draft meeting, however, a representative of the St. Louis Browns stood up and announced: "We draft Player Paul Richards of Crisfield."

Uncle Robbie, his face flushed with innocent indignation, got to his feet and cried: "Oh, no, you don't! I've got that boy covered up!"

Commissioner Landis glared at Robbie, amidst the laughter, and announced: "Player Paul Richards is drafted by the St. Louis Browns."

As a Brownie farmhand Paul showed promise of being a good long-ball hitter. Back at Crisfield the following year, he hit 24 home runs in 87 games and batted .322. The next year, with Muskogee in the Western Association, he hit 36 home runs, knocked in 109 runs and batted .314. He was not only a third-baseman and a shortstop, but he still came in occasionally as an ambidextrous relief pitcher. It had to happen, of course, and it did: In the ninth inning of a game against Topeka, a switch-hitter named Charlie Wilson was sent up to bat against him. When Wilson stepped in as a lefthander, Richards shifted his glove to his right hand and assumed the posture of a southpaw; when Wilson thereupon stepped across the plate and became a righthanded hitter, Richards shifted the glove to his left hand, shifted his feet on the rubber and became a right-handed pitcher. While the crowd roared and the umpire tried to think what in the world the rulebook said about a situation like this, Wilson and Richards skipped back and forth in their delicate little dance. Finally, Richards threw his glove aside, put *both* feet on the rubber and, holding both hands behind him, shouted: "OK, Charlie, choose your poison!"

It wasn't until 1930 that Paul became a catcher. The Dodgers had got him back the previous season by buying him for Macon, but as spring training was coming to an end, he hadn't been able to break into the starting infield. With word being passed through the camp that one infielder was about to be sent to Jacksonville—a backward step he wasn't eager to take—Richards went to Charlie Moore, the manager and lone catcher, and volunteered to become the spare catcher. Since it made Moore happy to assume that Richards had caught before Paul did not think it would be polite to disabuse him. He became a catcher, quite literally, overnight. Moore was injured in the opening game and Richards was thrown into the breach. He had, it seemed, a natural aptitude for the position. He had always had the essentials—a strong throwing arm and an even stronger inclination to question the judgment of the umpire. The rest of it he picked up, he says, by trial, error and observation. He gives himself the worst of it. When Moore eventually learned that Paul's previous catching experience had been nil, he shrugged and said: "Then the first time he ever went behind the plate he was a better catcher than I ever was."

He was more than a good receiver; he was smart and he was alert. No one was more adept at picking off the hit-and-run. ("The only sign worth stealing," he says.) His secret was that he didn't try to steal the sign; he would catch the play by keeping an eye on the baserunner. Many players, he had discovered, had little unconscious movements that gave away the fact that they had just got the sign. Some would tug on their pants, some would steal a glance at second; a few walked back and kicked first base or grabbed a handful of dirt. Some immediately assumed an attitude of complete nonchalance and indifference.

After .304 and .301 seasons at Macon and Hartford, Paul finally got to the Dodgers. Brooklyn, however, was overstocked with catchers. Unable to break through Al Lopez, Clyde Sukeforth and Val Picinich, he was sold to Minneapolis in the American Association. When he hit .361 in 78 games, with 16 home runs and 69 runs-batted-in, the Giants bought him to back up Gus Mancuso.

Mancuso didn't need much backing up. The Giants won the pennant, but Richards' contribution was negligible, since Mancuso caught 144 games. In two seasons, Richards had a total of only 162 at bats and hit under .200. About the only memorable things that happened to him were catching Carl Hubbell and picking up his World Series check.

In 1935, Connie Mack bought him for the A's and Richards finally got his chance to be a first-string major-league catcher. But he could only get his batting average up to .245. His chief claim to fame was that he was the only catcher in baseball who could handle the Senators' base-stealing wizard, George Washington Case. Richards would glare down at Case, obviously challenging him to try to steal, and when Case went, he would almost invariably get thrown out. It was not until the end of the year that it occurred to George that Richards was only glaring at him when he had a pitcher with a quick motion on the mound.

One fit of temper got Mr. Mack down on Paul. Late in a game against Detroit, Hank Greenberg, attempting to bunt Gehringer to second, ticked a pitch back into Richards' mitt. When the umpire, hardly expecting to see Greenberg bunting, called it a ball, Richards blew his stack. Ball, glove and mask bounced off the ground while Paul screamed at the umpire and Gehringer raced from first to third. Mr. Mack was never heard to utter a word about his smart catcher again. At the end of the season, he traded him to Atlanta for a pitcher named Al Williams. The irony of it all was that Richards himself had recommended Williams to Atlanta two years earlier.

It was at Atlanta that Paul developed that distinctive catching stance, right foot stuck out straight-away from his body. He developed it neither by chance nor design but out of sheer necessity after he had injured the knee so badly that he couldn't bend it. When the knee healed, the pitchers asked him to stay with the stance, because they felt it enabled him to offer them a lower target. Since Richards had found that it also enabled him to get his throws off a little quicker, he was happy to oblige.

After two good seasons, Richards, still under 30 and still itching to make a name as a major-league catcher, asked Earl Mann for permission to try to make a deal for himself. Mann granted the permission, but he added: "If you're interested in managing, hang on here for a while. There's a good chance you'll be managing this club in a year."

Since he had thought plenty about managing, Paul agreed to stay. By the time the next season started, Paul Richards was the manager of the Atlanta Crackers. He was a disciplinarian, stern and exacting, from the very start. In his first sea-