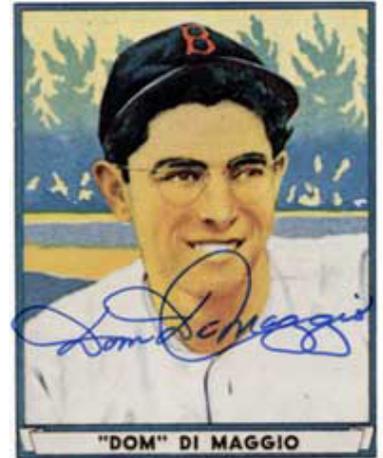


## ALLA CORRENTE

Dominic DiMaggio

*With the continuing exhibit at the Museo Italo Americano that closes on November 25, 2012, entitled Italian Americans At Bat: From Sand Lots to the Major Leagues, (I highly recommend that you see it) and with the baseball season about to enter into the playoffs and World Series, I thought it would be fun to devote another "Alla Corrente" article to famous Italian-American ballplayers; this time to the only DiMaggio ballplayer born in San Francisco. We'll also move away from earlier "Alla Corrente" articles which dealt with the NY Yankees and focus on one of the great players of their fierce rival: Dom DiMaggio of the Boston Red Sox.*

Dominic Paul DiMaggio, the youngest of nine children, was born on February 12, 1917, in San Francisco and grew up in a typical working-class home at 2047 Taylor Street in the North Beach-Telegraph Hill section. Dom and brother Joe used to sell newspapers in downtown San Francisco on the corner of Sutter and Sansome Streets. The patriarch of the clan, Giuseppe DiMaggio, was a hard-working fisherman from Sicily who spoke little English. He believed playing baseball to be frivolous and in violation of his code of a strong work ethic. Their mother, Rosalee, a former schoolteacher, covered for the boys so that they could play baseball. Three of the DiMaggio brothers, Joe, Vince, and Dom, went on to play center field in the major leagues, and it was said of the brothers that Joe was the best hitter, Dom had the best arm, and Vince, who had aspirations to become an opera singer, had the best voice.



In his youth Dom thought of becoming a chemical engineer. He was offered an academic and baseball scholarship to Santa Clara College, but chose instead to follow the path of his older brothers. Vince had set the stage by winning a roster spot on the minor-league San Francisco Seals in the Pacific Coast League at the start of the 1932 season. Vince paved the way for his brother Joe to join the team when a shortstop position later became available.

While Dom was still in high school, Joe was burning up the Pacific Coast League and soon was sold to the New York Yankees for \$25,000. In 1934, as a senior at Galileo High School, Dom was a solid pitcher and shortstop hitting .400. He later played shortstop for the North Beach Merchants sandlot team while working at the Simmons Mattress Factory. He was scouted by the Seals, and later attended a joint baseball camp and tryout for the Seals and Cincinnati Reds. He immediately was offered a contract by the Seals.

In 1936, Joe made it to the New York Yankees, and in the following year Vince made it to the Boston Braves. Meanwhile, Dom began playing for the Seals in 1937 and hit .306 that season, but was criticized by some who thought he had been signed not because of his own athletic talent but because of his famous last name. Dom turned down a chance to sit out the last game of the '37 season in order to preserve his .302 average. He played the game as usual and added four points to his season batting average. He continued to prove himself with a solid 1938 season, hitting .308. The following season (1939) proved to be his breakout season. He managed to add 20 pounds to his diminutive frame, and with instruction from Lefty O'Doul, the Seals manager, Dom raised his average to .361, finishing second in batting in the Pacific Coast League and winning the MVP award. He was first in hits and runs scored and second in stolen bases and triples. A few years earlier, O'Doul had also helped Joe raise his average by almost 60 points. Dominic had high praise for O'Doul in his 1990 book, *Real Grass, Real Heroes*, calling him "...far and away the finest hitting instructor that ever put on a baseball uniform." After the 1939 season, the Red Sox purchased Dom's contract from the Seals for \$75,000.

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**ALLA CORRENTE, *Continued***  
**Dominic DiMaggio**

Lefty O'Doul once again showed his insight into the game by telling reporters in San Francisco that DiMaggio would be a sensation in Boston: "Boston is one town where the fans know and appreciate all-around good ballplayers. Boston is going to idolize Dom" (from *Real Grass, Real Heroes*).

Dominic made his major-league debut on April 16, 1940, and had little trouble adjusting to the big leagues, hitting .301 and scoring 81 runs in 108 games in his rookie season. Going into spring training, he was concerned that he might not get to play because Boston was loaded with good outfielders: Ted Williams in left, Doc Cramer in center, Lou Finney in right, and Joe Vosmik, a 10-year veteran, as backup. But Dom, at age 22, had a terrific spring training and was able to beat out Finney, a .300 hitter the year before, as the starting right fielder. Later in the season, he was moved to center field, and there he remained for the rest of his career. The Red Sox showed confidence in him by trading Doc Cramer to the Senators during the offseason.

