

ALLA CORRENTE

Frankie Crosetti



With the opening of an exhibit at the Museo ItaloAmericano on June 21, 2012 (closing on November 25, 2012) entitled *Italian-Americans At Bat: From Sand Lots to the Major Leagues*, and with the baseball season in full swing (pun intended!!), I thought it would be fun to devote several “Alla Corrente” articles to some Italian Americans who were successful ballplayers in the history of baseball. The first player we will consider is Frankie Crosetti.

Frank Peter Joseph Crosetti (October 4, 1910–February 11, 2002) spent his entire 17-year Major League Baseball-playing career with the New York Yankees before becoming a coach with the franchise for an additional 20 seasons. He holds the New York Yankees’ club record for service to the club. He was a player from 1932 to 1948 and the third-base coach from 1949 to 1968. He was known by players and fans as “The Crow,” a nickname that probably had as much to do with him being the Yankees’ “holler guy” from the dugout

with his high-pitched, shrill voice, as it did being an abbreviation of his surname. As a player and third base coach for the Yankees, Crosetti was part of 17 World Championship teams and 23 World Series appearances overall, from 1932–1964, the most of any individual.

Crosetti was born in San Francisco and grew up in North Beach, which was something of a hotbed of Italian-American talent on the baseball field during the 1920s and 1930s (Tony Lazzeri, Charlie Silvera, and the DiMaggio brothers all came from the same neighborhood). Before joining the Yankees, he played four seasons for the San Francisco Seals, hitting .320. The Yankees purchased him in the fall of 1930 for the hefty (particularly in the Depression era) sum of \$75,000, but allowed him one more year in the Pacific Coast League for seasoning before inviting him to spring training in 1932. As a San Francisco Seal, he twice led the Pacific Coast League in runs scored. In 1930, he scored 171 runs for the Seals while hitting .334 with 113 RBIs; and in 1931 (his last year with the Seals), he added 141 more runs scored before beginning his 17-year career with the Yankees.

After Crosetti joined the Yankees in 1932, he batted .241 with five home runs and 57 RBIs at the bottom of the Yankees’ batting order. He was part of a World Series Championship team his first year in the big leagues with the Yankees completing a four-game sweep of the Chicago Cubs in the 1932 World Series, two days shy of Crosetti’s 22nd birthday. As the last surviving Yankee in uniform for Babe Ruth’s famous “called shot” home run in the 1932 World Series, Crosetti always adamantly insisted that the Bambino did not point toward the outfield fence before hitting his home run.

The finest year of his career in the majors was in 1936, when he batted .288 with 15 home runs, 90 walks, 18 stolen bases, 78 RBIs and 137 runs scored (all career highs) while batting lead-off for the Yankees. He was named an American League All-Star for the first time in his career, and reached the World Series for the second time. Crosetti batted .269 in the Yankees’ six game victory over the New York Giants in the 1936 World Series, and drove in the winning run in the Yankees’ 2-1 victory in game three. In the World Series, he was the lead-off hitter for a line-up that usually had Red Rolfe batting second, Joe DiMaggio third, Lou Gehrig fourth, Bill Dickey fifth, and then George Selkirk, Jake Powell and Tony Lazzeri in various combinations in the sixth, seventh and eighth spots. What a powerhouse lineup!

Continued next page...

ALLA CORRENTE, *Continued*
Frankie Crosetti

Known for his slick fielding, Crosetti was a master at the hidden-ball trick, which he pulled on players including Al Brancato and Augie Galan, often in spring training. His glove was also responsible for brilliant defense in the 1938 World Series, which included three game-saving plays in Game One. His home run off Dizzy Dean in that series drew him (unofficial) votes from several sportswriters for “series hero” (in the days before the creation of the World Series MVP award) in the Yankees’ sweep of the Chicago Cubs.

After a poor 1940 season, he lost his starting shortstop position to Phil Rizzuto in 1941. He regained the starting shortstop job when Rizzuto joined the Navy in World War II. However, he became a reserve infielder once again when Rizzuto rejoined the club in 1946. At this point, Crosetti became a player-coach for the club through the 1948 season.

In 29 World Series games, Crosetti batted .174 with 1 home run, 11 RBIs and 16 runs scored. His only World Series home run was a two-run shot off Dizzy Dean in Game Two of the 1938 World Series that gave the Yankees a 4-3 lead over the Cubs. Perhaps Crosetti’s second most memorable moment in postseason play occurred in Game Three of the 1942 World Series when he shoved umpire Bill Summers, an act for which he received a \$250 fine from Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis and was suspended for the first 30 games of the 1943 season.

Crosetti led the American League in plate appearances twice (1938 and 1939), in stolen bases once (1938), strikeouts twice (1937 and 1938). He also led the league eight times in being hit by pitches (1934, 1936–1940, 1942 and 1945). He was known as the weak link in the Yankees batting order, but he was also known for his slick fielding ability. He won 17 World Series rings (seven as a player, nine as a coach, plus an additional one as a player-coach in 1947); so many that the Yankees began giving him engraved shotguns instead of rings. In all, Crosetti was on the field in 23 World Series. He also was a two-time All-Star (1936 and 1939).

Coaching career

Crosetti became third base coach with the Yankees in 1946 and was part of an additional nine World Series championships as a coach with the franchise once he retired as a player after the 1948 season. He was said to be the “perfect coach,” because he had no ambition whatsoever to manage, turning down numerous offers over the years to do so. After 37 years, longing to be closer to his family in Northern California, he left the franchise to join the upstart Seattle Pilots in 1969. He was the subject of several unflattering anecdotes in Jim Bouton’s iconoclastic recollection of the Pilots’ one and only season, *Ball Four*. He moved to the Minnesota Twins from 1970–1971, after the Pilots (who became the Milwaukee Brewers) did not renew his contract.

It has been said of Crosetti that he had waved home over 16,000 runners in 25 years as a third-base coach!

In February of 2002, Crosetti died at age 91 of complications from a fall in Stockton, California, and was entombed at Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma. He was survived by his wife of 63 years, Norma, his son, John, and his daughter, Ellen. In 2004 he was elected to the Pacific Coast League Hall of Fame as one of the great San Francisco Seals.

—Adapted from Wikipedia, Baseball-Reference.com, and <http://www.milb.com>
by Dr. James J. Boitano