

ITALIAN AMERICANS

*At Bat*

FROM SAND LOTS TO THE MAJOR LEAGUES

# ITALIAN AMERICANS AT BAT FROM SAND LOTS TO THE MAJOR LEAGUES

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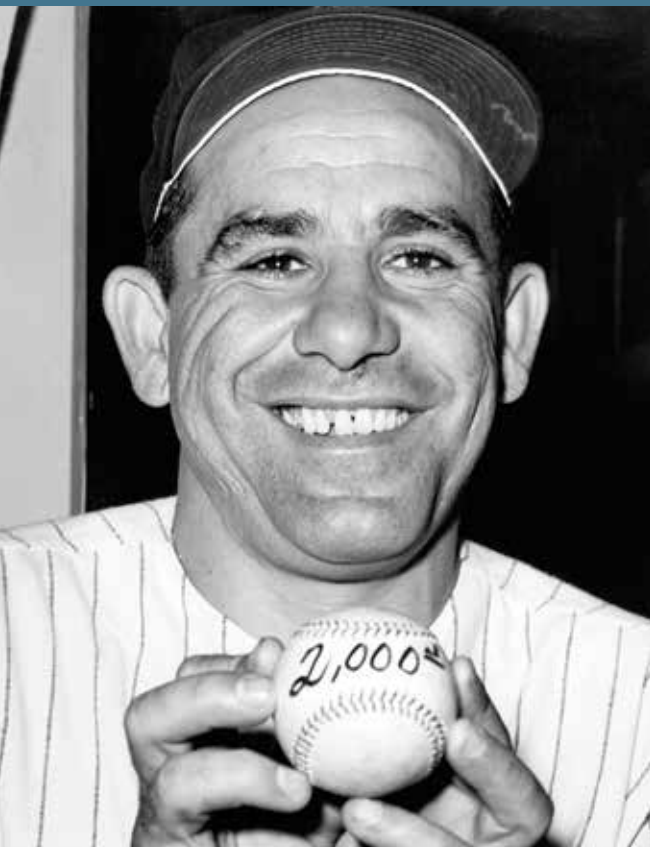
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ABOVE: **Yogi Berra** after his 2000th game, 1962. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* RIGHT PAGE: **Joe DiMaggio**, June 29, 1941, Washington D.C. © Bettmann/CORBIS



“

That an Italian immigrant, a fisherman's son, could catch fly balls the way Keats wrote poetry or Beethoven wrote sonatas was more than just a popular marvel. It was proof positive that democracy was real. On the baseball diamond, if nowhere else, America was truly a classless society. DiMaggio's grace embodied the democracy of our dreams.”

— David Halberstam, *Summer of '49*



If baseball is a narrative, an epic of exile and return, a vast, communal poem about separation, loss, and the hope for reunion — if baseball is a Romance Epic . . . it is the Romance Epic of homecoming America sings to itself.”  
 — A. Bartlett Giamatti

## Contents

Introduction: <b>ITALIAN AMERICANS AT BAT</b>	3	<b>LEGENDS &amp; LORE: THE 50s, 60s &amp; 70s</b>	22
<b>BREAKING IN: THE EARLY DAYS</b>	4	Hall of Famer: Yogi Berra	24
Hall of Famer: Tony Lazzeri	6	The Emperor of Right Field: Carl Furillo	24
Baseball Was America	7	Hall of Famer: Roy Campanella	25
Hall of Famer: Eppa Rixey	7	Sal “The Barber” Maglie	26
Up From The Sand Lots	8	The Shot Heard ‘round the World: Ralph Branca	26
Dante Benedetti	8	The Prodigy: Tony Conigliaro	27
<b>BREAKING OUT: THE 30s &amp; 40s</b>	10	Hall of Famer: Ron Santo	28
Hall of Famer: Ernie Lombardi	12	The No-Hitters: Maglie, Montefusco, Righetti & Bosio	28
The Streak	12	<b>THE MODERN ERA</b>	31
Baseball at War	13	Billy Ball	32
Playing Smart: Dom DiMaggio	13	Managers at the Heights	32
Hall of Famer: Joe DiMaggio	14	Hall of Famer: Tommy Lasorda	33
The Cookie Game	14	Buzzie’s Boss: Emil “Buzzie” Bavasi	34
PCL: The Majors of the West	17	A. Bartlett Giamatti	34
Babe & the Babe	17	Moneyball: Paul DePodesta	35
Nine Old Men: The 1948 Oaks	19	Joe Torre	35
<b>ITALIAN AMERICANS IN THE HALL</b>	20	Mike “The Monster” Piazza	36
Baseball Immortality: The Hall of Fame	21	Dustin Pedroia	38
Hall of Famer: Phil Rizzuto	21	The 2011 World Series: Tony La Russa & Mike Napoli	38



ABOVE: **Roy Campanella** sliding home, 1954. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* LEFT PAGE: (L to R) **Rugger Ardizoia**, **George Puccinelli** and **Ernie Orsatti** of the Hollywood Stars, 1939. All three sons of Italian immigrants played sandlot ball, had successful careers in the Pacific Coast League, and played in the majors. *Courtesy of Rugger Ardizoia.* FRONT COVER: (L to R) **Frank Crosetti**, **Tony Lazzeri**, **Joe DiMaggio**, 1936. *New York Times Co./Getty Images.* BACK COVER: (L to R, Top to Bottom) **Roy Campanella**, c. 1950. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Steve Sax**, c. 1985. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Ping Bodie**, c. 1920. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Mark Belanger**, 1971. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Nick Swisher**, 2011. *Photo by Keith Allison.* **Billy Martin** (left), c. 1980. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Phil Rizzuto**, 1941. *Courtesy of Rugger Ardizoia.* **Dolph Camilli**, 1937. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Mike Piazza**, c. 1995. *Photo by Michael Ponzini.* *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Craig Biggio**, 1990. *Photo by Rich Pilling.* *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Mike Napoli**, 2012. *Photo by Keith Allison.* **Joe Torre**, 1997. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Rico Petrocelli**, c. 1963. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Dom DiMaggio**, 1938. *From the collection of Doug McWilliams.* **Ernie Lombardi**, 1931. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **Tony La Russa**, 2011. *Photo courtesy of Tony La Russa.*



## Italian Americans at Bat

**T**HE STORY OF BASEBALL, according to Bart Giamatti, is “the story of going home after having left home; the story of how difficult it is to find the origins one so deeply needs to find.” For Giamatti, such a game, with such a story, cannot help having a “particular resonance for a nation of immigrants, all of whom left one home to seek another.”

What we find, in the case of Italian Americans, is precisely this. If not the immigrants themselves, then their children took to a game, as they took to a place, totally at odds with the villages and traditions from which they came. Very often, the young Italian Americans who became obsessed with the sport had to defy their parents for every chance to play this “useless” game. Until, that is, they demonstrated with their paychecks that playing baseball professionally could produce rewards few had ever imagined. At that point, playing baseball became not only the second generation’s way to carve out a new identity — i.e. as Americans in every sense — but also to fulfill their immigrant parents’ aspirations as well: to earn enough money to “make” America. In the hundred years since Ed Abbaticchio first donned a major league uniform in Philadelphia, PA, Italian Americans have become some of the most celebrated players, and later managers in this most American of games. Starting out as outsiders in a game dominated by the English, the Irish and the Germans, they overcame the initial prejudice they found by dint of their skill, their fierce determination, and their love of a game they had made theirs. Oddly enough — given that there was no major league franchise in the West until the 1950s — it was in the San Francisco Bay Area that a startling proportion of the first great players got their start. Whether this was because of the city’s early history with the game — Alexander Cartwright came West in 1849 after codifying the game in New York — or its favorable weather, or its several Pacific Coast League teams, or its many sandlot leagues is debatable. But there is no debate about the great Italian American players to come out of the San Francisco area: not just the legendary Joe DiMaggio and his two brothers, but also Ping Bodie, Tony Lazzeri, Frank Crosetti, Ernie Lombardi, and a host of others.

*We think that’s a story that deserves telling.*



ABOVE: Rookie **Joe DiMaggio**, center, hugs his brothers, **Vince**, left, and **Dom**, before the start of the 1936 World Series in New York. All three were major league center fielders: Vince was a 2-time All-Star who played for the Boston Bees, Cincinnati Reds, Pittsburgh Pirates, Philadelphia Phillies, and New York Giants. Dom was a 7-time All-Star who spent his entire career with the Boston Red Sox. *The Rucker Archive/Transcendental Graphics*. LEFT PAGE: Frank “**Ping**” **Bodie**, pictured here in 1914, was a center fielder who played for the Chicago White Sox (1911–1914), Philadelphia Athletics (1917) and New York Yankees (1919–1921). *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*



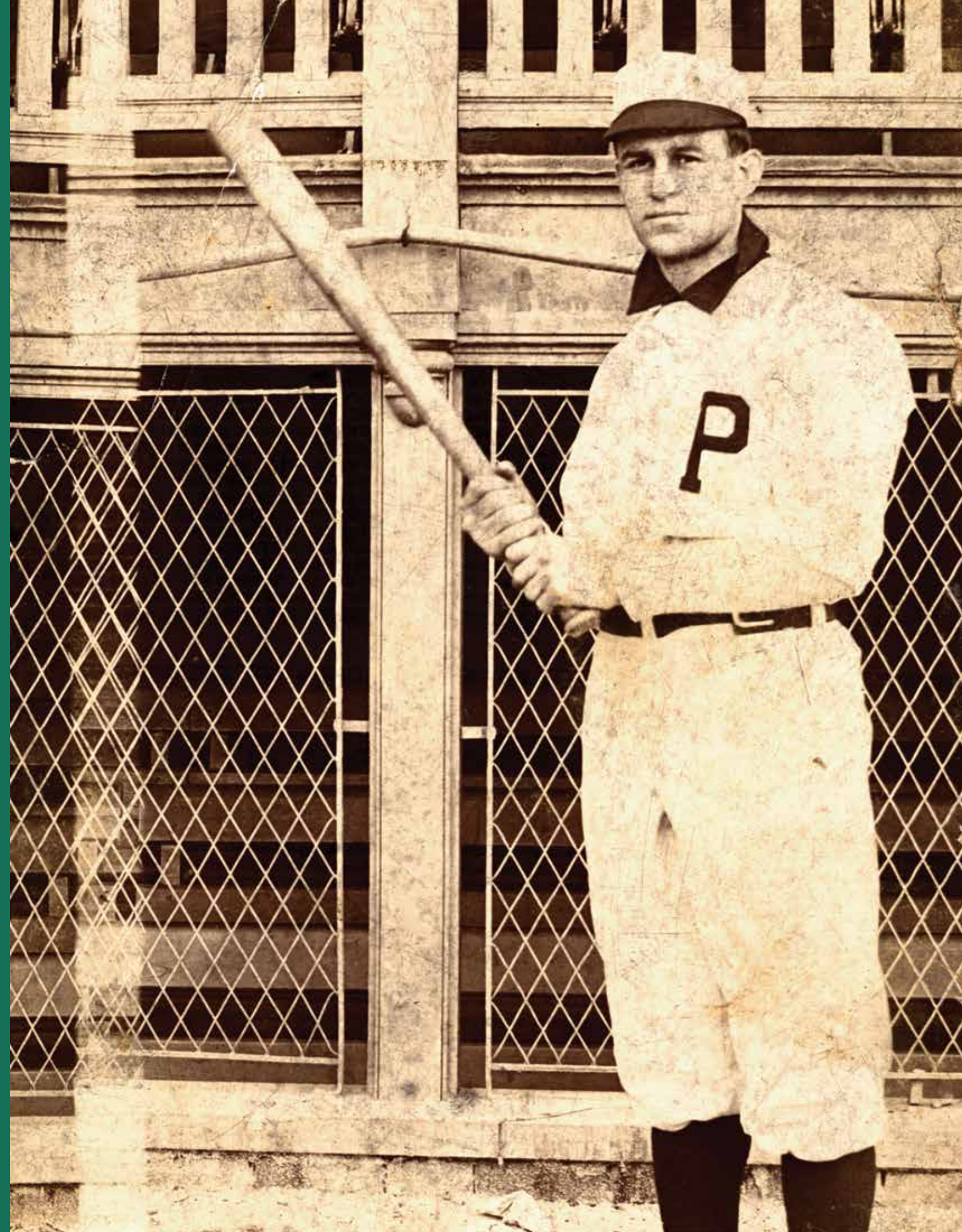
ABOVE: Born Rinaldo Angelo Paolinelli in San Francisco in 1895, "**Babe Pinelli**" played most of his career with the Cincinnati Reds from 1922 to 1927. He also played with the Chicago White Sox (1918) and Detroit Tigers (1920). He is pictured here in his Reds uniform, circa 1920s. RIGHT PAGE: **Ed Abbaticchio**, 1898. Both photos: National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.