Dom had fond memories of the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry, and especially the media interest in the DiMaggio brothers in center field. He recalled that the newspapers made a big deal out of the first time in 1940 when the Yankees visited Boston for a five-game series. Dom had 11 hits to Joe's nine, or as Dom said, "Twenty hits for the family in one series." One week later in New York, Joe advised his younger brother to move back because the ball carried well in that part of Yankee Stadium. The next day Dom, taking Joe's advice, was able to run down a fly ball hit 460 feet to deep center—off the bat of brother Joe!

In 1941, Dominic went to spring training knowing his role: center fielder and leadoff hitter. After a slow start, which he attributed to tender hands (playing cards in the offseason in his brother Joe's new restaurant in San Francisco instead of fishing with his father), he finished third with 117 runs scored, batted a decent .283, and was named to the All-Star team for the first time. In his first All-Star Game he singled to drive in his brother Joe for the American League team. The media attention surrounding the DiMaggio brothers, especially with the success of all three center fielders, led to false rumors of a Hollywood movie, and inspired sportswriter Grantland Rice to poetry:

*Out in the olive trail they go—  
Vincent, Dominic, and Joe,  
Lashing, flashing, steaming hot  
In the fabled land of swat.*

*Where the big ash sings its song  
For the glory of the throng,  
Or the big mace through the fray  
Sends the apple on its way—  
Watch them as they whirl, careen,  
Over the fields of verdant green.*

*Rulers of the batting eye,  
Where their gaudy triples fly,  
In the sunset's shining glow  
Who is it that steals the show?  
Vincent, Dominic, and Joe.*

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## ALLA CORRENTE, *Continued*

Dominic DiMaggio

During the 1942 season, as World War II expanded, many ballplayers were drafted into military service. Around this time Dom was labeled the “Little Professor” because of his 5-foot-9, 168-pound frame, his serious expression, and his glasses—necessary to correct his nearsightedness. He earned his second All-Star selection that season while on his way to hitting .286 with 110 runs scored, good for third in the league, 272 total bases, and 36 doubles. Early in the season, he tried to enlist in the Navy but was told that his vision was an issue. “I had to fight my way into the Navy,” he said. “They rejected me because of my eyesight, and for the longest time, I told them I wanted to be in the Navy. I was not about to sit out the war.” Despite a 4-F classification, he was able to enlist after completing the 1942 season, and left for a three-year stint in the U.S. Coast Guard. While in the service, he played for the Norfolk Naval Training Station team in Virginia and saw overseas duty as well.



*Vintage Fenway Park*

Dominic returned to baseball in 1946, along with Ted Williams, Johnny Pesky, Bobby Doerr, and many of the more than 500 professional baseball players who had served during wartime. The Red Sox had an amazing year, finishing 12 games ahead of the Detroit Tigers and 17 games ahead of the Yankees, with 104 wins and only 50 losses. Dom was once again an All-Star, hitting .316 and driving in 73 runs. This was Boston’s first World Series since 1918 and the team was very confident of winning.

The Series that year was decided in a legendary Game Seven at Sportsman’s Park in St. Louis. In the top of the eighth inning, with the Cardinals leading 3-1, Dom came to bat with two outs and men on second and third. With Ted Williams on deck, he knew he would get a pitch to hit and he drove the ball off the wall in right-center. He was thinking triple as he hustled around the bases, but he popped a hamstring and hobbled into second base. He was replaced on base and then in center field by Leon Culberson. Ted Williams jumped in to end the inning. With the score tied 3-3, St. Louis won the Series on Enos Slaughter’s “mad dash” home from first base after a soft line drive to center field by Harry Walker. Dom believed that if he had been able to remain in the game, the outcome might have been very different. He knew he had more experience in center field than Culberson and he believed he was more comfortable with the poor field conditions at Sportsman’s Park.

Over the next few seasons Dom was consistently among the league leaders in runs scored, walks, hits, and doubles. In 1947 and 1948, he hit .283 and .285, respectively. In 1948, he was second in runs (127), fourth in walks (101), and fifth in doubles (40). He put together the longest hitting streak in Red Sox history in 1949, batting safely in 34 consecutive games. During that streak, from June 26 to August 7, he hit .357 and scored 35 runs. The streak ended against the Yankees on a fly ball to brother Joe. Dom hit .307 that season and finished third in the league in three categories with 186 hits, 126 runs, and 34 doubles, and he again was named to the American League All-Star team.

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## ALLA CORRENTE, *Continued*

Dominic DiMaggio

The year of 1950 was Dom DiMaggio's finest major league season, with a career high .328 average and 193 hits (both third best in the league), and league-leading marks with 131 runs and 15 stolen bases. In 1951 he continued his hot hitting, putting together a 27-game hitting streak, batting .296 with 189 hits, and scoring a league-leading 113 runs. In 1952 he was in just 128 games, but hit a solid .294, and played in his final All-Star Game. After being relegated to the bench the following year and playing in just three early-season games, Dom retired on May 9, 1953. The new manager of the Red Sox, Lou Boudreau, believed that he was past his prime and replaced him in center field with Tommy Umphlett. Dom had no desire to sit on the bench. He finished with a career .298 average and 1,680 hits.

