

Yanks' Crosetti dies at 91

Spent 37 years in pinstripes

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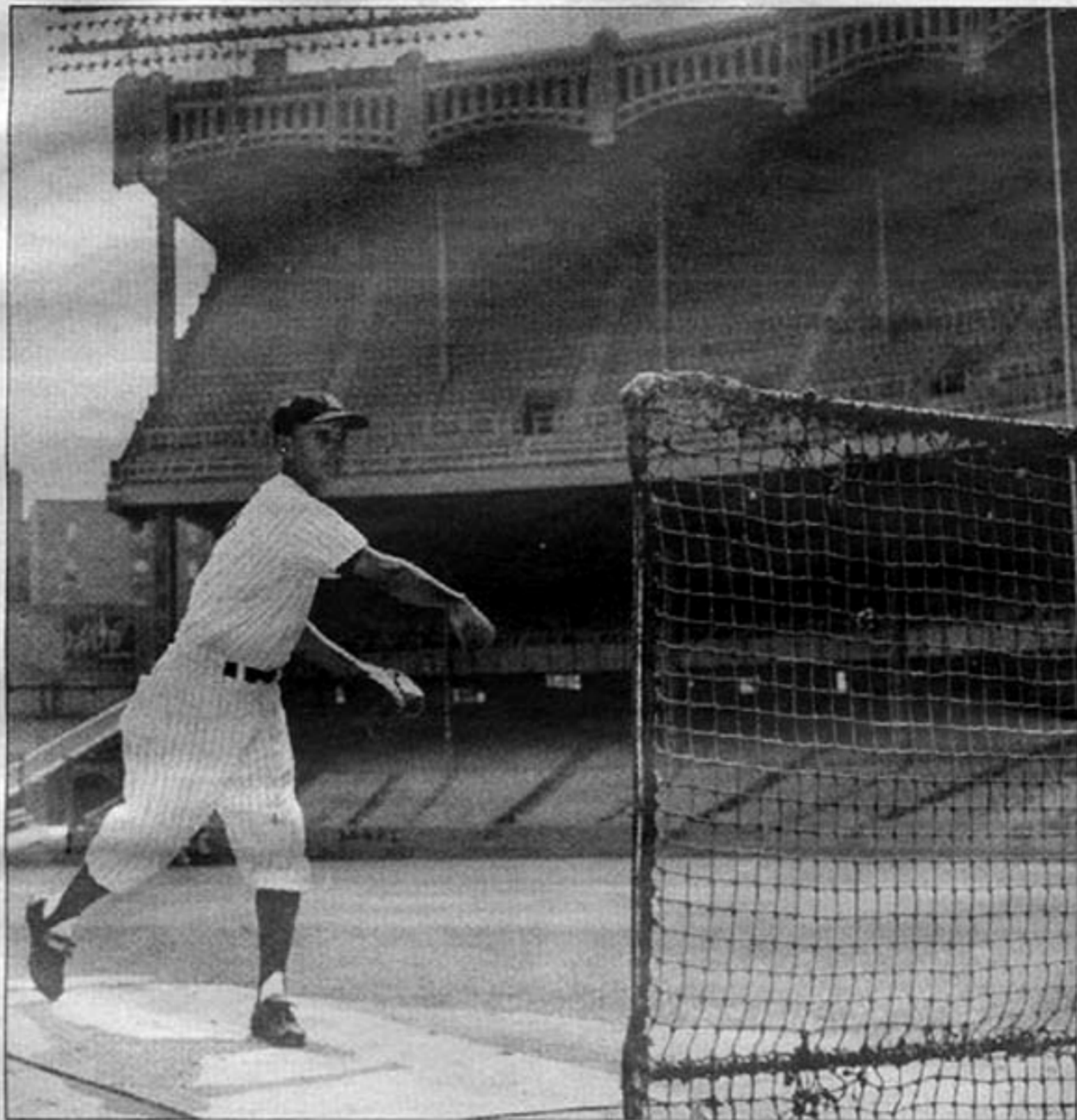
Frank Crosetti, the shortstop on eight Yankee world championship teams from 1932-1948 and their third base coach on 14 other World Series teams, died Monday in Stockton, Calif., of complications from a fall he suffered in early January. He was 91 and was one of the last living links to the Yankees' Babe Ruth era.