## Breaking In: The Early Days

**T**HOUGH MANY PEOPLE THINK of Italian American players as household names, the first Italians to play major league baseball are virtual unknowns. If one didn't know that Ping Bodie's real name was Francesco Pezzolo, his Italian roots would pass unnoticed. Bodie, in fact, illustrates one of the difficulties faced by Italian Americans early on. He has admitted that he called himself "Bodie" — the name of a mining town in California where his father once worked — to avoid the ridicule baseball writers aimed at Italian names. Several sportswriters are on record as commenting with distaste about such names — names that seemed not quite American enough for America's game.

Despite this handicap, Italian American boys played the game whenever they could. Many played in informal leagues formed by church groups, factories, and settlement houses seeking to improve the lives of immigrants with recreation. Often they did this in opposition to their parents' wishes, many of whom saw baseball as a "child's game." Ed Abbaticchio, probably the first Italian American to play professionally, had to reject his father's bribe of a hotel if he would agree never to play baseball again. In 1905, Abbaticchio did retire from baseball to run the hotel, but he had already become one of baseball's highest-paid, most sought-after players, and later returned to the Pittsburgh Pirates to play until 1910.

When Bodie became a New York Yankee and Babe Ruth's roommate in 1918, an Italian American player finally became recognized. Even with this status and his name change, however, Bodie failed to escape stereotypes: his most publicized episode involved beating an ostrich in a spaghetti-eating contest, and sportswriter Wood Ballard compared Bodie's stooping shoulders and long dangling arms to an ape's. Bodie took it all with good humor, perhaps knowing that he, and several other Italian Americans like Babe Pinelli, Oscar Melillo and Ed Abbaticchio, had proven they could play America's game at the highest level. Because of their pioneering efforts, baseball would never be the same.



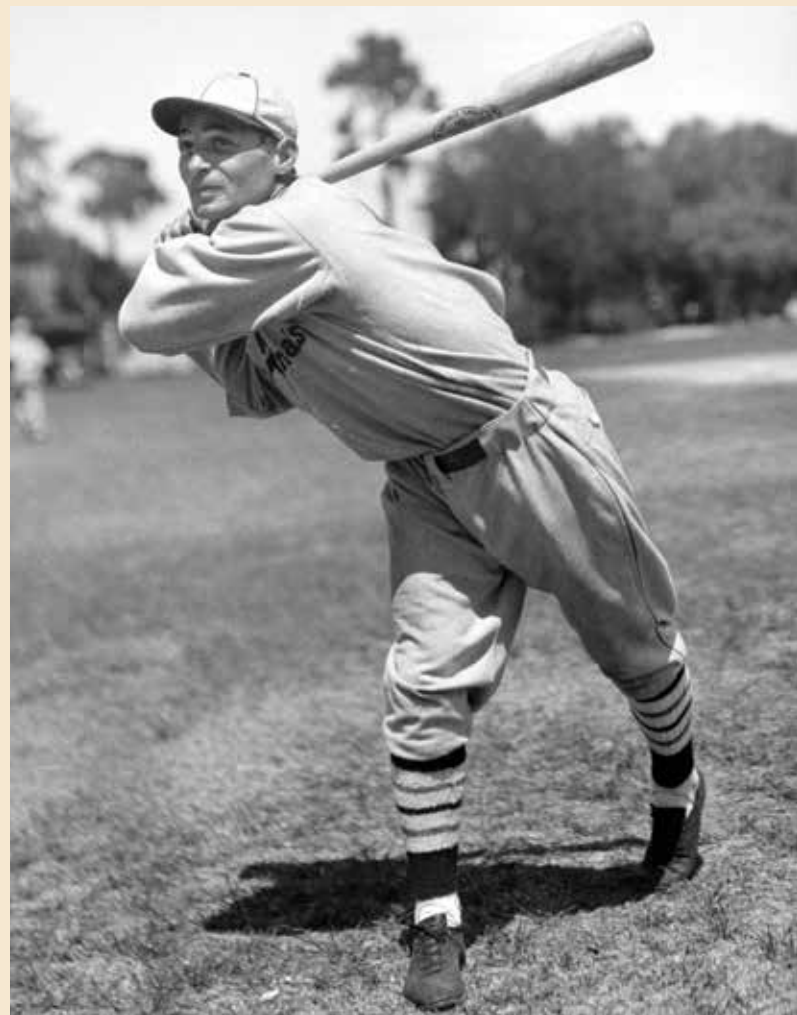


Tony Lazzeri in his Salt Lake City Bees uniform, 1925. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



**Tony Lazzeri**

IT TOOK TONY LAZZERI MORE than 50 years after his last season (1939) to make it to the Hall of Fame, possibly because he played at a time when “Walloping Wops” were not thought of as baseball greats. But he was. He electrified the Pacific Coast League in 1925 by hitting 60 home runs for the Salt Lake City Bees. The Yankees brought him to New York for the 1926 season and the second baseman became a key part of the “Murderers’ Row” of 1927, more feared as a hitter than all but Ruth and Gehrig. Yankee General Manager Ed Barrow called the former boilermaker “one of the greatest ballplayers I have ever known.” The Italians of New York called him “Poosh ‘Em Up” Tony and cheered his every swing, especially when, in 1936 against the Philadelphia Athletics, he hit three home runs, two of them grand slams, in one game. His American League record for eleven RBIs in that one game still stands. So does the stature of “Poosh ‘Em Up” Tony.



TOP: **Ernie Orsatti** was a left-handed first baseman and outfielder with the St. Louis Cardinals. He made his debut in the majors in 1927 and played in the 1928, 1930, 1931 and 1934 World Series. In 1939 he played one year with the PCL’s Hollywood Stars before retiring from baseball and joining his brothers at the Orsatti Talent Agency. BOTTOM LEFT: **Gus Mancuso** had his major league debut with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1928. He also played with the New York Giants, the Chicago Cubs, the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Philadelphia Phillies. Mancuso was regarded as one of the top defensive catchers of the 1930s. BOTTOM RIGHT: **Oscar “Ski” Melillo** reached the majors in 1926 with the St. Louis Browns, spending nine and a half years with them before moving to the Boston Red Sox (1935–1937). He is pictured here in his Browns uniform, circa 1935. *All photos: National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York*



Tony Lazzeri (center) being congratulated by Babe Ruth (right) and Lou Gehrig on “Tony Lazzeri Day” at Yankee Stadium, September 9, 1927. *The Rucker Archive/Transcendental Graphics.*

## Baseball Was America

**B**ASEBALL STARTED OUT as “an English game,” wrote Frederick Ivor-Campbell. It was invented, promoted and played mostly by Americans of English origin. It wasn’t long, however, before this “gentleman’s sport” had been so invaded by both Irish and German immigrants that by the end of the 19th century, the game was being hailed as a “primary vehicle of assimilation for immigrants into American society.”

When Italian immigrants arrived in great numbers around the turn of the twentieth century, this was what they, or rather, their children found — a game considered so American that reformers everywhere promoted baseball as a “natural and effective means for schooling them in American values.” Sportswriters echoed this idea, calling baseball “the greatest single force working for Americanization” — a force even better than schools at teaching “the American spirit.”

The behavior of the immigrants’ children confirmed these ideas. Painter Ralph Fasanella, growing up in New York city around World War I, said, “We were foreigners... and the only thing that made the connection was the baseball game. Baseball was America.” The ability to play, and especially to excel in this most American of sports became a quick way to counter that negative immigrant identity as an outsider. Though you might still be taunted as a “wop” or a “dago,” playing well made the diamond a place of welcome. And if a Lazzeri or a DiMaggio were knocking the hide off the ball for the New York Yankees, the welcome extended all the way to the top.

It is true that delight in a home-grown hero like Lazzeri could cause the type of ethnic pride that tended towards isolation, but for the most part, the increasing success of Italians in America’s sport worked the other way. It drew more and more Italian Americans away from the old-world ways of their parents, and towards the playing fields — either as players or as fans — and the newer, more American ways they seemed to represent.



Eppa Rixey in front of Cincinnati Reds dugout, July 10, 1923. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*



**Eppa Rixey**

**EPPA RIXEY PROBABLY NEVER** knew he was Italian — but recent family genealogy research indicates that he descended from Richard Riccia, whose name first appears in the Prince William County, Virginia records in 1740.

Born in Culpeper, VA in 1891, Rixey was a left-handed pitcher who had a 21-year career, pitching for the Philadelphia Phillies from 1912 to 1920 and for the Cincinnati Reds from 1921 until 1933.

A giant of a man with a wonderful sense of humor, he was beloved by Reds fans. When inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1963, he joked about his election, “They’re really scraping the bottom of the barrel, aren’t they?” Rixey, however, was the best left-hander ever to pitch for the Reds with a 179–148 record, 180 complete games, 23 shutouts and a 3.33 ERA in his 13 seasons. At the time of his retirement he held the National League record for victories by a left-handed pitcher with 266 wins, which was not to be broken until Warren Spahn surpassed his total in 1959.



Detail from the Jasper Alley mural painted in memory of Dante. The scene shows him in Heaven playing ball, next to one of his most famous sayings.

**Dante Benedetti** NO CONVERSATION ABOUT Italian Americans and San Francisco baseball is complete without mentioning Dante Benedetti. Born to Italian immigrants from Tuscany, Dante and his siblings grew up at the New Pisa Restaurant in North Beach which his parents founded in 1927. While he never played ball professionally, he was an integral part of the fabric of Italian American baseball in San Francisco — playing neighborhood pick up games with the DiMaggio brothers, sponsoring numerous sandlot and semi-pro clubs out of the New Pisa, and coaching baseball at the University of San Francisco, which he did without compensation from 1962 – 1980. When we wasn't coaching ball, Dante could be found sitting in front of the New Pisa on Green Street greeting customers, all of whom he seemed to know personally. Stories of Dante's generosity abound. It is believed that he supported as many as eight sandlot and semi-pro teams at any given time, as well as many individual young ballplayers who were in need. He became one of the most beloved of North Beach Italian American characters. When he died at the age of 86 in 2007, he had sold the restaurant, his life-long generosity reportedly rendering him penniless. He was rich, however, in the memory of the ballplayers and others he had helped over the years who honored that memory with a mural, located in the North Beach alley where he had been born and raised.



New Pisa Team, 1952. Courtesy of Don Benedetti (pictured: top row, far left) and Ed Lodigiani (pictured: bottom row, third from left). Dante Benedetti is pictured on the bottom row, fourth from right.

## Up from the Sand Lots

**T**HE TERM "SANDLOT BALL" DATES BACK TO 1860s San Francisco — a city built on sand dunes. Players at this time played ball in what became the Civic Center, a cemetery during the Gold Rush but a flattened, sandy lot well suited to sports in the 1860s when baseball became popular. Residents began referring to such players as "sandlotters," and the games as "sandlot ball." The name stuck, and has been used freely ever since, not least to refer to games played at the first fenced ballpark in the West, the Recreation Grounds built in San Francisco's Mission District in 1868. From the latter also comes the term "knothole gang," referring to the kids peering through fence knotholes to watch the games.

It was not long before such organized games became standard fare in San Francisco. According to the website "good old sandlot days," sandlot baseball referred to "semi-pro baseball," sometimes called "bush league baseball." This was a type of non-professional ball played at such a high level that it attracted large crowds to its Sunday (and sometimes Saturday) games, and, of course, many of the famous players who would later turn pro. In its heyday, more than 200 teams played in San Francisco alone, with other Bay Area cities like Richmond, Oakland, Alameda and San Jose fielding their own sandlot teams. Teams were equipped by nearby businesses — automobile dealers, restaurants and taverns, merchants of all kinds, and funeral parlors. The team uniforms displayed the business names as a kind of advertising, so competition to field a winning team could be fierce. Most baseball historians cite the highly-skilled sandlot leagues in the Bay Area as one factor contributing to the unusual number of San Francisco Italian Americans making it to the big leagues.



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1 San Francisco City Hall, 1890. In the foreground is the sand lot from which the term "Sandlot ball" got its name. *San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.* 2 Visitacion Valley youth baseball team, circa 1910. *San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.* 3 Shreves Team, 1911. *Courtesy of John Ward, goodoldsandlotdays.com.* 4 Spectators and participants at a baseball game at Big Rec in Golden Gate Park, 1930. *San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.* 5 Noe Valley Merchants semi-pro baseball team, 1911. *San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.* 6 Sons of Italy sandlot team, Weed, 1929. *Courtesy of John Ward, goodoldsandlotdays.com.* 7 Paul's Corner Team, circa 1950. Ed Lodigiani, brother of Dario Lodigiani, is in the bottom row, third from the right. *Courtesy of Ed Lodigiani.*



**Phil Cavarretta**, Chicago Cubs, 1938. In the 1938 World Series against the New York Yankees, Cavarretta batted .462, though the Cubs were swept. He played for the Cubs from 1934 through 1953, managing the team in his final three seasons with the club. *June Friest Collection, National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## Breaking Out: The 30s & 40s

**B**Y THE TIME JOSEPH PAUL DIMAGGIO reached the New York Yankees in 1936 for his rookie season, the Yankees—and Italian American baseball fans—were getting used to Italian American players at the top. DiMaggio, in fact, would join two fellow Italian Americans from San Francisco on the Yankees: Frank Crosetti playing shortstop, and “Poosh ‘em up” Tony Lazzeri playing second. Lazzeri had paved the way for his home boys by hitting 60 home runs in 1925 with Salt Lake City, and then becoming part of the Yankees’ fearsome “Murderers’ Row” of 1927 (Combs, Koenig, Ruth, Gehrig, Meusel, and Lazzeri). Bay Area native Ernie Lombardi added to expectations, drawing this kind of praise from sportswriter Arthur Daley: “You almost come to the conclusion that he was the greatest hitter of all time.”

