

Mel Ott, 49, Dies Of Crash Injuries



Associated Press
Mel Ott

Special to The New York Times.

NEW ORLEANS, Nov. 21—Mel Ott, former New York Giants' baseball star and manager, died here today of injuries received in an automobile collision a week ago. He was 49 years old.

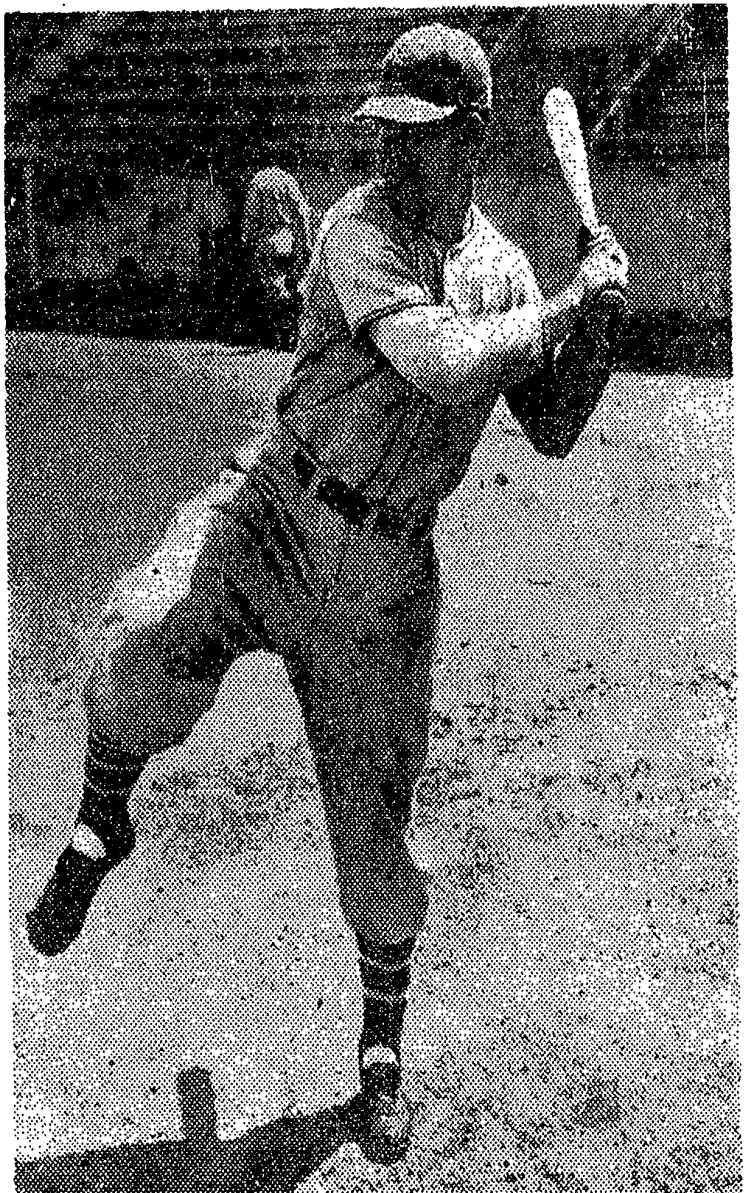
Death came to Mr. Ott at 12:35 P. M. Central Standard time, in the operating room of Touro Infirmary, where a team

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Mel Ott at 18 in 1927, his second year with Giants.



A distinctive way of raising his right foot marked Ott at bat. This photo is from 1938, when he hit 36 homers.

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of seven surgeons prepared to operate for the second time in twenty-four hours.

Funeral services will be held at 2 P. M. tomorrow from the P. J. McMahon & Sons funeral home here. Interment will be in Metairie Cemetery.

Mr. Ott was transferred to New Orleans yesterday by ambulance from Memorial Hospital, Gulfport, Miss., where last Saturday he underwent preliminary surgery. The transfer came about as a result of a kidney malfunction.

A hospital spokesman said Mr. Ott died of uremia and the effects of a combination of injuries that resulted in "a massive failure."