"The Cro" held the distinction of having cashed more World Series checks than any player in history, including Yogi Berra, who holds the record for having been a player on the most world championship teams. All told, Crosetti spent a record 37 years with the Yankees and was in 23 World Series with them as a player and a coach.

Born in San Francisco on Oct. 4, 1910, Crosetti grew up and played sandlot ball in the same North Beach area that later spawned Yankee great Joe DiMaggio. After beating out Billy Werber for the Yankee shortstop job in 1932, Crosetti was a mainstay with the Yankees into the '40s, when another Italian shortstop came along in Phil Rizzuto.

"Cro was just great to me," Rizzuto said yesterday. "He taught me so much about the position, how to play the hitters, etc., and here I was taking his job. He was just a wonderful guy and I had such admiration for him."

After hitting only .194 in 1940, Crosetti, who had led AL shortstops in fielding the year before, was replaced by Rizzuto, but stayed around as the backup until 1948 — when he launched the longest third base coaching career in baseball history. He coached third base for the Yankees until 1968, when he decided to go back to the West Coast with the expansion Seattle Pilots. He moved to the



Minnesota Twins for his final season in 1970.

It was computed that during his 21-year career as a third base coach, Crosetti waved home 16,159 baserunners — which, if nothing else, established him as the "Cal Ripken" of third base traffic cops in terms of endurance and continuity.

In all his years as a third base coach, Crosetti was noted for never shaking hands with a player who had just hit a home run. Instead, he would merely pat him on the back. However, Crosetti made an exception to that rule when Mickey Mantle hit his mammoth home run off the

Cardinals' Barney Schultz in the 1964 World Series.

"Cro was a great teacher and a real company man," said Yogi Berra. "What I'll remember most about him was that high-pitched voice and how he guarded those baseballs like they were his own. The only way you could ever get one from him was if you had the last ball from a game and gave it to him. And when he threw batting practice, if you tried to hit the ball out of the park on him, he'd walk off the mound. He wanted you to work on things."

Despite a spindly, 5-10, 165-pound frame, Crosetti, a lifetime .245 hitter, had decent pow-

er — he hit 98 career homers in 1,683 games, including a season-high 15 in 1936. A two-time All-Star, he scored over 100 runs in four straight seasons from 1936-39 and in 1938 led the American League with 27 stolen bases. That season, he also had 757 plate appearances, the record for a 154-game season.

In his retirement in Stockton, Crosetti was a frequent visitor to the Oakland Coliseum when the Yankees were in town to play the A's and never left any doubt about his allegiance. In his letter of resignation as coach in 1968, he concluded: "The old saying of years gone by will hold true for me too: 'Once a Yankee, always a Yankee!'"

A Yankee life

Frank Crosetti witnessed many great Yankee moments during his 37 years with the club.

1932: Wins Yankee shortstop job, playing with Lou Gehrig (1B), Tony Lazzeri (2B), Babe Ruth (RF) and Bill Dickey (C). Manager is Joe McCarthy. Plays in World Series that features Ruth's famous 'called shot.'

1939: Still the regular shortstop as Lou Gehrig's consecutive-game streak ends and Gehrig makes his 'Luckiest Man' speech.

1941: Loses starting job to youngster Phil Rizzuto, but plays 50 games as Joe DiMaggio runs through his 56-game hitting streak.

1956: Coaches third as Don Larsen pitches perfect game against Brooklyn Dodgers in World Series.

1961: Still coaching third as Roger Maris circles bases with his 61st HR of season.

DAILY NEWS PHOTOS

CRO'S NEST Frank Crosetti tosses batting practice at Yankee Stadium during his 21-year stint as team's third-base coach and gets pointers from skipper Joe McCarthy (below r.) during his 17-year Yankee playing career.

