



The Obit For Pete Coscarart

Pete Coscarart; 89; major leaguer, union backer

**By Jack Williams
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER**

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In a postwar era that foretold the sometimes rancorous relationship between Major League Baseball players and owners, Pete Coscarart was ahead of his time.

A nimble second baseman who was twice named to the National League All-Star team, he strongly supported efforts in 1946 to form a players union that could negotiate pension benefits.

After joining a minority of his Pittsburgh Pirates teammates in voting for a strike, he found himself out of the major leagues, sold to the San Diego Padres of the Pacific Coast League.

"There's no way of proving it, but I've always felt I was cheated," Mr. Coscarart told The San Diego Union-Tribune in 1996.

Although a pension plan was adopted in 1947, it was too late for Mr. Coscarart, who never gave up fighting for the benefits he believed he deserved.

He died Wednesday at Palomar Medical Center in Escondido of complications from an aneurysm he suffered July 14. He was 89.

A legend on the playing fields of Escondido, Mr. Coscarart "was probably the most famous athlete Escondido has ever produced," said George Cordry, a retired newspaper editor who has lived in the North County city more than 50 years.

Known during his playing career as "The Bounding Basque," Mr. Coscarart played part of nine major league seasons beginning in 1938 with the Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1996, he was inducted into the Brooklyn Dodgers Hall of Fame.

"He was considered to be the top defensive second baseman in the National League," said Bill Swank, a San Diego baseball historian and author.

"What's more, he was what you would want a baseball hero to be. He liked the kids and fans and loved the game. And he gave more to the game and fellow players than he ever got back."

Mr. Coscarart was traded after the 1941 season to the Pirates and compiled a .243 lifetime batting average in 864 games before finishing his career in the PCL.

More than 50 years after the Pirates sold him to the PCL Padres, he joined a former Dodgers teammate, Dolph Camilli, in suing baseball for lost benefits and rights of players to receive royalties for use of their images and memorabilia.

After the case moved through the appeal process, they received nothing.

Last year, Mr. Coscarart was informed by baseball Commissioner Bud Selig that he was not entitled to \$10,000 in annual pension benefits because of his suit against Major League Baseball.

But many other pre-1947 major leaguers eventually received their benefits, in no small part thanks to Mr. Coscarart's efforts, Swank said.

Mr. Coscarart received widespread media exposure in his appeals to Selig over the past few years. But sympathy and support didn't translate into success.

"I had just sent another letter to Selig on June 24, telling him Pete wasn't doing well and could you please grant the pension effective July 1," Swank said. "I would have wanted to tell Pete, 'They're giving you the pension,'

and to have felt his hand squeeze mine in acknowledging he knew. But it never happened."

Mr. Coscarart was born on a farm in what now is Rancho Bernardo. He entered Escondido High School as a 90-pound freshman and left with an athletic scholarship to Washington State University after excelling in three sports.

He left college early to sign with the Portland Beavers of the PCL and joined the Dodgers in 1938.

Sent to Nashville of the Southern Association after batting .152 in 32 games with Brooklyn, he hit .315 with a sparkling .983 fielding percentage. He was invited back to spring training with the Dodgers in 1939 and worked his way into a starting role.

Part of a double-play combination with shortstops Leo Durocher and then-rookie Pee Wee Reese, he was named to the National League All-Star team in 1940, a season in which he hit .243 with a career-high nine homers.

In his only All-Star at-bat, he was struck out by Bob Feller.

Later, as a Pirate, he was named to the All-Star team but didn't play in the game.

In 1941, Mr. Coscarart played on a Dodgers World Series team that lost to the New York Yankees in five games. He was on the field in the fourth game of the series, when a third strike that would have given the Dodgers a victory eluded catcher Mickey Owen.

The batter, Tommy Heinrich, reached base, and the Yankees rallied to win and clinch the series the next day.

After his playing days, Mr. Coscarart worked as a scout – first for the Minnesota Twins and later the Yankees. While employed by the Twins, he signed San Diego native Graig Nettles, an All-Star third baseman who played 22 major league seasons.

In 1963, Mr. Coscarart became a real estate broker, a profession he pursued for nearly 30 years.

Survivors include his wife, June; daughters, Carol Coscarart Cope and Julianne Coscarart of Escondido and Linda Wilson of Poway; a son, Peter of Redondo Beach; a brother, Steve of Hickory, N.C.; five grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Visitation is scheduled from 4 to 8 p.m. Monday at Alhiser-Comer Mortuary, Escondido. A funeral Mass is scheduled for 10 a.m. Tuesday at St. Mary's Catholic Church, Escondido.



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