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# Lennie Merullo, 98; last living Cub to play in World Series



PAUL CANNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE 1942

**Mr. Merullo helped the Cubs win Game 6 of the 1945 World Series in 12 innings. They lost Game 7 and haven't played in a Fall Classic since.**

By **Bryan Marquard** | GLOBE STAFF JUNE 01, 2015

While playing in the 1945 World Series, as was the case any game day with the Chicago Cubs, Lennie Merullo made it his job “to get everybody relaxed on the ball club,” he recalled in a 2010 interview with the Globe. “And being the shortstop I was supposed to be the pepperpot, keep everybody alive, ‘C’mon, let’s go! How many outs? Two outs!’ ”

Mr. Merullo, the oldest living Cubs player, died Saturday in the Sawtelle Family Hospice House in Reading of complications from a stroke he suffered three weeks ago. At 98, he also had been the last Cub alive to have played in a World Series.

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His baseball talent and strong throwing arm had lifted him out of East Boston, where he was the ninth of 12 children and, according to his family, slept “head to toe with a selection of brothers.” He played seven seasons with the Cubs, from 1941 through 1947, and spent decades as a major league scout. Mr. Merullo, who lived in Reading for 60 years, was inducted into the Professional Baseball Scouts Hall of Fame in 2008.

He carried more than just memories from the 1945 World Series. On one play, a Detroit Tigers player “came in spikes high,” Mr. Merullo told WBUR-FM last June, and the scar remained the rest of his life. His key moment in the Series was in the sixth game, which ran 12 innings. Mr. Merullo recorded the final out in the top of the 12th when he tagged Joe Hoover, who was trying to steal second for the Tigers. The Cubs won in the bottom of the 12th but lost Game 7 and the championship and have yet to make it back to the World Series.

Last year, however, Mr. Merullo returned to Chicago to throw out the ceremonial first pitch for a June 7 Cubs game as part of Wrigley Field’s 100th anniversary celebrations. “I’ll tell ya’, you don’t know what a thrill it is for me to be here in Chicago,” he said while sitting in the announcer’s booth during the game, adding: “I’ll never, ever forget this moment.”

When Mr. Merullo was on the field for the first pitch, he took a step away from his walker and doffed his cap to cheers from the crowd, and then drew more applause when he made three exaggerated throwing motions before tossing the ball to the waiting Cubs player. During the seventh inning stretch, he led the crowd in singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.”

“This is Lennie Merullo, let’s hear you all at once,” he said over the public address system. “One, a-two, a-three, ‘Take me out to the ballgame. . .’ ”

“If there was any doubt Wrigley Field does make dreams come true, you could look into Lennie’s eyes beaming with joy as he visited his beloved ballpark for what would be the last time,” Tom Ricketts, the Cubs’ chairman, said in a statement expressing condolences, adding that “our organization will never forget him.”

Leonard Richard Merullo was born May 5, 1917. His parents, Carmine and Angelina, raised their dozen children in a second-floor apartment in East Boston. Carmine worked at a paint company and the family grew vegetables and pressed wine from their own vines.

Mr. Merullo traced his early baseball playing to pickup games with friends on East Boston’s Byron Street. “They named that movie after me, ‘The Natural,’ ” he joked in the 2010 Globe interview, adding that, “Every kid wanted to be a ballplayer, and Byron Street, there was always enough kids to have a game.”



NAM Y. HUH/ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE

**Mr. Merullo returned to Chicago last year to throw out a ceremonial first pitch at a Cubs game.**

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*‘Every kid wanted to be a ballplayer, and Byron Street, there was always enough kids to have a game.’*

Lennie Merullo, in a 2010 interview with the Globe, reminiscing about playing pickup games in East Boston



JOANNE RATHE/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

**Mr. Merullo posed in his Reading home in 2010 with a bat used by Babe Ruth.**

He was good enough to catch the eye of Ralph Wheeler, the scholastic sports editor of the Boston Herald who also was a scout for the Cubs and the Boston Braves. Wheeler helped Mr. Merullo get into St. John's Preparatory School in Danvers, from which he hitchhiked home to visit on weekends, and into Villanova University. He signed with the Cubs his senior year.

The team called him up from the minor leagues in 1941. "If you can imagine, back in those days, a boy born and raised in East Boston, signing with the Cubs. And where did they have spring training? Catalina Island, in California. It was a dream come true," he said in the Globe interview.

The year Mr. Merullo became a major leaguer he married Mary Eugenia Geggis, who was known as Jean and had grown up across the street in East Boston. "I'd be looking out my window to see if I could see her," Mr. Merullo told the Globe. "And if she saw



me, she'd look out her window. On foggy days, we'd draw 'S's in the window for 'Sweethearts.' ” They celebrated their 74th wedding anniversary in February.

Baseball became a multigeneration family pursuit and gave a nickname to the couple's first child. Playing on little sleep after the birth of Len Jr., Mr. Merullo committed four errors in the second game of a September 1942 doubleheader against the Boston Braves at Braves Field. “If they hit me another ball, I would have booted that one, too,” he recalled in the Globe interview.

A Chicago newspaper headline the next day announced: “ ‘Boots’ is Born, Merullo Boots Four.” The name stuck even after Len Jr. grew up to be a good enough athlete to play minor league baseball with the Pittsburgh Pirates organization. Len Jr.'s son Matt played for the Chicago White Sox, Cleveland Indians, and Minnesota Twins. Matt's son Nick signed with the Baltimore Orioles organization last year, extending the Merullo baseball lineage to four generations.



BILL BRETT/GLOBE PHOTO/FILE 2010

**Mr. Merullo (right) with Red Sox legend Johnny Pesky at the annual Oldtime Baseball Game in Cambridge.**

In 2006, the Boston chapter of the Baseball Writers' Association of America presented Mr. Merullo with the Judge Emil Fuchs Memorial Award for his contributions to baseball. He finished his playing career with a .240 batting average in 639 games.

He became a scout for the Cubs in 1950, joined the Major League Scouting Bureau in the 1970s, and worked until 2003, scouting for various teams. As he appraised players throughout New England and Canada's eastern provinces, Mr. Merullo scribbled notes on a pad upon which he wrote five letters for headings: A, F, R, H, T, for arm, field, run, hit, and time to first base. He jotted a numerical rating under the first four and a stopwatch reading beneath the last.

"You want to know what the player can do, not what he can't," he told the Globe in 1983. "You can list on one hand all the complete ballplayers in the history of baseball. Just about everyone can't do something. You want to know what they can do."

A service will be announced for Mr. Merullo, who in addition to his wife, Jean, son Len Jr., grandson Matt, and great-grandson Nick leaves three other sons, Charles of London, Richard of Essex, and David of Reading; four other grandchildren; and, two other great-grandchildren.

Like many fans, Mr. Merullo hoped the Cubs would someday return to the World Series. As for why the team hadn't done so since he was the shortstop, he quipped in the 2010 interview that there was a simple reason.

"They miss me," he said. "My gosh, they miss me."

*Bryan Marquard can be reached at [bryan.marquard@globe.com](mailto:bryan.marquard@globe.com).*

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