DiMaggio, though, took things to a new level of heroism. In his first full season as a professional with the San Francisco Seals in 1933, he ignited fans with a record 61-game hitting streak. He kept this up for the Yankees, leading the league in batting in 1939 and 1940, and in homers in 1937 and 1948, with his most stunning achievement being the 56-game hitting streak in 1941, when he was again named MVP. Nor was it just Joe DiMaggio. No less than 54 players of Italian descent entered the major leagues in the 1930s. By 1936, every Major League team had at least one Italian American on its roster, including three future Hall of Famers—Lazzeri, DiMaggio, and Lombardi—and four future MVP winners—DiMaggio, Lombardi, Cavarretta and Camilli.

The 1940s continued the “Italian invasion.” Shortstop Phil Rizzuto joined the other Italian Yankees—soon bolstered by Yogi Berra behind the plate and Marius Russo and Vic Raschi as pitching aces—to become rookie of the year in 1941. When the Yankees played the Brooklyn Dodgers in several postwar World Series, the Dodgers fielded such Italian notables as Roy Campanella, Ralph Branca, Carl Furillo, Al Gionfriddo and Cookie Lavagetto. So pervasive were Italian names on big league teams—Dom DiMaggio starring for the Red Sox, Sal Maglie shining for the Giants—that sportswriter Jack Munhall of the Washington Post referred, with scarcely disguised alarm, to “the growing Italian domination of the great American pastime of baseball.”



Joe DiMaggio, Tony Lazzeri, and Frank Crosetti, 1936. Yankees Lazzeri and Crosetti drove cross-country taking fellow San Franciscan and new teammate, Joe DiMaggio, to his first Spring Training in Florida. Legend has it that they learned half-way through the road trip that DiMaggio couldn’t drive. In this publicity photo they appear to be doing “RoShamBo” to decide who would drive next. Joe isn’t playing. *Courtesy of the Lazzeri family.*





Ernie Lombardi, 1936. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



**Ernie Lombardi**

ERNIE LOMBARDI WAS BIG — 6'3", 230 pounds—and slow, sometimes being described as “cumbersome.” But he was one of the most feared hitters of all time. The great pitcher Carl Hubbell once said “I thought he might hurt me, even kill me, with one of those liners. They were screamers.” It was for this reason that most infielders played Lombardi so deep they might have been outfielders. It was also why Ted Williams said of him, “If he had had normal speed, he would have made batting marks that would still be in the books.” Yet even with his handicap, Lombardi hit for a lifetime average of .306, mostly with the Cincinnati Reds. He won the batting title twice and was the first player of Italian descent to be chosen MVP, in 1938. Though it took him far too long — until 1986, nine years after his death — to reach the Hall of Fame, the man known as “The Schnozz”, had he lived to see it, would have been gratified.



Joe DiMaggio kisses his signature bat, December, 1941. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*

## The Streak

OF ALL THE EPISODES IN JOE DIMAGGIO'S unmatched streak — hitting safely in 56 consecutive games, a feat many consider the greatest baseball achievement ever — one stands out. On June 29, 1941, the day he tied George Sisler's record of 41 straight games, DiMaggio's streak bat was stolen. Whether or not he was distraught over this loss, his New Jersey pals certainly were. Initiating a search, they finally recovered the bat from a Newark man who had stolen it. Though details of the theft are unknown, what we do know is that on July 5, using his newly-returned bat, DiMaggio hit a home run to extend his streak to 46 straight games. And after that game, he autographed the substitute bat he had used to break both Sisler's and Wee Willie Keeler's records, and sent it to be raffled off at Seals Stadium in San Francisco to raise money for the USO. Ten thousand delirious fans showed up, thousands were raised for the troops, and Joe DiMaggio went on to hit safely in ten more games. Each hit was recorded in the “Dimag-o-Log” that the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran daily in the Sporting Green. Also recorded was soon-to-be-wartime President Franklin Roosevelt's comment about DiMaggio's gesture: “I am deeply impressed by the invincible Joe DiMaggio surrendering his record-breaking bat to the USO cause.”



Rugger Ardizioia, Dario Lodigiani and Joe DiMaggio at the Service All-Stars game against a combined Hollywood Stars and Los Angeles Angels team in 1943. The servicemen won, 8-to-2, and the game raised an estimated \$25,000 to purchase recreational equipment for the armed forces. *Courtesy of Rugger Ardizioia.*

## Baseball at War

HUNDREDS OF MAJOR LEAGUERS entered the service in World War II — including Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, Bob Feller, and Phil Rizzuto — many of them playing exhibition games to entertain the troops. One was Rinaldo “Rugger” Ardizioia. Born in Oleggio, Italy, and immigrating to the US at the age of one, Rugger was classified as an “enemy alien” before he entered the service in 1943. Nonetheless, he did dual duty as a tow target operator, and as a pitcher in exhibition games in Hawaii and on Iwo Jima. That the troops loved the games was demonstrated to him on Iwo Jima when his team was playing alongside a big name band: “We had 10,000 troops watching us play, while the band had roughly 1,000.” Rugger resumed his career with the Yankees upon his return in 1946, but like many ball-players, WWII may have consumed his best playing years. Still, he treasured the time, especially in light of the war-time losses incurred by others: two major leaguers died in action, and another 125 minor leaguers lost their lives.



The McClellan Field Fliers were one of the strongest Service Teams in the nation, (from left to right) Dario Lodigiani, Walt Judnich, Rugger Ardizioia, and Mike McCormick, 1943. *Courtesy of Rugger Ardizioia.*



Dom DiMaggio, circa 1940s. DiMaggio scored 1,046 runs in his 10 seasons with the Red Sox, second only to Ted Williams, had a .298 BA, and more hits (1,679) than anyone else. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## Playing Smart

DOMINIC DIMAGGIO PLAYED in the shadow of an older brother who was perhaps the greatest of all time. While this might have discouraged most men, it drove Dom to work harder to compensate for his small size (5'9" and 140 lbs. when he started) and his near-sightedness. One of the ways the “little professor” did it was by playing “smart.” His knowledge of the game, and of all the little details of batting and fielding were encyclopedic. He studied where hitters tended to hit and always seemed to be one step ahead of the ball, of where to throw to nail a baserunner. Oddly, the most famous play in this regard was one he couldn't make — the throw to second base in the 7th game of the 1946 World Series by his ninth-inning replacement, Leon Culberson. The throw, allowing Cardinal Enos Slaughter to score from first base to take the Series, happened because DiMaggio had injured his hamstring the inning before. Slaughter himself said that if Dom had been playing centerfield, he never would have scored. Ted Williams, Dom's teammate, agreed, rating Dom at the very top of the great fielders of his time: “Dom saved more runs as a centerfielder than anybody else. He should be in the Hall of Fame.”



Joe DiMaggio drives a pitch up the middle to establish a new and still standing record, hitting safely in 56 straight games, July 16, 1941. *The Rucker Archive/Transcendental Graphics.*



Joe DiMaggio

#### ANYONE WATCHING JOE

DiMaggio play baseball could come away with the image of a natural: a supremely talented athlete gifted with effortless grace and dignity. It was the image he always sought to convey, not least by the string of statistics he compiled: 10 World Series, three-time Most Valuable Player Award, lifetime .325 batting average, and a record 56-game hitting streak. But there was another DiMaggio as well. Here's how Dario Lodigiani, a boyhood chum who had played with the DiMaggios from childhood on, put it. Playing second base for the Phillies at Yankee Stadium, Lodigiani was covering the bag as his pal Joe sought to stretch a hit into a double.

“I thought a train hit me,” Lodigiani said. “You know, I tagged him and he plowed into me and knocked me over on my back and everything. And I got up and I said, ‘Hey, Joe, what’s going on here?’ He didn’t say (anything). He just brushed his pants off and ran over in the dugout.”

In short, beneath that controlled exterior burned a fierce competitive spirit that played all-out, regardless of the situation. It made Joe DiMaggio who he was.

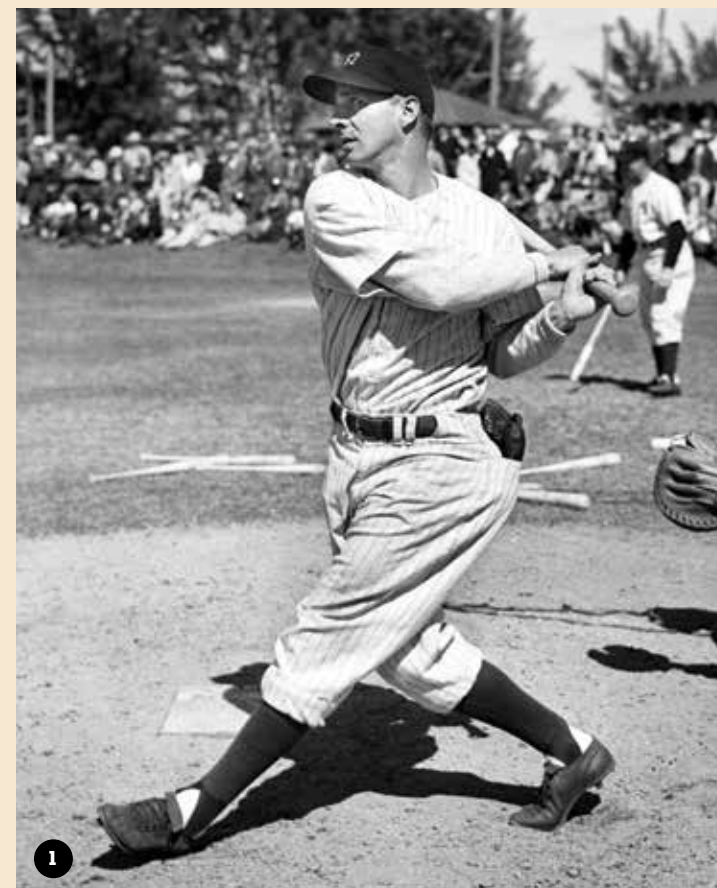


Harry Arthur “Cookie” Lavagetto, circa 1940s. The 1947 World Series turned out to be Cookie’s last major league appearance. In 1948, he played for the Oakland Oaks, becoming one of Casey Stengel’s “Nine Old Men” who went on that year to win the Pacific Coast League pennant. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## The Cookie Game

**B**ETWEEN 1947 AND 1956, THE BROOKLYN DODGERS and the New York Yankees met in no less than six World Series. The 1947 Series may have been the most memorable. In Game 4, the Yankees led 2-1, with Bill Bevens needing one out in the 9th inning to complete a no-hitter. With two men on via walks, Burt Shotton, Dodger manager, tapped an aging Cookie Lavagetto to pinch hit for Eddie Stanky. Lavagetto promptly smacked a double, not only breaking up the no-hitter, but driving in the two base runners to win the game for the Dodgers, 3-2. It became the “Cookie Game”; but perhaps Game 6 should be named as well—for Al Gionfriddo. Gionfriddo was one of the runners Lavagetto knocked in in Game 4, a bench player also put into Game 6 for defense. The Dodgers were leading 8-5 in the sixth inning, when Joe DiMaggio, with two men on, blasted a “sure” home-run to left-center field. Leaping as he reached the wall, Gionfriddo snared the drive in his glove’s webbing, preserving the Dodgers win. Though the Yanks went on to win the Series, those two plays have won a truly enduring place in history.

