

Bob Ramazzotti: Altoona's last Major Leaguer

By Neil Rudel

It's been almost 40 years, but Bob Ramazzotti clearly remembers the warm, August 1947 night in Columbus.

Ramazzotti was playing for the St. Paul Saints, the Brooklyn Dodgers' AAA affiliate in the American Association. The opponent was Columbus, St. Louis' affiliate. The pitcher was Odie Clark, who had just surrendered a home run to Ramazzotti's teammate, Marv Rackley.

The pitch to Ramazzotti was high and tight. Ramazzotti tried to get out of the way. He couldn't.

"It was a big field and the lights aren't anything like they are today," Ramazzotti was saying quietly recently in his cozy home on 26th Street. "I saw the ball coming and I went to turn and it hit me flat in the (left) temple."

Ramazzotti laid motionless at home plate. An ambulance was called. The diagnosis was a triple-fracture and a blood clot on the brain. The clot was removed. Ramazzotti was fortunate to only be out for the year.

He didn't deny that the incident put a major psychological crimp in his career.

"At the time, I didn't think it would," he said. "But evidently it did. As I look back, I guess it must have had an effect on my hitting. You tend to shy away. In the back of your mind, you guess it might happen again.

"Now, you can't do that. You throw at somebody and you're out of the game. But it was part of the game then."

Ramazzotti recovered in time for the 1948 season, his third in the big leagues, and came north with the Dodgers, but found he wasn't really in their plans. Their infield was set with Pee Wee Reese at shortstop, Al Campanis (who soon gave way to Jackie Robinson) at second, a combination of Arky Vaughan-Cookie Lavagetto-Spider Jorgenson and then Billy Cox at third. Midway through the 1949 season, he was dealt to the Chicago Cubs.

There, he played behind Roy Smalley at shortstop, Wayne Terwilliger at second and Ransom Jackson and Bill Serena at third. He stayed with the Cubs through 1953. Presented with the option of playing in Havana, Cuba (a Dodger affiliate) in 1954, Ramazzotti decided he'd "had enough." His final major league line reads: 346 games, .230 batting average, 851 at bats, 196 hits, 22 doubles, nine triples, four home runs, 86 runs scored and 53 RBIs.

"I mostly played when somebody was hurt or in a slump in Brooklyn," Ramazzotti



Bob Ramazzotti began his career with the Brooklyn Dodgers at old Ebbets Field.

said. "In Chicago, it was practically the same thing. I got a chance to start in 1951 and after that, I pretty much found myself a job as the starting second baseman."

But an injury to the middle finger on his glove hand, a finger he still can't straighten completely, took its toll and led him into retirement.

Ramazzotti, a 1936 graduate of Altoona Area High School — "They didn't have baseball back then and I was too small for football" — returned to Altoona and worked for SKF until retiring in 1979. Today, he tends to gardening and odd jobs around the Pleasant Valley home where he has resided for the last 26 years.

At 71, he appears in good shape and still bowls and golfs when a foursome presents itself.

Ramazzotti, once an all-star shortstop in the Penn State League, which played its games at the Point Stadium in Johnstown, said he continues to follow sports, although he said he hasn't been to Three Rivers Stadium since it opened.

"I don't care too much for carpets," he said. "Maybe I'd feel different if I got down on it."

Like most of baseball's oldtimers, Ramazzotti has an opinion on the exorbitant salaries being thrown around — not

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only Major League baseball, but sports in general.

"I don't blame the players. They always told you to get as much as you can," said Ramazzotti, whose top salary was \$10,000 in 1953. "I think the owners are at fault. The only thing I blame the players is for cutting us off their pension plan."

Ramazzotti still draws about \$400 a month from baseball's pension plan, but that is a modest figure compared to what it could have been had the current players' union not voted to cut the pre-1957 era out of the full pension package.

When he came back to Altoona, Ramazzotti, who has two children but is separated ("I've always been pretty much of a loner") began teaching fundamentals to the various little leagues and also coached two teams in the early 1960s that advanced to the AAABA Tournament in Johnstown.

"Bob was always very sound, a real good guy to work with," said Tom Lane, who along with Ernie Columbia coached Altoona's AAABA entries with Ramazzotti. "He had an excellent baseball mind. I was coaching Tyrone's baseball team at the time and we used to spend hours together before practice, designing offensive and defensive drills and baserunning drills.

"Bob was an outstanding guy to work with. He had spent all those years with the Cubs and the Dodgers, but he didn't play the dictator role with me. He was in charge, but he didn't play it that way. I have nothing but the utmost respect for him."

Ramazzotti, a member of the Italian-American Sports Hall of Fame, was one of 25 players when there were only 16 teams. He also is the last Altoonian to play in a Major League baseball game.

He will be remembered as someone who experienced good fortune and bad fortune. Had it not been for the beaning, his career statistics may well have been more impressive.



Ramazzotti ended his career with the Chicago Cubs.

"When I was beaned, there was a scout for the Washington Senators there who was following me that whole year," he said. "They were supposed to be ready

to offer me \$75,000 or \$80,000.

He paused at the memory.

"But I was fortunate to be at the Major League level for as long as I was."

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