

Restelli gone, but far from forgotten
Former Pirates phenom much more than one-year wonder



Baseball Perspectives

by

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Dino Restelli

The Major League Baseball career of Dino Restelli was over before he reached the age of 25.

Restelli's career with the Pittsburgh Pirates had started in comet-like fashion in 1949 with a flurry of home runs.

Unfortunately for Restelli, the homers faded from his performance as quickly as they arrived and he was destined for a career spent primarily in the Pacific Coast League.

I became aware of Restelli as a youngster growing up in Jamestown, Ohio.

"Who was this new outfielder for the Pirates who broke into the big leagues by hitting one home run after another," I wondered so many years ago.

He had hit five homers in his first nine days in the big leagues after joining the Pirates in June 1949, and seven in his first 18 days.

All too soon, the spurt of home runs stopped and Restelli was to hit a total of 12 for the Pirates for the season. He was back in the Minor Leagues the following season and hit only one more home run in the Major Leagues.

I had forgotten about the player from so many years ago until I noted an obituary in the Sept. 11-24 issue of *Baseball America*: "Dino Restelli, an outfielder who slugged 13 home runs in two stints with the Pirates, died Aug. 8 in San Carlos, Calif. He was 81."

Who was this player and man who caught my attention so many baseball seasons ago? The question remained. Was his career really about a few home runs that had faded from the memories of all but the baseball historians?

Ironically, Restelli's name had surfaced in a few stories just prior to his passing as two young players -- Carlos Quentin of the Arizona Diamondbacks and Matt Kemp of the Los Angeles Dodgers -- had launched their big league careers with a flurry of home runs.

Quentin hit home runs in each of his first three starts after being recalled by the Diamondbacks on July 20 and then connected on a pinch-hit home run on July 28.

One sportswriter noted that "Quentin should probably take his blistering start with a big [sic] of caution. Among those to match his feat are the forgettable Dino Restelli of the 1949 Pirates ..."

Forgettable? The more I examined the life of Dino Restelli through the memories of those who knew him, I would offer another description of the man. Try unforgettable.

"He was one of those bigger-than-life guys who kind of filled up the room, and everybody gravitated to him," said Pat Gallagher, longtime executive with the San Francisco Giants.

"We have always tried to keep a connection with the players who were part of the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League and Dino always was a key guy to help get things organized. If it had anything to do with kids and baseball, Dino was there," Gallagher said.

Restelli was a big part of baseball in San Francisco before the Giants arrived on the scene.

He became a baseball star at Galileo High School and ultimately signed with the hometown Seals. He would spend six of his 10 professional seasons with the Seals.

"We had a group of guys from the area who played high school and semi-pro ball together and we had some talent," recalled Charlie Silvera, who was a catcher for 10 seasons in the big leagues, including nine with the New York Yankees.

"Dino was part of our group along with Bobby Brown and Jerry Coleman, both of whom went on to successful careers with the Yankees," said Silvera, still active today as a scout for the Chicago Cubs.

"Dino was a guy who stayed in San Francisco after his playing career and he always was contributing to various civic groups," added Silvera.

If there was a cause related to the promotion of baseball in the Bay Area, Restelli was ready for the call to assist.

In June of this year, the United Irish Cultural Center held an evening to honor San Francisco baseball legend Lefty O'Doul. Even though he was in failing health at the time, Restelli agreed to have his name used as one of the special guests and was in attendance for the event.

"Lefty O'Doul had been important to Dino in his career and he told us he would do whatever we wanted to assist with the event," said John Ring, one of the organizers of the dinner. "Dino wasn't feeling well, but he couldn't have been more generous with his time."

"Dino had been battling Parkinson's Disease but he was always ready to answer any call when it came to the promotion of baseball and helping others," said Dick Beverage of the Association of Professional Ball Players of America, a group that assists former players in need.

Restelli's life wasn't just about baseball. When his career ended in 1954 at the age of 30, he served as a police officer in San Francisco.

While taking an active role in the community, Restelli seldom spoke of his baseball career unless asked.

"I knew Dino from his role as the president of a dance club in the Bay Area," said Michelle Kinkaid. "He enjoyed dancing and did a lot to promote the activity. Unless someone brought up the subject, you never would know Dino had been involved in baseball."

Restelli and his wife Jude, an accomplished singer, were married for 37 years.

At a memorial service honoring Restelli, Jude sang several of her husband's favorite songs.

When the service ended, and the family departed the church, Jude led in a soft rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

Dino Restelli wasn't a one-year wonder, as he is recalled by some. He was a man who lived 81 full years, as recalled by many.

[Fred Claire](#) was a member of the Los Angeles Dodgers from 1969-98, serving the team as Executive Vice-President and general manager. His book, "Fred Claire: My 30 Years in Dodger Blue," was published by SportsPublishingLLC. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.