

Frank Crosetti, 91, a Fixture In Yankee Pinstripes, Is Dead

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Frank Crosetti, the smooth-fielding shortstop and third-base coach who was a presence in Yankee pinstripes for 37 consecutive seasons, the longest stretch of anyone in franchise history, died Monday in Stockton, Calif. He was 91.

He arrived at Yankee Stadium in 1932, a teammate of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, and saw Ruth hit his famed "called shot" home run against the Cubs that October at Wrigley Field in Chicago. He drove the rookie Joe DiMaggio from California to the Yankees' training camp in Florida in 1936. He shook Roger Maris's hand after his record-breaking 61st home run in 1961. His last season in New York, 1968, was the final year of Mickey Mantle's career.

Through four decades of Yankee dominance, Crosetti earned a major-league-record 23 World Series paychecks (17 of them winners' shares) totaling \$142,989.30. He played on 9 Yankee World Series teams and coached for 14 others.

Crosetti was born on Oct. 4, 1910, in San Francisco, and at 17 was an infielder for his hometown Seals of the Pacific Coast League. After four seasons with the Seals, he arrived at Yankee Stadium, having had his contract bought by the Yankees for \$75,000.

At shortstop on the powerful Yankee teams of the 1930's and early 1940's, Crosetti teamed with Tony Lazzeri and then Joe Gordon as dynamic double-play combinations.

Crosetti's career batting average was only .245, but he wasn't needed for his bat in a lineup perennially loaded with sluggers. He was a fine bunter, was adept at drawing walks and had a knack for getting hit by pitches. In 1938, Crosetti was hit 15 times — a Yankee record that stood for 46 years — and he led the American League in being hit by pitches in eight seasons.

He hit only 98 career home runs, and just one in a World Series, but that drive — a two-run, eighth-inning homer at Wrigley Field in Game 2 of the 1938 Series — was the game-winning shot over Dizzy Dean and the Cubs.

Dean, in the twilight of his career, his fastball gone, once recalled having shouted to Crosetti as he rounded the bases, "You wouldn't a-got a loud

foul off-a me two years ago."

According to Dean, Crosetti yelled back, "I know, Diz."

Many years later, asked about the supposed exchange, Crosetti said, "If Diz yelled something at me, I didn't hear it, and I didn't say anything back to him."

That was typical of Crosetti — he wasn't one for showmanship.

Crosetti lost the full-time shortstop's job in 1941 to the little rookie Phil Rizzuto. Years later, Rizzuto remembered how, during spring training, many of the veteran players tried to shove him out of the batting cage. But when Rizzuto started in the season opener at Washington, the man whose job he had taken was eager to help him. "Crosetti was in the dugout, moving me for the hitters," Rizzuto recalled. "Two steps this way for this guy. Two steps that way for that guy."

When Casey Stengel became the Yankee manager in 1949, Crosetti retired as a player to become the third-base coach, and he teamed with

The shortstop and coach earned 23 World Series checks.

Bill Dickey, the first-base coach, and Jim Turner, the pitching coach, through many pennant-winning seasons.

His chatter from the coaching box brought him the nickname Crow. He was an expert sign stealer and adept at finding an edge, as when he encouraged the bespectacled, fastball-throwing reliever Ryne Duren to frighten would-be batters by throwing warm-up pitches high against the screen.

Crosetti retired from the Yankees in October 1968, on his 58th birthday. He was later a coach with the Seattle Pilots and the Minnesota Twins. He retired from baseball after the 1971 season.

He is survived by his wife, Norma; a son, John, of San Diego; a daughter, Ellen Biggs, of Menlo Park, Calif.; three grandchildren; and two



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Frank Crosetti

great-grandchildren.

Crosetti and his fellow teammates, DiMaggio and Lazzeri — all Italian-American Yankees from San Francisco — were a quiet threesome. In the summer of 1936, Jack Mahon, a sportswriter for the International News Service, was reading a newspaper in the lobby of the Hotel Chase in St. Louis when it occurred to him that Crosetti, DiMaggio and Lazzeri, seated together nearby, had not said a word to each other in some time.

"Just for fun, I timed them to see how long they would maintain their silence," Mahon remembered. "They didn't speak for an hour and 20 minutes. At the end of that time, DiMaggio cleared his throat. Crosetti looked at him and said, 'What did he say?'"

"And Lazzeri said: 'Shut up. He didn't say nothing.'"

"They lapsed into silence, and at the end of 10 more minutes I got up and left. I couldn't stand it anymore."

As for Ruth's "called shot," Crosetti had an eyewitness account that he was happy to relate when interviewed while attending a game in Oakland in 1991. Ruth, he maintained, was not pointing to center field, but to the Cubs' dugout.

"Those Cubs were a bunch of stooges," Crosetti said. "They were riding Ruth from the bench. It was strike one, strike two. He held up one finger, as if to say, 'I have one strike left.' Then he hits the ball for a homer. Later he tells me, 'If the writers want to think I pointed where I was going to hit the ball, let 'em.'"