① **Frank Crosetti**, 1946. Crosetti was born in San Francisco and grew up in North Beach. Before joining the Yankees in 1932, he played four seasons with the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League. The two-time All-Star retired in 1946, but stayed on with the Yankees as a coach until 1968, racking up 17 World Series rings. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* ② Born in Italy and raised in North Beach, **Marino Pieretti** had a distinguished career as a pitcher in the PCL and a short career in the majors. When he was diagnosed with terminal cancer in the mid-1970s a few of his friends vowed to take him to lunch every month until the end. Though he died in 1980, the group now called “The Friends of Marino Pieretti”, and consisting of some 250 former Bay Area ballplayers, from sandlotters to major leaguers, continue the monthly luncheons even today. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* ③ Yankees second baseman **Tony Lazzeri** hits a grand slam in Game Two of the NY Giants vs NY Yankees 1936 World Series — only the second World Series Grand Slam in history. **Gus Mancuso** was the catcher for the Giants. The Yankees won that game 18-4, and won the Series 4-2. *The Rucker Archive/Transcendental Graphics.*





Fans looking through a knothole in Seals stadium fence, 1937. *San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

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## Pacific Coast League: The Majors of the West

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**A**MONG THE REASONS ALLEGED for the high percentage of outstanding Major Leaguers originating in California — think only of Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and Jackie Robinson — is the high quality of play in the Pacific Coast League. The League began on March 26, 1903 when Los Angeles hosted and beat Seattle, San Francisco defeated Portland, and Sacramento beat Oakland. It was the beginning of interstate play on the West Coast, and though the teams and their names would change over the years — the Los Angeles-area Vernon Tigers (1909–25) became the San Francisco Mission Reds (1929–37), who in turn returned to L.A. as the Hollywood Stars, the original Stars having come from Salt Lake as the Bees (1915–25), and then shifted to San Diego in 1936 to become the San Diego Padres — the essentials of keen rivalry between cities and an insatiable love for the game remained the same.

The players of Italian descent who began in the Pacific Coast League (or ended there) could fill a small book. Standouts include Ping Bodie, Babe Pinelli, Dario Lodigiani, Billy Martin, Ernie Lombardi, Dolph Camilli, Frank Crosetti, Tony Lazzeri, Cookie Lavagetto and a host of others. And it was in the PCL that all three DiMaggio brothers got their starts.

Pacific Coast teams pioneered in several areas of the game. The stadiums each team built rivaled the better-financed Major League stadiums in beauty if not size. The PCL pioneered in night games as well, the first in Sacramento in early June of 1930. This game was also broadcast on KFBK radio, another first. Soon every PCL club was featuring night games, most of them a full five years before the Major Leagues inaugurated night games of their own.

With their competitive salaries and long season helping to retain great players, the PCL reigned as the Major Leagues of the West Coast until 1958, when two teams — the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants — moved to Los Angeles and San Francisco respectively. This, along with the availability of major league baseball on TV, ended the Pacific Coast League's premier status. Though the league continues, it does so in a lesser, and decidedly minor league form.

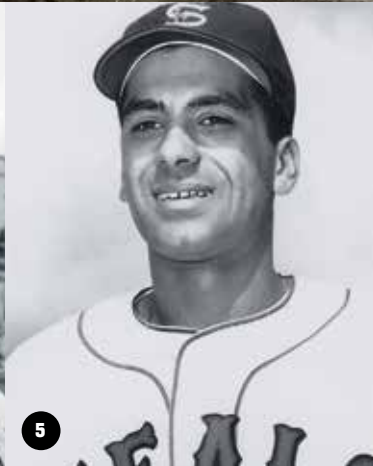
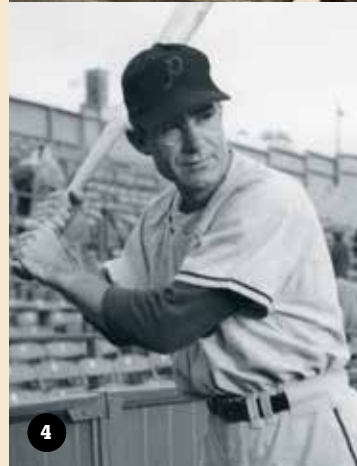


Dario Lodigiani of the Oakland Oaks sliding into 3rd base during a game with the San Francisco Seals, 1937. *San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

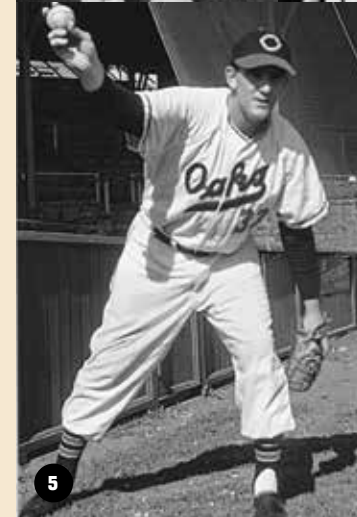
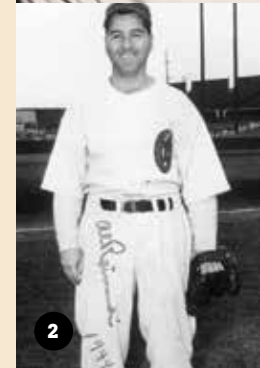


Babe Pinelli as umpire, circa 1940. Pinelli was also a shortstop and third baseman for 10 years in the PCL, mostly with the Seals and Oaks. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

**Babe & the Babe** IN ADDITION TO HIS CAREER as a player, mostly with the Cincinnati Reds from 1922–27, Babe Pinelli garnered renown as an umpire. One memorable episode occurred in 1935, his first year. Other umps advised the rookie not to call strikes on Babe Ruth, then ending his legendary career. But when the Bambino came to bat, the first thing Pinelli did was call a close pitch a strike. Outraged, Ruth yelled, “There’s 40,000 people in this park that know that was a ball, tomato-head!” Pinelli, not at all intimidated, replied, “Perhaps — but mine is the only opinion that counts.” The mighty Babe was silenced. Then in 1956, it was Pinelli who was overwhelmed, this time calling balls and strikes for Don Larsen’s Perfect Game in the World Series — the only one in history. Pinelli later admitted that, despite his apparent calm, when he reached the umpires’ room after the game, he burst into tears.



**1** Joe DiMaggio, Ty Cobb, Dominic DiMaggio and Seals' manager, Lefty O'Doul at a Major Leaguers vs Coast Leaguers benefit game in 1937. With the help of Joe, who was by then with the Yankees, the Major Leaguers defeated the Coast Leaguers 15-4. *From the collection of Doug McWilliams.* **2** Crowds entering Seals Stadium for a baseball game between the San Francisco Seals and the Seattle Rainiers, 1940s. *San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.* **3** Marcello "Marsh" Serventi and Dario "Lodi" Lodigiani of the Oakland Oaks enjoying a spaghetti dinner, circa 1936. Lodi played for both the Oaks and the Seals and went on to have a long career in both minor league and major league ball, eventually being inducted into PCL Hall of Fame. Marcel Serventi died in a tragic car accident while stationed at Fort Ord in 1941. *Courtesy of Ed Lodigiani.* **4** Dino Paolo Restelli, circa 1951. Born to Italian immigrants, Restelli grew up in San Francisco and attended Santa Clara University. After World War II, he played with the San Francisco Seals, and for a brief time with the Pittsburg Pirates. Dino still holds the rookie record for hitting 8 home runs in his first 10 games. After his baseball career, he was a policeman for the city of San Francisco. *From the collection of Doug McWilliams.* **5** Ken Aspromonte played second base for the San Francisco Seals in 1956 and 1957, before signing with the Boston Red Sox in 1957. He had a seven-year career in the majors and also managed the Cleveland Indians from 1972-1974. His brother, Bob, had a thirteen-year major league career. *Photo by Don Faulkner. From the collection of Doug McWilliams.*



**1** Dario Lodigiani and Billy Martin of the Oakland Oaks comparing noses, circa 1948. *Courtesy of Diane Lodigiani.* **2** Al Raimondi with the Oakland Oaks, circa 1944. Al had a long minor league career and was one of four Raimondi brothers to play professional baseball. *Courtesy of the Raimondi family.* **3** Ernie Lombardi in Oakland Oaks dugout holding bats, late 1940s. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **4** Billy Martin, played for the Oakland Oaks in 1948 and 1949, before signing with the New York Yankees in 1950. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* **5** Berkeley native, Ernie Broglio pitched for the Oakland Oaks until he was acquired by the New York Giants in 1956. After two seasons in the Giants' minor league system — where he won 17 games each year — Broglio was traded to the St. Louis Cardinals in October 1958. He went on to lead the National League with 21 wins in 1960 and win 18 games for the Cardinals in 1963. *Photo by Doug McWilliams.* **6** Vince DiMaggio with the Oaks, 1947. DiMaggio played with several PCL teams including the Seals, the Oaks, the Hollywood Stars and the Padres. He also had a nine-year career as a center fielder in the majors, the majority of it with the Pirates. He was named to the National League All-Star team in 1943 and 1944. *From the collection of Doug McWilliams.*



Six Italian American players on the "Nine Old Men" team, from left to right, Billy Raimondi, Ernie Lombardi, Billy Martin, Cookie Lavagetto, Les Scarsella, and Dario Lodigiani. *Courtesy of Diane Lodigiani.*

## Nine Old Men

WITH WORLD WAR II OVER, baseball fans in Oakland hungered for a championship, and 55-year-old Casey Stengel, recently fired as manager of the Boston Braves, was looking to revitalize his career. The two came together in 1946 and Stengel set out to build a winning Oaks team. It took until 1948, but by then Stengel had assembled a motley crew of ex-major leaguers and others that sports-writers nicknamed the "Nine Old Men." They included Italians Ernie Lombardi (Reds), Dario Lodigiani (White Sox), Cookie Lavagetto (Dodgers), Les Scarsella (Reds), Billy Raimondi (Oaks), and an 18-year old future Yankee named Billy Martin. Employing his platoon strategy, Casey constantly shifted his aging players to find winning combinations. Somehow it worked, and for the first time since 1927, the "Nine Old Men" of Oakland won the PCL championship. Many retired after that, but "old man" Stengel was hired to manage the NY Yankees, which he did, notching ten pennants and seven World Series victories in his twelve seasons.



Phil Rizzuto



Ernie Lombardi



Ron Santo

**“** I'll take any way to get into the Hall of Fame. If they want a batboy, I'll go in as a batboy.”  
— Phil Rizzuto



Roy Campanella



Eppa Rixey



Yogi Berra

**“** I guess the first thing I should do is thank everybody who made this day necessary...”  
— Yogi Berra,  
NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME INDUCTION SPEECH



Tony Lazzeri

**“** Baseball is a tremendous game not just when you become a professional, but as a little leaguer to be ... to just associate with the other boys in your neighborhood. And to learn the will to win, the American way of life.”  
— Roy Campanella,  
NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME INDUCTION SPEECH



Tommy Lasorda



Joe DiMaggio

## Baseball Immortality: The Hall of Fame

**T**HE HALL OF FAME HAD ITS BIRTH IN 1936 when baseball writers elected five players — Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson, and Walter Johnson — to be enshrined in a Cooperstown, NY facility, dedicated three years later to house them and other greats. Since then, election to the Hall of Fame has represented the summit of the sport, baseball's greatest tribute to, as of 2012, only 207 former Major Leaguers (plus another 90 managers, Negro Leaguers, umpires, and executives).

As might be expected, the first Italian American elected was Joe DiMaggio. He was chosen in 1955, even though he had not been retired the requisite five years — this because so many votes had been cast for him previously. After him there followed Phillies pitcher Eppa Rixey (Riccia) in 1963, Brooklyn Dodgers catcher Roy Campanella in 1969, and Yankees catcher Yogi Berra in 1972. Two players who had been retired far longer than five years came next: Cincinnati Reds catcher Ernie Lombardi in 1986 and Yankees second baseman Tony Lazzeri in 1991. Yankees shortstop Phil Rizzuto followed in 1994, and L.A. Dodgers Tom Lasorda was elected as a manager in 1997. Finally, in 2011, Chicago Cubs star third baseman Ron Santo became the 9th Italian American elected, one year after his death.



Roy Campanella making a speech at his Hall of Fame induction ceremony, 1969. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



Joe DiMaggio with his Hall of Fame plaque, 1955. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

With a long list of Italian American players and managers still waiting election, it seems certain that several more will receive this highest of honors. And while it is hazardous to speculate, NY Mets catcher Mike Piazza (most home runs ever by a catcher) and just-retired St. Louis Cardinals manager Tony La Russa (third in all-time wins by a manager; winning manager of three World Series) would have to be on a short list.