In addition to uremia, Mr. Ott had kidney damage, multiple fractures, shock, six broken ribs, broken legs, a broken arm, head injuries and "other complications," the hospital spokesman added.

On his arrival at Touro Infirmary Mr. Ott underwent a seven-and-one-half-hour operation.

His wife, Mildred, also 49, was also seriously injured in the accident. She was scheduled to be transferred to a New Orleans hospital for possible surgery.

The accident occurred last Friday night on U. S. Highway 90 near Bay St. Louis, Miss. The Ott automobile had just pulled away from a highway restaurant and collided with another car. The driver of the other car, Lester F. Curry, was killed in the crash.

In addition to his widow, Mr. Ott is survived by two daughters, Mrs. Philip Loria and Miss Barbara Ott; his mother, Mrs. Charles Ott Sr.; a brother, Charles Ott; a sister, Mrs. Louis Rhodes, and a grandson. All are from the metropolitan New Orleans area.

Blazed Way to Glory

Mel Ott blazed his way to baseball glory by hitting home runs. Only two men — Babe Ruth and Jimmy Foxx—ever hit more.

Ruth and Foxx were American Leaguers through most of their careers. No one else in the National League ever came close to Ott. When his playing days were over, in 1947, the Giant right fielder had held more batting records than any other National League player. In three world series, he hit four home runs and batted .295.

He set the National League lifetime records for home runs, runs scored, runs batted in, total bases, bases on balls, extra-base hits and others.

For nearly six years, from 1942 through the middle of 1948, Ott managed the Giants. World War II took so many younger men from baseball dugouts that he was able to stretch his playing days by several years.

But in 1946, in thirty-one games, he hit only one ball out of the park. The next year he went to bat four times as a pinch-hitter, had no hits and decided to surrender his place on the players' roster.

Only four years earlier, in 1942, he had hit thirty home runs. Then he was the Ott the fans will long remember.

Exactly 511 times in his twenty-one years' service with the Giants, an opposing outfielder would race to the fence, turn, brace himself a second and then go limp as the ball sailed overhead and out of reach, and Ott had another home run.

Helped by Short Fence

Many of the four-baggers were made in the Polo Grounds, the discount house of baseball. At the foul-pole, the right-field fence was 257 feet from the batter's box. And Ott, a left-handed hitter, could pull the ball sharply down the line.

In home-run output Ruth leads all the rest, with 714. Foxx is second with 534. Ott's 511 was third, Lou Gehrig, with 494, and Ted Williams, with 482, come next.

Oddly, all these men outstripped him in stature. Ott generated his power from a compact frame. He stood 5 feet 9 inches and never weighed more than about 170 pounds.

Ott's signature at bat was an unorthodox, high-stepping stride with his right foot just before he brought his bat around. He looked as if he were stepping over a stovepipe, and any high school coach could have told him it was dreadful form. But the next thing a pitcher knew, the ball was in the bleachers.

John J. McGraw, manager of the Giants, was captivated by the smooth, rhythmic, level swing of Ott's bat when the youth was sent to him in 1925 at the age of 16.

A New Orleans lumberman, Harry Williams, and a close

friend of McGraw's was the actual discoverer of this "diamond gem." It was Williams who gave Mel the fare to New York.

Ott always got a chuckle out of the fact that actually it was a penny post card that was his passport to fame. He received it in the summer of 1925, at a time when he was playing semipro ball with the Paterson Grays, a team that Williams operated as a hobby. The card read: "Report to McGraw, Polo Grounds, New York." It was signed: John J. McGraw.

But Ott thought somebody was pulling a joke on him and paid no attention to it. It wasn't until several weeks later that Williams, returning to New Orleans from a trip, tracked down Ott and virtually chased the youngster to New York with a bat.

Ott said he was a catcher. But McGraw, spotting his heavy legs, knew they would tie up in muscular knots from the crouching grind of catching. He made him an outfielder.

Remained With Team

Because McGraw wanted no one to tamper with that flawless swing, or even with that strange, goose-step stride, Ott was permitted not even a game of minor league seasoning. He stayed with the Giants through his entire playing career.

