

= Gus Mancuso =

August Rodney (Gus) Mancuso (December 5 , 1905 ? October 26 , 1984) , nicknamed " Blackie " , was an American professional baseball player , coach , scout and radio sports commentator . He played as a catcher in Major League Baseball with the St. Louis Cardinals (1928 , 1930 ? 32 , 1941 ? 42) , New York Giants (1933 ? 38 , 1942 ? 44) , Chicago Cubs (1939) , Brooklyn Dodgers (1940) and Philadelphia Phillies (1945) .

Mancuso was known for his capable handling of pitching staffs and for his on @-@ field leadership abilities . He was a member of five National League pennant @-@ winning teams , and played as the catcher for five pitchers who were eventually inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame . Mancuso was regarded as one of the top defensive catchers of the 1930s .

= = Baseball career = =

Mancuso was born in Galveston , Texas to the son of a Sicilian immigrant and the daughter of German immigrants . His father died in his forties and his mother continued to support the family by working as a midwife . Mancuso first began to play baseball as a nine @-@ year @-@ old . After graduating from high school , he went to work as a teller at a bank although , he was hired more for his talent as a baseball player than as a teller , playing as a member of the bank 's baseball team . He eventually caught the attention of the President of the Houston Buffaloes of the Texas League , and began his professional baseball career with them in 1925 . In 1927 , he hit for a .372 batting average for the Syracuse Stars in the International League . He made his Major League debut with the St. Louis Cardinals at the age of 22 on April 30 , 1928 , and stayed with them until July , when he was sent to the Minneapolis Millers in the American Association . He spent 1929 with St. Louis 's American Association farm club , the Rochester Red Wings and with Houston .

The Cardinals returned Mancuso to the major leagues in 1930 , primarily because of a contract dispute with Branch Rickey that made Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis void Mancuso 's minor league contract . He served as a reserve catcher to Jimmie Wilson who Mancuso considered one of the best catchers of the era . Although they competed for the same job , the veteran Wilson provided Mancuso with valuable help in learning the intricacies of catching in the major leagues . Mancuso became a student of the game , learning to study the daily box scores to learn the strengths and weaknesses of opposing teams . On September 12 , Wilson sprained his ankle and would not play for the rest of the season . Mancuso rose to the occasion , ending the season with a .366 batting average during a hitters ' year when the league average was above .300 for the first and only time . The Cardinals won the National League pennant but , eventually lost to Connie Mack 's Philadelphia Athletics in the 1930 World Series . In 1931 Mancuso was once again the reserve catcher to Wilson , leading the league with a 54 @. @ 3 % caught stealing percentage as the Cardinals won their second consecutive National League pennant . The 1931 World Series was a rematch with the Athletics as the Cardinals were victorious in a seven @-@ game series . Mancuso only had one plate appearance during the series as a late @-@ inning pinch hitter . During the 1932 season , Wilson turned 32 years old and shared the catching duties with Mancuso who caught 82 games to Wilson 's 75 and hit for a .284 average .

Mancuso was traded to the New York Giants before the 1933 season where new manager Bill Terry was rebuilding the team after the resignation of longtime manager John McGraw . Terry wanted to build his team around speed , defense and pitching . He replaced the slow @-@ footed Shanty Hogan and installed the agile Mancuso as the Giants ' starting catcher . Terry allowed Mancuso to be in charge of the Giants ' pitching staff that included ; Carl Hubbell 's sharp @-@ breaking screwball , Hal Schumacher 's diving sinker ball , Freddie Fitzsimmons ' knuckleball and Roy Parmelee who threw a variety of different pitches . Under Mancuso 's guidance , the Giants ' pitching staff led the National League in earned run average as the team won their first pennant in nine years .

Although Mancuso led National League catchers in errors and passed balls , he also led in games played , baserunners caught stealing , putouts and , finished second in assists and in range factor .

The Giants went on to defeat the Washington Senators in the 1933 World Series . Terry credited Mancuso as a major factor in moving the Giants from sixth place in 1932 to World Series champions in 1933 . In an Associated Press poll of sportswriters , Mancuso finished second to the Yankees ' Bill Dickey as the majors league 's all @-@ star catcher based on his ability to handle pitchers so skillfully . Mancuso ranked sixth in voting for the 1933 National League Most Valuable Player Award .