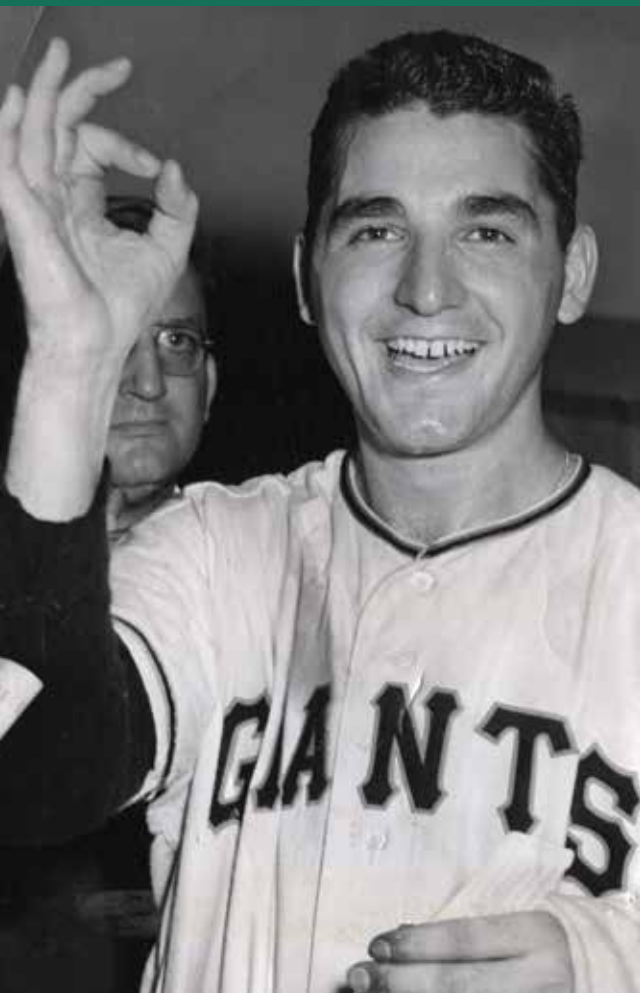


Phil Rizzuto poses at the Yankee spring training facilities in Florida, 1948. *The Rucker Archive/Transcendental Graphics*

### Phil Rizzuto

**LEGEND HAS IT THAT WHEN** Phil Rizzuto reported for a game early in his career, the guard wouldn't let him in, incredulous that someone so small could be a player. Even Casey Stengel, when he first saw Rizzuto trying out, said, "Go get a shoeshine box." The 5'6" Rizzuto soon proved both wrong. A great bunter, fielder and master of the double play, "The Scooter" anchored the Yankee infield throughout their dynastic years, 1941 to 1956. He also hit far better than expected, especially in 1949 when he finished second to Ted Williams for MVP, and in 1950 when he hit .324, and won MVP. Rizzuto may have achieved even more renown as a Yankee broadcaster, mixing his game calling with malapropisms, comments about cannoli, and his trademark comment, "Holy Cow!" — so popular it was used as a book title and on a 1992 Seinfeld show. After that, election to the Hall of Fame was a "shoe-in."

**“** Here's the windup, fastball, hit deep to right, this could be it! Way back there! Holy cow, he did it! Sixty-one for Maris! And look at the fight for that ball out there! Holy cow, what a shot! Another standing ovation for Maris, and they're still fighting for that ball out there, climbing over each other's backs. One of the greatest sights I've ever seen here at Yankee Stadium!" — Phil Rizzuto, on WCBS radio describing the new single-season home run record set by Roger Maris on October 1, 1961



## Legends and Lore: The 50s, 60s & 70s

**R**OGER KAHN CALLED THE POST-WWII ERA “the greatest age in baseball history.” Whether or not this was true outside New York, it surely was for Italian Americans. This was the period when the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers not only featured a host of Italian names on their rosters (DiMaggio, Berra, Rizzuto, Martin, Raschi; and Campanella, Furillo, Branca, Lavagetto, Gionfriddo), but also drew worldwide attention to those names in what came to be known as the “Subway Series.” Starting in 1947, the Yanks and Dodgers battled it out for supremacy in 1947, 1949, 1952, 1953, 1955 and 1956, with the Dodgers finally winning one in 1955. In between, the New York Giants, featuring pitchers Sal Maglie and Johnny Antonelli, fought both the Dodgers and the Yanks for the title. In possibly the most famous event in Major League history, Ralph Branca, relieving for the Dodgers on the last day of the 1951 season, served up a winning home run to Bobby Thomson — the “Shot Heard ‘round the World” — to propel the Giants into the Series against the Yankees, and Branca into baseball immortality. In the same year, Phil Cavarretta, after a record-setting career at first base, was named the Cubs’ player/manager—the first Italian American to hold that post. It was a sign of things to come.

But fame has its underside, and this was true for several players in the Golden Age. Branca’s enduring legacy has rested not on his great career but on that one pitch that lost the pennant. His teammate, master right fielder Carl Furillo, let his temper rule when he charged and throttled Giants’ manager Leo Durocher in 1953, ending up with a broken wrist. Though Furillo won the 1953 batting title with a .344 average, the memory of that brawl seems more lasting. Similar unfortunate events struck Red Sox star Tony Conigliaro (hit in the eye while crowding the plate, fatally marring his career) and Cleveland favorite Rocky Colavito (accused of responsibility for the Indians’ failure to win a pennant during his career.) All of which goes to show that not only does a baseball take funny bounces, so does the goddess known as *fortuna*.

ABOVE: **Johnny Antonelli** pitched for the Giants in Games Two and Four of the 1954 World Series, getting the Win and the Save, respectively. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* RIGHT PAGE: Brooklyn Dodger Roy Campanella hitting in the 1953 World Series, the same year he won the National League MVP. Behind him is Yankee catcher Yogi Berra. The Yankees beat the Dodgers 4-2 in the Series, with outstanding performances by Yogi Berra (.429 avg in 21 at bats) and Billy Martin (.500 avg in 24 at bats). *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*





Yogi Berra in NY Yankees road uniform, circa 1950. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



Yogi Berra

HE IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED one of the greatest catchers ever to play the game. The statistics back this up: MVP in 1951, 1954, 1955; the most RBIs, 1430, of any catcher; fifteen consecutive All-Star selections (1948–1962); 10 World Series championships with Series records for most games (75), at-bats (259), hits (71), doubles (10), and catcher put-outs (457). As manager he is one of a very few to lead both American and National League teams to the World Series.

But stats only begin to tell the story of Lawrence Peter Berra. The son of immigrants to St. Louis, Berra has become one of the most recognized figures in the world — with even a cartoon character, Yogi Bear, named after him. His aphorisms, such as “It ain’t over till it’s over,” are perennial favorites. More remarkable, these apparent malapropisms turn out to be deeply perceptive: the “ain’t over” comment was prophetic for the Mets who, virtually out of the pennant race when Yogi said it in July 1973, sprinted to win on the last day. It really wasn’t over. Perhaps this, besides the greatness of his hitting, is what should stick: the sharpness of his baseball mind. Craig Biggio once said of him, “He’s the smartest baseball man I’ve ever been around.” Thus it may be that the boyhood friends who nicknamed him “Yogi,” knew more than he, or anyone else, realized.



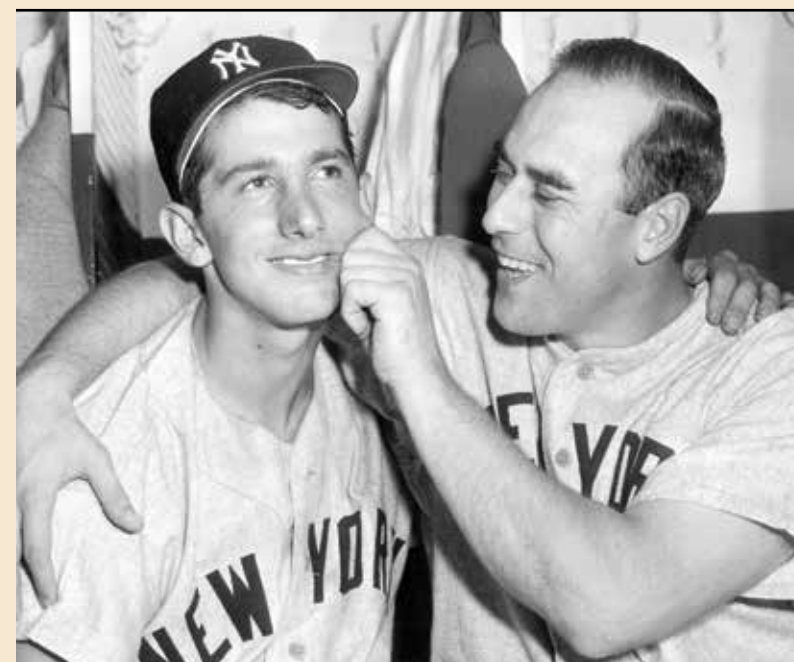
A member of seven National League champions from 1947 to 1959, Carl Furillo batted over .300 five times, winning the 1953 batting title with a .344 average — then the highest by a right-handed Dodger since 1900. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York*

## The Emperor of Right Field

THE TITLE PHRASE IS ROGER KAHN’S. He meant that together with Carl Furillo’s knowledge of precisely how to play a ball hit to right in Ebbets Field, the “Reading Rifle” had a furious right arm able to throw out runners at first. Also a standout hitter, Furillo’s best year was 1953 when he won the batting title with a .344 average. That year was memorable for another reason: 1953 was the year Furillo erupted to throttle Giants’ manager Leo Durocher. In 1949, Durocher and Herman Franks both warned Furillo before a game that the Giants’ pitchers would be aiming for his skull. Sure enough, a Sheldon Jones pitch struck Furillo’s head, hospitalizing him with a concussion. When, in 1953, Durocher’s shout from the dugout to pitcher Ruben Gomez to “stick it in his ear” got Furillo hit again, Furillo boiled over. He took his walk to first, but then charged Durocher in the Giant dugout, throttling him in a headlock. As other players tried to pull him away, one stomped Furillo’s hand, cracking it. His season was ended; though he still won the batting title, Furillo was unable to help his Dodgers in their World Series loss to the New York Yankees. That injury, added to his firing by the now – L.A. Dodgers after another injury in 1960, left Furillo “bitter about baseball.” Though he won his illegal-firing lawsuit against the Dodgers, his baseball career, including coaching or managerial jobs, was finished for good.



“My best pitch is anything the batter grounds, lines, or pops in the direction of Rizzuto.”  
— Vic Raschi, Yankee pitcher



TOP: **Phil Rizzuto** fires to first to make the final out in the first game of the 1955 World Series. BOTTOM: **Vic Raschi** hugs **Billy Martin** in the locker room, circa 1953. Raschi pitched for the New York Yankees on five straight World Series champion teams from 1949 to 1953, winning 21 games three years in a row. Nicknamed “The Springfield Rifle” for his powerful arm, the West Springfield, Massachusetts native had a 132-66 lifetime record with 26 shutouts. *Both photos: National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



Roy Campanella, circa 1950s. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



Roy Campanella

ROGER KAHN DESCRIBED Roy Campanella as “a little sumo wrestler of a man.” The Dodgers’ catcher may have looked fat, but he was all muscle. He was all ballplayer too, signed at age 15 to play in the Negro Leagues (though his father was Sicilian, his mother was African American and that barred him from the Majors until after Jackie Robinson broke the barrier). Once on the Dodgers, Campanella played in every All-Star game from 1949 through 1956. He was named MVP in 1951, 1953 and 1955, batting over .300 and hitting over 30 home runs each time. Overall, he threw out the highest percentage of base stealers, 57%, in major league history.

Campy’s career ended tragically when an ice-driven car accident in early 1958 paralyzed him from the shoulders down. Yet his courage in living with his disability may have elicited more admiration than his Hall of Fame stardom. What he said about baseball probably expressed both perfectly:

“You gotta be a man to play baseball for a living, but you gotta have a lot of little boy in you, too.”

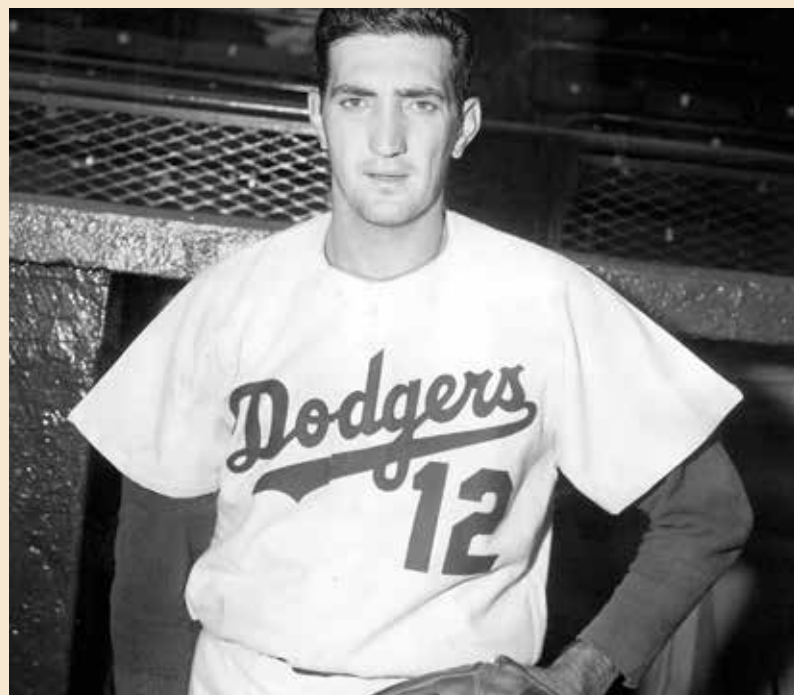


Sal "The Barber" Maglie warming up for a NY Giants game in August, 1951. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

**The Barber** EVEN WITH THE SHORTAGE of players due to World War II, Sal Maglie, deferred for a sinus condition, had trouble breaking into baseball. At 28 he was still a rookie pitcher for the New York Giants with a 5-4 record. But then he was invited to pitch in Cuba under manager Dolf Luque.

