

# Meet Mr. Modesty

*Metzger still cherishes dream fulfilled during major-league career*

by John P. Lopez  
 Battalion Staff

**BRENHAM**—At first glance, the Roger Metzger household is just like countless other homes. There are pictures of two children on the mantel, there's a dog roaming the back yard and there are two cars in the garage.

There isn't a room full of awards and game balls, although Metzger received more than his share of both during his 12 year major-league baseball career.

Metzger is a modest man. Just ask his wife, Tammy.

"He doesn't know why (journalists) always want to interview him," she said Wednesday. "He's really amazed when people always want to know more about him."

The only semblance of Metzger's accomplishments is in a small corner of the living room, where a few of his awards are on a shelf and there is a straw basket full of autographed baseballs.

One ball bears the inscription, "Roger Metzger — First major-league home run off Bob Gibson." Metzger modestly adds: "After I hit that, Gibson decided to retire. I guess he thought that if I could hit one off him, it was time for him to quit."

Another ball says, "Roger Metzger — First major-league single. Hit off Don Sutton." Metzger's wife Tammy answers: "Roger never got another hit off Sutton after that."

The only scrapbook Metzger has was given to him by a friend. On the inside flap of the book is a short note to Metzger that states: "Dear Roger, You have provided me and your many ... friends with a whole lot of pleasure during your nine years with the Astros ... I hope you enjoy (the scrapbook) as much as I have putting it together."

The only conspicuous award in the Metzger's living room is the Gold Glove trophy awarded to him after the 1973 season. Metzger doesn't like to be in the limelight and he never has. He considers himself "fortunate" even to have played in the big leagues.

"One of the biggest thrills I had while I was in the majors was playing in the same game with people that were super heroes to me — people like (Willie) Mays, (Hank) Aaron, Pete Rose and Steve Carlton," Metzger said.

"Looking back, it's something that I'll always cherish. I was one of 600,000 players who wanted to play in the big leagues. And I was able to fulfill a dream. A lot of players in all sports are kept away from the pros because of just one break. I consider myself very fortunate."

Fortunate or not, Metzger excelled as a shortstop with the Houston Astros and San Francisco Giants. He was considered by coaches and players to be one of the most sure-handed fielders in the league and still holds the record for most triples in a season with the 14 he hit for the Astros in 1973.

Metzger played college ball at St. Edward's University in Austin, but he didn't think about making a career out of baseball until his second year at the school.

"In my sophomore year in college, I got interested in baseball a little more and I started thinking that maybe I had a chance," Metzger said. "In that summer I was asked to go play in a summer league in Liberal, Kansas, but only as a reserve player. Fortunately, when I got there, there were quite a few other players involved in post-season games, so I got to play quite a bit. And luckily, about eight games into the season I started playing shortstop regularly."

Metzger was drafted by the Chicago Cubs in 1969 and went through their farm system before moving up to play in three games with the parent club in 1970. The following year he was

traded to the Astros, where he held down the starting shortstop position for eight years. In 1973, Metzger was named the Astros' Most Valuable Player and in 1974 he was voted the team's most popular player.

Metzger said that although Houston was never in a pennant race while he was playing, the Astros had a much better team than people gave them credit for.

"Right after we made the (Joe) Morgan for Lee May and Tommy Helms trade (in 1972) I felt like we had the type of team that could be a contender for the pennant," he said. "To me, the trade didn't hurt as much as people said it did, because Morgan was unhappy with the Houston situation and he never displayed any power like he did in Cincinnati. And at the time, I felt like Helms was just as good a second baseman as Morgan."

"I thought we had good pitching and strong hitting, but we didn't have anybody in the bullpen like a (Bruce) Sutter or (Kent) Tekulve that could win it in the eighth or ninth inning. We just never jelled as a team. The hitting and pitching was either good or bad. But we were never consistent for any length of time."

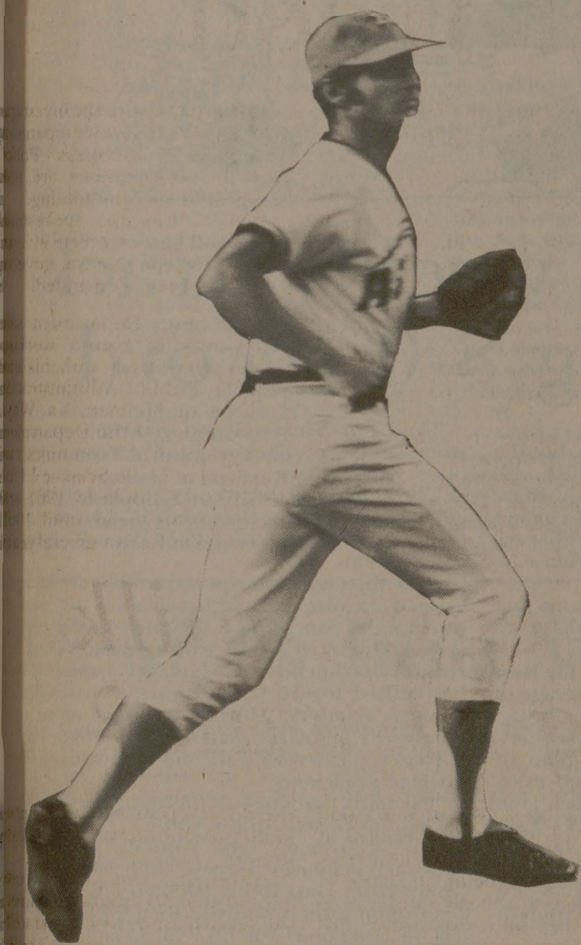
"I think the team was based on power," Metzger said. "The only base-stealing threat we had was (centerfielder) Cesar Cedeno. And I thought I could run pretty well, but I'm not exceptionally fast. So it was based on power, which is foolish in the Astrodome. The only way it's ever going to be a home run hitter's park is if they move the fence in about 30 feet down the line and another 20 feet in the alleys."

"Even then it won't be an advantage because the other



staff photo by John P. Lopez

Although Roger Metzger has retired from professional baseball, he's still as ambitious as ever. Here, Metzger stands in the storeroom of his Brenham restaurant, of which he is owner and proprietor.



Former Astro shortstop Roger Metzger, who retired from major league baseball in 1980, enjoyed several successful seasons in Houston. Now living in Brenham, Metzger no longer has any connection with pro baseball, but says he misses playing the sport. The former Astro and San Francisco Giant player, who won a Gold Glove in 1973, is a restaurant owner.

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