In 1934 , the Giants finished in second place , two games behind the eventual world champion St. Louis Cardinals , as Mancuso had an off @-@ year with his batting average dropping almost twenty points along with 10 fewer runs batted in . In 1935 Mancuso improved to hit for a .298 batting average with five home runs , and 56 runs batted in . He also earned a spot as a reserve for the National League team in the 1935 All @-@ Star Game . He had his best season in 1936 , hitting for a .301 batting average with career @-@ highs of nine home runs and 63 runs batted in as the Giants once again claimed the National League pennant . He led the league 's catchers in putouts , baserunners caught stealing , finished second in assists and , once again guided the Giants ' pitching staff to the lowest earned run average in the league . The Giants would go down in defeat against the powerful New York Yankees in the 1936 World Series . Mancuso finished the year ranked eighth in voting for the 1936 National League Most Valuable Player Award .

In 1937 , Mancuso was hitting for a .283 average at mid @-@ season to earn his second berth as a reserve for the National League team in the 1937 All @-@ Star Game . A few days after the All @-@ Star Game , a foul tip broke the ring finger on Mancuso 's right hand . Harry Danning replaced him and played well enough that , when Mancuso was healthy again , the two shared the catching duties for the rest of the season . The Giants clinched their second consecutive National League pennant and , once again faced the New York Yankees in the 1937 World Series . Mancuso started the first two World Series games but , when he went hitless , Danning took over as the Yankees went on to win the series in five games . Danning took over as the Giants ' starting catcher for the 1938 season with Mancuso hitting a respectable .348 with a .411 on @-@ base percentage in 52 games .

The Giants traded Mancuso to the Chicago Cubs before the 1939 season where he shared catching duties with 38 @-@ year @-@ old player @-@ manager Gabby Hartnett . He ended the season with a .231 batting average with only two home runs and 17 runs batted in . With the shortage of major league players due to the Second World War , Mancuso saw his career extended for another four years . He played the 1940 season with the Brooklyn Dodgers before the Cardinals brought him back to St. Louis for the 1941 season . Mancuso helped develop the Cardinals ' rookie catcher and future star , Walker Cooper but , when Cooper was injured , Mancuso caught the majority of the Cardinals ' games in 1941 . He was credited with helping the Cardinals to a second @-@ place finish due to his work with rookie pitchers Ernie White (17 @-@ 7) and Howie Krist (10 @-@ 0) , but only managed to post a .229 batting average .

Mancuso returned to the Giants in 1942 as a backup catcher and pitching coach . When Harry Danning was drafted into the United States Army , Mancuso became the club 's starting catcher at age 37 , sharing the job with 35 @-@ year @-@ old future Hall of Fame member , Ernie Lombardi for the 1943 and 1944 seasons . At the end of the 1944 season , one month before his 39th birthday , he was released by the Giants . Former teammate Freddie Fitzsimmons was managing the Philadelphia Phillies in 1945 and , convinced Mancuso to play one more season as a catcher and full @-@ time pitching coach . He caught 70 games while sharing catching duties with Andy Seminick but , when Fitzsimmons was fired , Mancuso left the club before the end of the season , playing his final game on September 11 at the age of 40 .

= = Career statistics = =

In a 17 @-@ year major league career , Mancuso played in 1 @,@ 460 games , accumulating 1 @,@ 194 hits in 4 @,@ 505 at bats for a .265 career batting average along with 53 home runs , 543 runs batted in and an on @-@ base percentage of .328 . He retired with a .977 fielding percentage . A two @-@ time All @-@ Star , he led National League catchers three times in putouts , and twice

in baserunners caught stealing and in range factor . His 49 @. @ 33 % career caught stealing percentage ranks 16th all @-@ time among major league catchers . Mancuso was a member of five pennant @-@ winning teams . He caught for five pitchers who were inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame (Carl Hubbell , Grover Cleveland Alexander , Dizzy Dean , Burleigh Grimes and Jesse Haines) . In his book , The Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract , baseball historian Bill James ranked Mancuso 74th all @-@ time among major league catchers .

= = Coaching and broadcasting career = =

In 1946 , Mancuso became the player @-@ manager of the minor league Tulsa Oilers and in 1948 he took over as manager of the San Antonio Missions . In 1950 , he was hired as the pitching coach for the Cincinnati Reds .

Mancuso began a career as a broadcaster in 1951 with his hometown Houston team in the Texas League . He later moved to St. Louis where he worked with play @-@ by @-@ play announcer Harry Caray on the Cardinals ' radio network until 1954 . He then served as a scout for the St. Louis Cardinals and the Houston Colt .45s. His younger brother , Frank Mancuso , also was a major league catcher in the mid @-@ 1940s . In 1962 Mancuso was seriously injured in a traffic accident which killed his wife , Lorena Mancuso .

Mancuso was inducted into the Texas Sports Hall of Fame in 1981 and was elected to the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame in 1984 . Mancuso contracted emphysema and died in 1984 at the age of 78 in Houston , Texas .

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