There, and in Mexico later, Luque taught Maglie to become the fearsome pitcher he would be known as: tough, competitive, and always ready to hurl a curveball that grazed a batter's chin. Hence his nickname, "The Barber."

Back with the Giants in 1950, Maglie compiled the first of several winning records. And in 1951, when Bobby Thomson's "Shot Heard 'round the World" won the pennant, Maglie not only won 23 games, but pitched the first eight innings of that historic game. Oddly, it was also Maglie, this time pitching for the Dodgers in 1956, who pitched in the World Series against Don Larsen's no-hitter. Maglie's role in those games is almost forgotten. What has never been forgotten is what made him great: his persistence, his toughness in critical ballgames, his curveball, according to Roy Campanella, "the best curveball I ever caught," and, of course, the capstone of his career: the no-hitter he threw two weeks before Larsen's, on September 25, 1956 against the Philadelphia Phillies.



Ralph Branca at Ebbets Field, 1952. Considering it unlucky, Ralph Branca forsook the number 13 that he wore in the 1951 season for the number 12 in 1952, but resumed wearing 13 in 1953. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## The Shot Heard 'round the World

**D**ODGER PITCHER RALPH BRANCA MADE THE ALL-STAR team three times, winning 21 games in 1947, his best year. 1947 was also a best year in another sense: when Jackie Robinson became the first African American to line up with the Dodgers on Opening Day, Branca, unlike many other Dodgers, lined up beside him. Fate, however, made 1951 Branca's most famous year — the year of the "Shot Heard 'round the World." The battle for the pennant between the Dodgers and the NY Giants came down to the last game of a three-game playoff. With the Dodgers leading 4-2 in the 9th inning, manager Dressen signaled to the bullpen for a reliever. Branca and Carl Erskine were warming up, but coach Clyde Sukeforth recommended Branca because Erskine's curveballs looked erratic. On Branca's second pitch, Bobby Thomson blasted a three-run homer to left field. Game over, series over, season over — and for Branca, a pitch that would haunt his whole life. "Why me?" he later asked his priest, who responded, "God knew you were strong enough to bear this cross."

In truth, it turned out to be more than divine intervention. Branca later learned the Giants had set up a high-powered telescope to steal the pitching signs, letting the batter know what was coming. Though discovery of the scheme doesn't change the outcome, it does soften the notoriety endured for so long by a very fine pitcher named Branca.



**1** An eight-time All-Star, **Frank Malzone** also won three straight Gold Glove Awards (1957–1959), including the first Gold Glove for a third basemen in MLB history. After 35 years as a Boston scout, he now serves as a player development consultant for the Red Sox. **2** On April 15, 1958, All-Star **Gino Cimoli** made history as the first Major League batter to step into the batter's box on the West Coast when the LA Dodgers and the San Francisco Giants played their first game of the season at Seals Stadium in San Francisco. **3** **Joe Garagiola** interviewing boyhood friend, Yogi Berra, 1955. Garagiola was a major league catcher from 1946–1954, but is best known for long broadcasting career and colorful personality. His son, Joe Garagiola, Jr., is the senior VP of standards and on-field operations for Major League Baseball. He was also the GM of the Arizona Diamondbacks. **4** **Don Mossi** was a left-handed pitcher in the Major Leagues from 1954–1965. He was an American League All-Star in 1957 and is still the Detroit Tigers All-Time leader in Walks Allowed per 9 Innings Pitched (1.75) and Strikeouts to Walks (2.87). **5** **"Diamond Jim" Gentile** was a six-time All-Star. On May 9, 1961 he became the fourth MLB player to hit two grand slams in one game. To date, there have been only thirteen players to achieve that feat. **6** Nine-time All-Star, **Rocky Colavito**, had eleven consecutive 20-home run seasons ('56–'66), was a Cleveland icon and adored by Indian fans. His 1960 trade to Detroit devastated them. In 1994, when the Indians had failed to win a pennant in 40 years, sportswriter Terry Pluto wrote *The Curse of Rocky Colavito*, blaming Cleveland's years of mediocrity on the Colavito trade. Though they have since won two pennants, Cleveland has not won the World Series since 1948. *All photos: National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



Boston Red Sox right fielder, Tony Conigliaro. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

**The Prodigy** TONY CONIGLIARO COULD be called a baseball prodigy: in his first at bat with his hometown Boston Red Sox, he hit a home run, going on to hit 24 home runs in 1964, his rookie season. He was 19 years old. At age 22, the right fielder became the youngest American League player to hit 100 home runs, and seemed destined for greatness. His problem was crowding the plate — a way for a batter to narrow the area pitchers can target. Pitchers always try to "brush" such batters back, aiming at Conigliaro so much he suffered several broken bones. Yet he refused to back off, even though the great Ted Williams sent him a message: "Tony is crowding the plate. He's much too close. It's serious time now." The very next day, August 18, 1967, Angels' pitcher Jack Hamilton threw an inside fastball that hit Conigliaro in the left eye and cheekbone. The injury kept Conigliaro out of the World Series and permanently impaired his vision. Even after his standout year of 1970, the Red Sox traded him to the California Angels. He gutted it out until 1975 but was never the same.

In 1982, Conigliaro suffered a heart attack leading to irreversible brain damage. The one-time prodigy finally succumbed in 1990. He was only 45.





Cubs third baseman, Ron Santo. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



**Ron Santo**

RON SANTO WAS A NINE-TIME All-Star, as good a hitter as he was a defensive third baseman (five consecutive Gold Glove Awards, league leader numerous times in putouts and assists), and yet he died in 2010 without making it into the Hall of Fame. Some people attribute this to his famous heel-clicking routine done at the end of Cubs' victories — a display many considered 'showboating' even though Santo's manager, Leo Durocher, ordered him to continue it as a morale booster after his first heel-click celebration in 1969. Some say it was because the Cubs never played in the postseason. Whatever the reason, Santo's Hall of Fame election in December of 2011 was virtually unanimous. It memorializes a player (and Cubs' announcer for 21 years) who had already made it into the hearts of Cubs' fans: when his Number 10 uniform was retired in 2003, Santo declared to thousands of cheering fans, "This is my Hall of Fame."



John "The Count" Montefusco pitching for the San Francisco Giants, circa late 1970s. He is one of only a handful of pitchers to hit a home run in his first at bat (September 3, 1974). *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## The No-Hitters

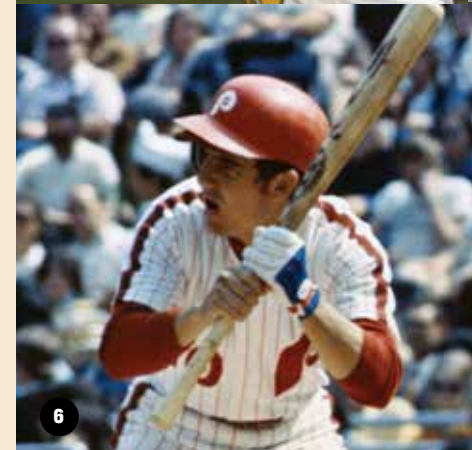
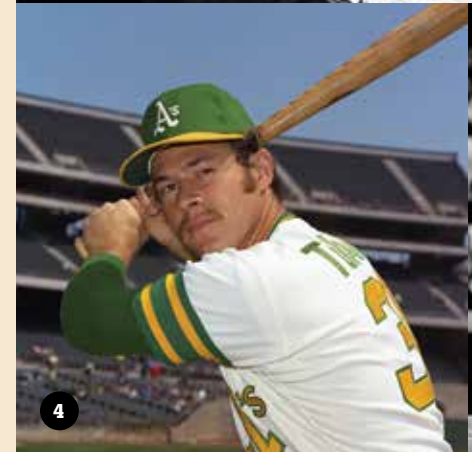
IT IS ONE OF THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS IN BASEBALL. That's why when Brooklyn Dodger Sal Maglie shut down the Philadelphia Phillies on September 25, 1956, it was not only a personal triumph, but one shared by Italian Americans like those of the Italian Tripoli Club of Perth Amboy, NJ, whose telegram said: "Your courage and ability certainly makes us proud." It's also why when San Francisco's John "the Count" Montefusco pitched a no-hitter in September 1976, he never forgot how it felt: "In the eighth and ninth innings, anybody they would have sent up, I would have gotten out. That's how good I felt. I wish everybody could have that feeling."

While not everyone could, Yankee Dave Righetti had a similar feeling on July 4, 1983 pitching against the Red Sox. Righetti recalled his fear that Boston's great Wade Boggs would spoil his gem in the ninth inning. Instead, "The last slider I ended up throwing, he happened to miss it. Thank goodness."



Chris Bosio, the Carmichael, California, native was only the second pitcher in Seattle Mariners' history to pitch a no-hitter. Bosio is currently a pitching coach for the Chicago Cubs. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

The most recent no-hitter by an Italian American also came against the Red Sox. On April 22, 1993, Seattle Mariner Chris Bosio walked the first two batters, and retired the next 27 in a row. Like Montefusco and Righetti, Bosio found the experience almost transcendent: "It's a feeling I'll probably never have again. Something came over me...I kind of froze. Guys started to mob me. I didn't know where I was."



**1 Dave "Rags" Righetti** pitching for the Yankees, circa 1980s. Currently the pitching coach for the San Francisco Giants, Righetti was the first player in history to both pitch a no-hitter and also lead the league in saves during his career. **2 Joe Pepitone**, the gregarious first baseman and outfielder played most of his career for the New York Yankees. During that time, he was named to play in three All-Star Games and also won three Gold Glove awards. **3** San Mateo native and major league shortstop, **Jim Fregosi**, was an eight-time All-Star, won the Gold Glove in 1967, and holds the Angels' franchise record with 70 career triples. Later as manager, he guided the Angels to their first-ever postseason appearance in 1979, and in 1993 managed the Philadelphia Phillies to the National League pennant. **4** One of the top catchers of his era, **Gene Tenace**, whose real name is Fiore Gino Tennaci, won the 1972 World Series MVP Award and was an All-Star in 1975. He is tied for third in OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage) with Johnny Bench and Joe Torre, behind only Roy Campanella and Yogi Berra. *Photo by Doug McWilliams.* **5** **Sal Bando**, the four-time All-Star third baseman at bat for the Oakland A's, circa 1970s. During the A's championship years of 1971–75, he captained the team and led the club in RBIs three times. He retired in 1981 among the all-time leaders in games, assists, and double plays at his position. His brother, Chris Bando, was a catcher for the Cleveland Indians. **6** Sacramento born **Larry Bowa** is a five-time All-Star shortstop who spent most of his 15-year career with the Phillies, winning two Gold Glove Awards and leading the National League in fielding percentage six times — then a league record. Bowa then managed the Padres and later the Phillies, where he was named NL Manager of the Year in 2001. He also had a long coaching career. **7** **Ray Fosse**, a two-time All-Star catcher and Gold Glove winner (1970 and 1971), made his mark in the 1973 American League Championship series catching for the A's, when he threw out five would-be base stealers. *Photo by Doug McWilliams.* All photos: *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* Except Fregosi: *The Rucker Archive/Transcendental Graphics.*



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## The Modern Era

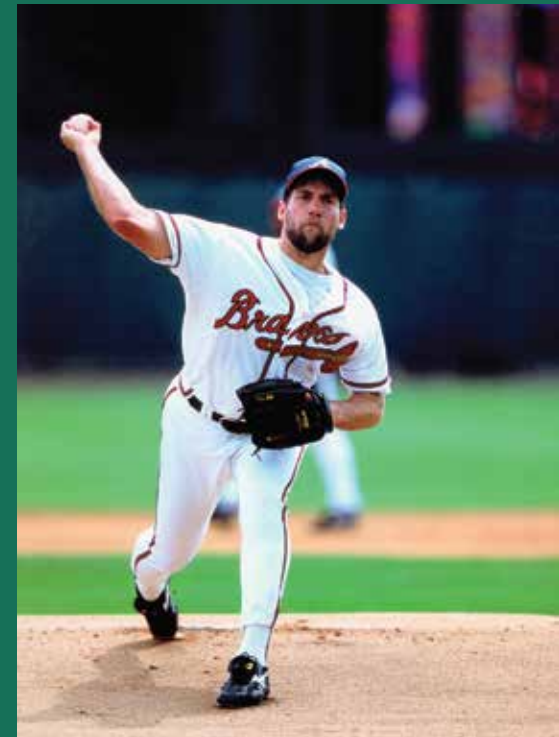
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**D**ESPITE AN ETHNIC REVIVAL STARTING in the late 1960s, there can be little doubt that Italian Americans of this era had mostly left the world of their immigrant forebears. Many modern ballplayers grew up not in crowded cities but in the suburbs. Most felt less prejudice, less need to “prove” themselves, and less sense of their Italian-ness, especially those of mixed ethnicity. For many, their names alone — Jack Clark, John Smoltz, Nick Swisher, Andy Pettitte — would fail to indicate an Italian connection. Yet that connection persisted, especially for those like Mike Piazza, whose relationship to Tommy Lasorda — a boyhood friend of Piazza’s father — led to a 1988 contract for Piazza to play for Lasorda’s Los Angeles Dodgers.