In his first season with the Giants, in 1926, Ott appeared in thirty-five games, came to bat sixty times and had twenty-three hits for a .383 average. But he hit no home runs. The next year he batted .282 and got one home run in 163 at bats.

Then, in 1928, Ott found the range. He hit eighteen home runs. In 1929, he swatted forty-two—a mark he never matched again in sixteen home-run hitting seasons.

Ott's open secret was steady production, not sensational spurts. He led the league only three times in total home runs. But over the years, he was dozens ahead.

His lifetime batting average was .304. His best year, outside of his short first season, was in 1930, when he hit .349. His worst, outside of the last two seasons, was 1943. He hit .234.

Ott was quiet, deliberative and gentlemanly. He was soft-spoken with a sort of shy humor. As a manager he was no disciple of the legendary McGraw, who threw wild tantrums and won the nickname "Little Napoleon."

However, there were occasions, rare perhaps, when, as manager, he gave vent to outbursts of McGravian temper. Once, during the war years, a Giant pitcher, Bill Voiselle, with the count two strikes and no balls on the batter, grooved the next pitch. Johnny Hopp of the Cardinals whacked it for a ninth-inning triple, a blow that cost the Giants the game. And it cost Voiselle a \$1,000 fine.

As a player, even tractable Ott was not exempt from McGraw fines. Once the Old Man ruled there was to be no card playing in the clubhouse in the forenoon of a ball game. One morning, though, it rained and as it did not look as if there possibly could be a game, Ott thought there would be no harm in sitting in on a few hands with several other players. But McGraw walked into the room and it cost each player \$50.

Although Ott achieved his greatest fame as a home run slugger, he also ranked for many years as one of the outstanding defensive outfielders of his time. Despite short, stocky legs and heavily muscled thighs, which almost always had to be

taped before a game to fend off Charley horses, Melvin was able to cover an amazing lot of ground in the outfield.

McGraw once said of him, "This kid can just about play anywhere on a ball field, except maybe pitch." In 1937 Ott gave a practical demonstration of his rare versatility. Bill Terry, then manager of the Giants, was sorely pressed for a third baseman and finally called on Ott to help him out. Mel jumped into the position and played it to the manner born. It helped the Giants win the pennant that year for their second in a row.

Apart from his heavy legs, Mel had one other physical defect. He was nearsighted. In his later years it began to show in his play and may have hastened his retirement as a player.

Called 'Master Melvin'

A sports writer dubbed Ott "Master Melvin" at the very outset, and the title stuck with him all the way, like a piece of gum on the shoe.

As a manager, Ott got off to a satisfactory start. He brought the team in third after three straight seasons in the second division under Bill Terry. That was in 1942. After that the going was rough.

In July, 1948, he was relieved of field duties and moved into the Giants' front office in favor of the flamboyant Leo Durocher of Dodger fame.

Later, he went to Oakland in the Pacific Coast League as manager. In 1953, he said he was quitting baseball to become an executive in the construction business.

By that time he had been voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame by the Baseball Writers' Association.

In recent years, he worked as a baseball broadcaster in Detroit.



This was the scene in December of 1941 as Ott held his first news conference here after becoming Giants' pilot.

Ott's Record With Giants

Year	G.	AB.	H.	HR.	RBI.	PC.
1926	35	23	0	4	383	
1927	82	60	1	19	222	
1928	124	163	46	18	77	322
1929	150	545	179	42	151	328
1930	148	521	182	25	119	349
1931	138	497	145	29	115	292
1932	154	566	180	36	123	318
1933	152	580	184	23	103	283
1934	153	582	190	35	135	326
1935	152	593	191	31	114	322
1936	150	534	175	33	135	328
1937	151	545	160	31	95	294
1938	150	527	164	36	116	311
1939	125	396	122	27	80	308
1940	151	536	155	19	79	289
1941	146	525	150	27	90	286
1942	152	549	182	30	93	295
1943	125	360	83	18	47	234
1944	120	369	115	26	82	288
1945	135	451	139	21	79	308
1946	31	68	5	1	4	074
1947	4	4	0	0	0	000
Total	2,730	9,456	2,876	511	1,860	304