Johnny Pesky called Dominic DiMaggio "the almost perfect ballplayer, so smart and so talented." Dom was inducted into the Italian American Sports Hall of Fame in 1978, and the Red Sox Hall of Fame in 1995, but he has thus far been overlooked by the Veterans Committee for the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY despite an energetic campaign on his behalf led by former teammate Ted Williams in the 1990s.

Late in his career, Dom expressed concern about the treatment of ballplayers at the hands of some owners. He joined Johnny Murphy, Allie Reynolds, Fred Hutchinson, Bob Feller, Eddie Yost, and others in the early vestiges of a players union, an effort that eventually led to the formation of the Major League Baseball Players Association.

Dom was successful in other areas of his life besides baseball. He had met Emily Alberta Frederick in 1943, while playing an exhibition game in Boston to promote War Bonds. Despite a romantic spark between them, he did not see her again until four years later. In 1949 they were married. Emily was not a passionate baseball fan, but she was a passionate community leader. Ted Williams affectionately called her "the Queen" because of her strong personality and her work on community projects. Dom and Emily had three children, Dominic, Jr., Emily, and Peter.

In 1953, after he retired from baseball, he founded the American Latex Fiber Corporation along with two partners in Lawrence, Massachusetts. They produced padding for ammunitions packaging, boxcar insulation, and furniture and mattress padding. He later bought out his partners and began producing seat padding for the automotive industry. In 1961, he purchased a fire-ravaged company in Pennsylvania and merged the companies to form a new corporation: the Delaware Valley Corporation, and expanded production to include innovative products for the medical, construction, marine and RV industries.

After Boston Red Sox owner Tom Yawkey died in 1976, Dom headed a group of New England businessmen who put together an offer to purchase the Red Sox. The trust set up to handle the disposition of the ball club rebuffed a number of offers, in which prospective applicants had invested considerable time and money, leaving a sense that the Haywood Sullivan group had had the inside track all along. This resulted in a sense of estrangement for Dom that lasted for a number of years.



*Fenway Park on April 20, 2012 in Boston, USA. Fenway Park is the oldest professional sports venue in the United States, celebrating the 100th anniversary since its foundation.*

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## ALLA CORRENTE, *Continued*

Dominic DiMaggio

Among other commercial ventures, Dom was involved in the operation of DiMaggio's Restaurant on Fisherman's Warf in San Francisco, and in real estate on both coasts. He was co-founder of the Boston Patriots NFL football franchise, and he actively supported numerous charities. Emily DiMaggio served as a trustee for Boston's Jimmy Fund for many years. Dom was also co-founder (in 1966) and a former president of the BoSox Club, now a long-standing fan organization founded to promote interest in the Red Sox and baseball, and to bring closer contact between the Red Sox and the community.

Dom's love for the game of baseball is eloquently expressed in a passage from his autobiography *Real Grass, Real Heroes*:

*It was that wonderful sameness, year in and year out. We could always count on baseball to be the same warm and sunny game, on the same fields, in the same cities. We loved baseball not only for itself but for the secure feeling of continuity it gave you. We felt a loyalty to baseball, because it was loyal to us.*

Dom spent his later years between homes in Massachusetts and Florida. He had suffered from Paget's disease since 1962, but he remained actively involved in the family businesses and the Red Sox. In 1978 he was named a member of the Board of Trustees at Saint Anselm College in Goffstown, New Hampshire. He served under Presidents Father Peter and Father Jonathan DeFelice and helped lead Saint Anselm College through four decades of expansion; he was awarded an honorary degree in 1999.

His sense of humor was evident in his response to a question addressed to him on his 90th birthday:

"You'll be 90 tomorrow. Any goals?"

His answer:

"Reach 91."

Dominic DiMaggio died May 8, 2009 at the age of 92 at his home in Marion, Massachusetts after a bout with pneumonia. Red Sox owner John Henry said it best:

*His loss saddens us all but his contributions to the glory and traditions of our ball club will forever be etched in the annals of Red Sox history.* (From Dominic's obituary in the Boston Globe).

In an obituary that he wrote for the The Boston Globe, author David Halberstam described Dom as "probably the most underrated player of his day." It is really too bad that he has never been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

*Adapted by James J. Boitano, PhD from John Contois' article at <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/60406688> (Society for American Baseball Research BioProject). It also appeared in Spahn, Sain, and Teddy Ballgame: Boston's (Almost) Perfect Baseball Summer of 1948, edited by Bill Nowlin and published by Rounder Books in 2008. Material also adapted from Wikipedia.*