Ethnic or not, the roster of Italian American Major Leaguers continued to grow in all areas of the sport. Some, like MVPs Jason Giambi, Ken Caminiti, Dustin Pedroia and Joey Votto have continued to excel, though not so frequently as before. Too, great pitchers have emerged from Italian American ranks: “Count” Montefusco, Dave Righetti and Chris Bosio threw no-hitters, while John Smoltz anchored the champion pitching trio of the Atlanta Braves for several years. And some went on to find their niche among the coaches, managers, umpires and front-office men so vital to the sport.

In many ways, these trends mirrored the progress into the mainstream by the Italian American population at large. Rather than struggle for acceptance as players, Italian Americans in baseball could now count on full acceptance as managers and general managers, and even owners, like Mark Attanasio of the Milwaukee Brewers and Robert Castellini of the Cincinnati Reds.

Finally, with the 1988 elevation of A. Bartlett Giamatti to baseball’s highest office as the game’s Commissioner, one could say, in a reflection of Giamatti’s own words, that Italian immigrants had made it home — their lasting imprint now on every phase of the national pastime.



ABOVE: **John Smoltz**, the Cy Young Award winning pitcher played 20 of his 21 years as a major league pitcher with the Braves, winning the 1992 NLCS MVP award, the 1997 Silver Slugger, the 2005 Lou Gehrig Award, and was an eight-time All-Star. He is the only pitcher in major league history to top both 200 wins and 150 saves. He became the 16th member of the 3,000 Strikeout Club on April 22, 2008. He is currently an active sportscaster. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

LEFT PAGE: Playing his entire 20-year career with the Houston Astros, **Craig Biggio** was the only baseball player ever to be named an All-Star both as a catcher and as a second baseman. He played in 7 All Star games, won the Gold Glove 4 times, and the Silver Slugger 5 times. He was also the recipient of three prestigious awards — the Hutch, the Roberto Clemente, and the Heart and Hustle — for his spirit, drive, and contribution to his team and community. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*



Billy Martin as manager of the Oakland A's, circa 1980. Photo by Doug McWilliams. National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.

## Billy Ball

HAVING ALREADY MANAGED the New York Yankees, Minnesota, Detroit, and Texas, Billy Martin in 1980 returned to his East Bay roots (born in Berkeley) to manage the floundering Oakland A's. The A's had lost 108 games the year before and owner Charlie Finley tapped Martin because of his reputation for rescuing no-talent clubs. It worked. In one season, Martin turned the A's into winners, with 83 wins and a near-victory in the American League West — which they did win the next year. He accomplished this with what sportswriter Ralph Wiley called "Billy Ball."

Billy Ball involved many things, mostly surprise. Martin had his players stealing bases at a pace hardly ever seen in the Majors. He regularly amplified the theft, ordering double steals, suicide squeezes (stealing home on a bunt), and assorted sleights of hand like the hidden-ball trick. Martin had everyone, even slower-than-average players, stealing bases and mastering fundamentals. With hardly any relief pitchers, he also had his starters pitching complete games at a record pace — 94 complete games in 1980.

The A's fired Billy Martin at the end of the 1982 season at least partly for overworking his pitchers. But for two glorious seasons, Billy Ball had the A's and much of the baseball world believing that nothing was impossible.



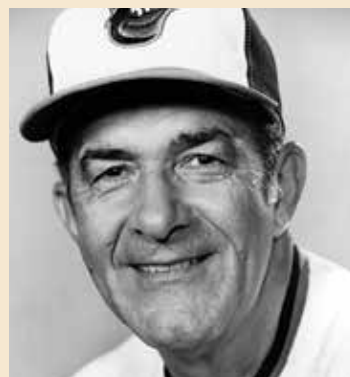
Joe Girardi, manager of the NY Yankees, guided his team to a World Series victory in 2009. Photo by Keith Allison.

## Managers at the Heights

**T**HOUGH IT STARTED WITH PHIL CAVARRETTA in 1951, the avalanche of Italian American managers did not begin until Cookie Lavagetto piloted the Washington Senators from 1957 to 1961. Three years later, Yogi Berra became manager of the New York Yankees, and recorded the first pennant for an Italian American skipper. After losing the World Series, though, Yogi was fired. Berra then proved he could manage in the other league, taking the Mets to the pennant in 1973, going back to the Yankees as a coach, and resuming managerial duties when George Steinbrenner fired Billy Martin for the third time in 1983.

By then, Italian Americans were on their way to dominating the managerial ranks. Tommy Lasorda became L.A. Dodgers manager in 1976, and in 1977 took part, with Yankees manager Billy Martin, in the first Series in which both managers were of Italian descent. It happened again in 1988 (Lasorda's Dodgers beating La Russa's Oakland A's); in 2000 (Joe Torre's NY Yankees beating Bobby Valentine's NY Mets); and in 2004 (Terry Francona's Boston Red Sox beating La Russa's St. Louis Cardinals).

Nor was this all: Lasorda's Dodgers had also won in 1981, Torre's Yankees in 1998 and 1999, La Russa's Cardinals in 2006 and 2011, and Francona's Red Sox in 2007. With Joe Altobelli (Baltimore Orioles, 1983), Mike Scioscia (Anaheim Angels, 2002) and Joe Girardi (NY Yankees, 2009) filling out the picture, the World Series from the 1980s on could almost be said to belong to managers of Italian descent. Between 1981 and 2011, fourteen of the World Series winning managers were Italian American.



Joe Altobelli, who managed the San Francisco Giants from 1977 through 1979, took the Baltimore Orioles to a World Series victory in 1983. National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.



**1 Bobby Valentine**, the newly named manager of the Boston Red Sox gives a press interview, December 2011. Valentine has also managed the Texas Rangers (1985–1992), and the New York Mets (1996–2002), whom he led to a National League pennant in 2000. Valentine's Mets lost the 2000 "Subway Series" to Joe Torre's Yankees four games to one. Photo by Aaron Frutman. **2 Joe Maddon**, whose original family name was "Madonnini", is currently the manager of the Tampa Bay Rays. He was named American League Manager of the Year in 2008 and 2011. He guided the Rays to the AL pennant in 2008, and was the bench coach of the 2002 Anaheim Angels when they defeated the SF Giants in the World Series. In April 2012, he won his 500th career game as manager of the Tampa Bay Rays. Photo by Keith Allison. **3** In 2004, as manager of the Boston Red Sox, **Terry Francona** succeeded in breaking the "Curse of the Bambino" guiding his team to their first World Series victory since 1918, and won another World Series three years later. In 2011, he was fired by the Red Sox and replaced with Bobby Valentine. He is currently taking over Valentine's previous position as an analyst with ESPN. Photo by Keith Allison. **4 Mike Scioscia**, manager of the L.A. Angels of Anaheim, congratulates his team on a victory over the Baltimore Orioles, September 18, 2011. On May 8, 2011 Scioscia became the 56th manager to win 1,000 or more games and just the 23rd to have all 1,000 or more victories with a single team. He was honored with the American League Manager of the Year Award in 2002 and 2009. Photo by Keith Allison.



Tommy Lasorda during the 1981 World Series. National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.



## Tommy Lasorda

THOMAS CHARLES LASORDA did not set the Major Leagues on fire as a player. The Norristown, PA native pitched for only two years with the Brooklyn Dodgers, then a season with the Kansas City A's and the NY Yankees, before playing out his career with the minor league Montreal Royals. After that, Lasorda returned to the Dodgers as a scout, and then as a third-base coach under Dodger manager Walter Alston. When Alston retired in 1976, Lasorda took over, and came into his own. His 20-year career as Dodger manager yielded two World Series championships (1981 and 1988), four National League pennants, and eight division titles. When Lasorda retired in 1996, he had compiled almost 1600 managerial wins, 16th in Major League history. The next year he was voted into the Hall of Fame, the Dodgers retired his uniform number (#2), and a street in Dodgertown was renamed "Tommy Lasorda Lane." Having spent over 60 years as a Dodger, his statement that "I bleed Dodger blue and when I die, I'm going to the big Dodger in the sky" seemed both jocular and fully justified. Such statements have made Lasorda the most quotable Italian American sports figure since Yogi Berra. Perhaps the all-time favorite is this:



When we win, I'm so happy, I eat a lot. When we lose, I'm so depressed, I eat a lot. When we're rained out, I'm so disappointed, I eat a lot."



Buzzie Bavasi in 1981. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## Buzzie's Boss

EMIL JOSEPH BAVASI WAS BORN in Manhattan in 1914, but his sister renamed him "Buzzie" because he was "always buzzing around." He kept buzzing for 93 years, mostly in baseball's front office. Along the way he racked up such achievements as leading the Dodgers to eight pennants and four World Series championships in his eighteen years as General Manager. He was a trailblazer in racial integration when, as GM for the Dodgers' Nashua, NH farm club, he welcomed and fought for Don Newcombe and Roy Campanella. He also pioneered baseball's move to the West Coast, ending as part-owner of the San Diego Padres.

It was while he was running the Padres that he ran into the buzz saw that was his aging mother. Since money was scarce, each time the Padres got a valuable player, Bavasi would sell him. During a few years in the 1970s, Bavasi sold Al Santorini, Al Ferrara and Ed Spiezio. Then his phone rang.

"Am I next?" a voice asked before hanging up.

It was Bavasi's mother calling from Florida. Bavasi called her back.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"Well, you sold three Italians in a row. I figured I was next."

Bavasi continued in baseball management for several more years and no doubt fired more Italian American players, but never, apparently, his mother. No doubt he knew who was really the boss.



Angelo Bartlett "Bart" Giamatti, circa 1989. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## Bart Giamatti

**Y**OU MIGHT THINK THAT A RENAISSANCE SCHOLAR who had become president of Yale University would have reached his aspirational summit. But A. Bartlett Giamatti was not just any scholar and, as a sports fan, had never forgotten his true aim: "All I ever wanted to be president of was the American League." Though he didn't exactly get his wish — he was named president of the National League in 1986 — he shortly did even better. In 1988, Bart Giamatti was elected to a five-year term as baseball's top official, the Commissioner of Baseball. Though his term was cut short by his untimely death, Giamatti's one year as Commissioner, coupled with his brilliant writings about baseball and sports in general, left an indelible impression on the way Americans think of their national pastime.

After a heartbreaking 1978 loss ending the pennant hopes of his Boston Red Sox, Giamatti wrote this on baseball:

“It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone.”



Paul DePodesta, Vice-President of Player Development and Scouting for the New York Mets and a key "Moneyball" figure, speaks at the CCH User Conference in San Antonio, Texas, November 2011. *Photo by Bill Sheridan.*

## The Man Behind Moneyball

**W**HEN PAUL DePODESTA GRADUATED FROM HARVARD with a degree in economics, he could have gone straight to Wall Street. He chose baseball instead. As described in the book by Michael Lewis, *Moneyball*, DePodesta became Billy Beane's Assistant General Manager in charge of scouting for the Oakland Athletics. What he did was to change the way young talent was located and evaluated — using ideas first announced by Bill James in his book, *1977 Baseball Abstract*.

That is, Paul DePodesta used statistics in a way not possible before the age of the Internet. As *Moneyball* puts it, Billy Beane's idea about where to find major league players was "inside Paul's computer." With complete stats about college players online, DePodesta found future A's by surfing the Internet. He called it "performance scouting" — stats based not on what a player looks like to a scout, but on what a player had done. The most valuable indicator became not batting average or RBIs, but on-base percentage — a statistic that included walks.

With player salaries a fraction of other teams', the A's finished first in their division in 2002. DePodesta then went on to do the same job for the L.A. Dodgers, San Diego Padres and now for the New York Mets. It appears that moneyball, and DePodesta, are here to stay.



Joe Torre with the St. Louis Cardinals, running the bases, circa 1970. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## Joe Torre

JOE TORRE NEVER MANAGED to reach the postseason as a player. This doesn't reflect on his ability as a player: he was an All-Star selection nine times, National League MVP in 1971 when he also won the batting title, and a standout catcher. It means he never played — as a Brave, a Cardinal, or a Met — with a winning team. Torre's first managerial stints were similar: fired by the NY Mets after five years without a winning season; fired by the St. Louis Cardinals in 1995 for failing to get to the playoffs. Even when first hired as Yankee manager in 1996, Torre was ridiculed in the New York Press as "Clueless Joe."

Then the Yankees under Torre started to click. By the time the Yankees had beaten the Atlanta Braves in the 1996 World Series, Torre's dark visage had become a national icon. Torre led the Yankees to 11 more playoff appearances, three consecutive World Series victories (1998, 1999, 2000) and a place, for his 1998 Yankee team, among the best teams ever.

But when Yankee owner Steinbrenner cut Torre's pay for the 2008 season, Torre refused, and chose to manage the L.A. Dodgers. Torre's wins rose to 2,326, fifth on the all-time managerial wins list. Not bad for a kid from Brooklyn who took 35 years (after his 1961 rookie year) to even reach the playoffs.



Mike Piazza in Los Angeles Dodgers catching gear, circa 1990s. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.*

## The Monster

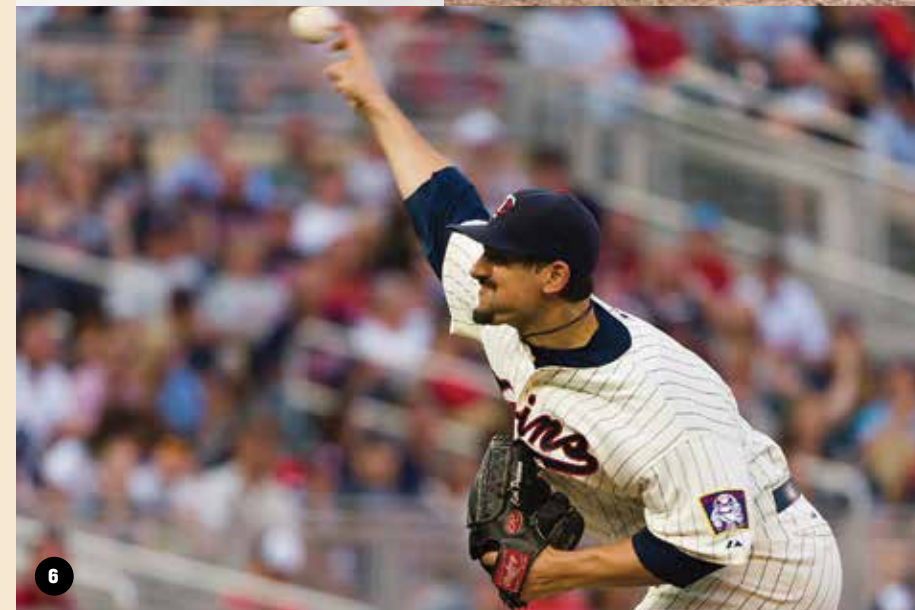
AS EARLY AS AGE FIVE, MIKE Piazza was being groomed by his father — a frustrated ballplayer — to become a major leaguer. At twelve, the boy practiced constantly in his backyard batting cage, once even getting lessons from Ted Williams. Then in 1988, L.A. Dodger manager Tommy Lasorda, a family friend, drafted

Mike, arranging for him to attend a special camp for catchers in the Dominican Republic. By 1992, Piazza was ready, and he broke in with the Dodgers. In his first full year, 1993, he won the Major League Rookie of the Year Award. Four years later, in 1997, he hit .362, with 40 home runs, 124 RBIs, and a second-place finish for MVP for the second straight year.

Piazza played for the New York Mets starting in 1999, and led them to the playoffs that year, and to the World Series in 2000. Though the Mets lost that Series, Piazza's fierce hitting earned him the nickname "The Monster" after a Mets' coach was overheard saying, "The Monster is out of the cage." Piazza ended up playing seven seasons for the Mets. In assessing his teammate, Mets pitcher Tom Glavine called Piazza a "first-ballot Hall of Famer, certainly the best-hitting catcher of our era, and arguably the best-hitting catcher of all time." Were it not for suspicions of steroid use (and possibly even in spite of them) Piazza, with the most home runs ever (396) as a catcher, would make that Hall of Fame prediction inevitable.



1 **Jason Giambi** at bat with the Yankees, 2008. The first baseman was the AL MVP in 2000 while with the Oakland A's, is a five-time All-Star, and has won the Silver Slugger award twice. In 2007, he publicly apologized for having taken steroids, and said that baseball — "players, ownership, everybody" — had made a mistake by not owning up and dealing with the problem earlier. He is now with the Colorado Rockies. *Photo by Keith Allison.* 2 **Mike Aldrete** as a Giant, c. 1987. The former first baseman and outfielder had a 10-year career in the major leagues. He played in the Bay Area for the San Francisco Giants from 1986–1988 and also for the A's in the mid-1990s. He is currently the Bench Coach for the St. Louis Cardinals. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* 3 Third baseman **Robin Ventura** in 1990. As a player, Ventura played for the White Sox, Mets, Yankees and Dodgers. He was selected twice to the AL All-Star team and won the AL Gold Glove award six times. On October 6, 2011, he was named manager of the Chicago White Sox. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* 4 **Mark Loretta** playing second base for the Dodgers in the National League Division Series, October 2009. Loretta was a two-time All-Star, won the 2004 Silver Slugger and the 2006 Hutch Award given to the MLB player who best exemplifies the fighting spirit and competitive desire of Fred Hutchinson. He bounced back to a successful baseball career after being treated for malignant melanoma in 2005 and has since become an advocate for skin-cancer prevention. *Photo by Eric D. Danielson.*



1 **Andy Pettitte** pitching for the New York Yankees in a game against the A's, May 29, 2000. The starting pitcher has played for sixteen years in the major leagues, primarily for the Yankees. He has won five World Series championships with the Yankees and is a three-time All-Star. He ranks as the MLB's all-time postseason wins leader with 19. He is of Italian and Cajun descent. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York. Rob Tringali, Jr., photographer.* 2 **John Franco** pitching for the NY Mets, 1998. The four-time All-Star had a 21-year career (1984–2005), playing for the Cincinnati Reds, the New York Mets, and the Houston Astros. His 1,119 career games pitched is an NL record, and is ranked third in major league history. His 424 career saves ranked second in major league history when he retired, and remain the most by a left-hander. He also won the Lou Gehrig prize in 2001 given to the MLB player who best exemplifies Gehrig's character and integrity both on and off the field. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* 3 **Mike Scioscia** was a catcher for the LA Dodgers from 1980 through 1992. He was selected to two All-Star games and won two World Series over the course of his 13-year MLB career with the Dodgers. He has been the manager of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim since the 2000 season — making him the longest-tenured manager in Major League Baseball. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* 4 **Rich Aurilia** playing shortstop for the San Francisco Giants, late 1990s. Aurilia played much of his 14-year major league career with the Giants — from 1995–2003 and from 2007–2009. In 2001 he was elected to the National League All Star team and won the Silver Slugger award that same year. He retired in April, 2010, and is currently a member of Comcast SportsNet Bay Area. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* 5 Three-time All-Star third baseman, **Ken Caminiti**, at bat for the Padres, circa 1996. Caminiti, who also won 3 Gold Glove Awards while playing for the Padres was unanimously selected as the National League's MVP in 1996. After a long struggle with substance and steroid abuse, the gifted athlete tragically died of a drug overdose in 2004. *National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, New York.* 6 **Carl Pavano** pitching for the Minnesota Twins, 2011. He made his major league debut in 1998 with the Montreal Expos. He was a National League All-Star in 2004 and led the American League in complete games and shutouts in 2010. He achieved 100 wins on June 3, 2011. © 2011 Ben Krause.



Dustin Pedroia of the Boston Red Sox at bat against the Baltimore Orioles on September 28, 2011. In 4 at-bats, he scored one run, made three hits, two RBIs and one double play. Photo by Keith Allison.

**Dustin Pedroia** AT 5'9" DUSTIN PEDROIA IS ONE of the smallest players in baseball. Yet many consider him the most important player on the Red Sox. This is not just because Pedroia has won awards: Rookie of the Year in 2007, and, in 2008, American League MVP. It's because Pedroia displays a dedication to his craft that is remarkable even among professional ballplayers.

In June 2010, for example, Pedroia fouled off a pitch that broke a bone in his foot. The Red Sox put him on the disabled list, with doctor's orders to avoid putting weight on the foot for two weeks. But so concerned was Pedroia about his fielding skills that he continued to practice fielding ground balls — on his knees. Only orders from the Red Sox top brass were sufficient to stop him.

Such dedication pertains in all he does. The season after his injury he drove himself to the best numbers of his career, with a .307 batting average, and an on-base percentage of .387 that included 21 home runs and 26 stolen bases. Add this to his league-leading fielding skills, and it's hard not to see Dustin Pedroia as a throwback to the likes of Rizzuto and Lazzeri.



Tony La Russa speaks during an emotional celebration for the Cardinals' 11th World Series victory, October 30, 2011, in St. Louis. This was La Russa's third World Series victory as manager. He announced his retirement the following day. Photo by Ed Szczepanski. Courtesy of Tony La Russa.

## 2011 World Series

**E**VEN IF THE GOLDEN AGE OF ITALIAN AMERICAN baseball players is gone, the 2011 World Series left a reminder of that glowing era in the figures of two Italian Americans. Mike Napoli led the Texas Rangers in the Series with clutch hitting and fielding, while Tony La Russa's win put the cap on one of the great managerial careers in baseball.

Acquired by the Rangers in January 2011, Napoli led the Rangers in the Series with a .350 average and two home runs. His greatest moment came in Game 5, when his double in the 8th gave the Rangers a 4-2 win, with one victory needed to take the Series. Had the Rangers prevailed, Napoli would have been a good bet for Series MVP.

Instead, La Russa rallied his underdog Cardinals twice in the last two games, notably in Game 6 when St. Louis fell behind Texas five times, yet rallied to win. The comebacks were typical of the 2011 Cardinals who, from 10 1/2 games behind, squeaked into the playoffs and then beat everyone. For La Russa personally, the Series win capped a record-setting 33-year managerial career — third on the all-time wins list (2,728), one of only two managers in history to win the World Series in both leagues. When he announced his retirement after the Series celebration, some of his players — "grown men", in his words — wept.



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1 Texas Rangers catcher, **Mike Napoli**, was a crowd favorite at the plate throughout the 2011 post-season. Chants of Na-PO-li, Na-PO-li resounded as he stepped up to the plate. Courtesy of the Texas Rangers. 2 **Barry Zito** pitching in a Giants-Padres game, 2011. Zito won the 2002 AL Cy Young Award and made three All-Star teams with the A's. He is well known for the dramatic difference between his performances before and after the All-Star break, making him one of the best second-half of the season pitchers in MLB history. He is also one of the best pitchers in recent memory at giving his team a chance to win the games he starts, coming into the 2012 season with a record of 111-6 when getting at least 4 runs of support. ©2011 San Francisco Giants. 3 **Nick Swisher** celebrating a victory over the Baltimore Orioles on August 31, 2009, with Robinson Cano (#24) and Derek Jeter. The 2010 All-Star, currently an outfielder and first baseman for the Yankees, was drafted by the A's in 2002 and is featured in Michael Lewis' book *Moneyball*; Swisher was notable as one of the few examples of a player who both traditional scouts and Billy Beane, influenced by the sabermetric method of Tony DePodesta, could agree upon. Photo by Keith Allison. 4 St. Louis Cardinal infielder and Peninsula born and raised, **Daniel Descalso** represents the latest generation of Bay Area Italian Americans to play in the majors. His key hit in the sixth game and great catch in the seventh game were instrumental in the Cardinals improbable comeback World Series victory in 2011. Photo by John Thompson. 5 First baseman, **Paul Konerko**, made his major league debut in 1997, and has been with the Chicago White Sox since 1999. The five-time All-Star — with more than 400 career home runs and over 2,000 career hits — has in fact become the "face of the White Sox franchise." He was named Comeback Player of the Year in 2004, was the AL MVP in 2005, and has been the White Sox team captain since 2006. Photo by Keith Allison. 6 2010 National League MVP, **Joey Votto**, was walked three times in this game against the Orioles on June 26, 2011. The night before, he had homered twice and driven in five runs, greatly helping the Reds overpower Baltimore 10-5. Votto, who has played first base for the Cincinnati Reds since 2007, was a 2010 and 2011 All-Star and the 2011 NL Gold Glove winner. Photo by Keith Allison. 7 **Alessandro "Alex" Liddi** in a game against the Oakland A's on September 27, 2011 — just three weeks after making his major league debut with the Seattle Mariners and becoming the first Italian-born and raised player in the big leagues. Liddi was born in San Remo, Italy, where he still lives off-season. Photo by Brett Tatsuno.

