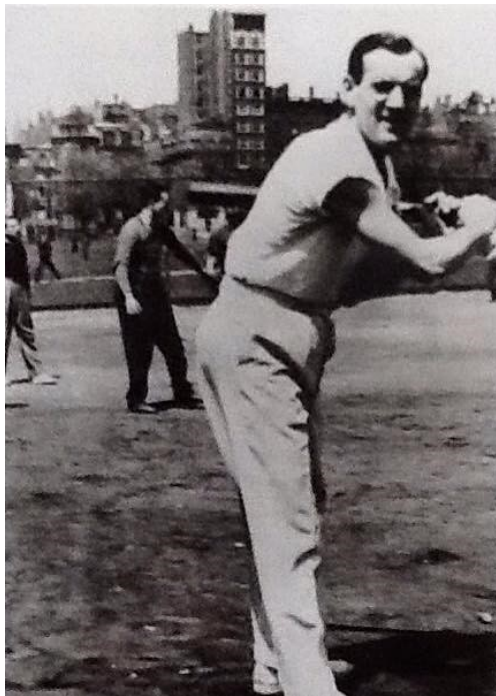




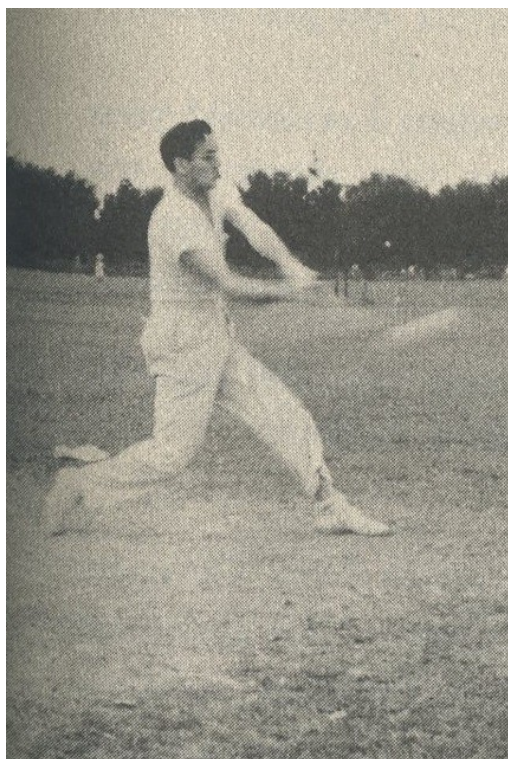
Harry James once said, "I'd rather play ball than trumpet."
Did he mean it?



Here he is serenading the ground maintenance crew at Ebbets Field on September 25, 1941,
after the Brooklyn Dodgers clinched the pennant while playing in Boston that day.



Glenn Miller had lots of hits. Most of them were recordings, but did you know that he also scored hits on the ballfield?





Many big band leaders, such as James and Miller, as well as Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Duke Ellington, to name a few more, enjoyed sports, and so did the members of their bands.

Especially baseball, which was considered “America’s pastime.”

The Editor of Metronome (and, later, author / historian) George T. Simon observed that, not only did they follow baseball, “quite a few bands fielded teams.”

While still on the Goodman band, Harry James was their captain, pitcher, and big hitter, leading the team to a season total of 14 wins, zero losses.

“Our most recent victory was an eighteen-inning affair against Count Basie’s Bulldog, and we finally won out only after Benny Heller (guitarist) tallied after some hard running from second on Red Ballard’s (trombone) prodigious triple to deep left center,” James wrote in a guest column for Metronome. “We’ve had three road games. We walloped Glenn Miller’s Millers 15 to 5. Gene Krupa’s Kangaroos 19 to 7 (which really steamed Gene, too), and in a very tight pitchers’ battle just nosed out Woody Herman’s Herd by 26 to 15.”

Among the bandleaders, James eventually may have been the ultimate sports enthusiast; have you heard the story of a musician named Johnny Fresco reporting for duty at a 1941 rehearsal?

Harry: *What do you play?*

Fresco: *What do I play? I play tenor saxophone and double on clarinet.*

Harry: *No, what position in baseball?*

Fresco: *What? I never heard about baseball, and I’m not a sports nut; fights, soccer, maybe . . .*

James’ biographer Peter J. Levinson wrote years later that one observer claimed that Harry “seemed more interested in hiring somebody for their ability to play baseball rather than for their musical talent.”



Another James anecdote reported by Levinson - one night in 1942 after the band began an engagement at the Astor Roof in New York City, three members of the pennant-bound St. Louis Cardinals (Enos Slaughter, Terry Moore, and Ray Sanders) were in the audience and, as a result of their enthusiasm for his music, James switched his allegiance “permanently” from the Brooklyn Dodgers to the Cardinals.

Muggsy Spanier, who grew up playing ball on vacant lots in Chicago, hired Pat Malone, a former Chicago Cubs and New York Yankees pitcher, to improve the sporting skills of his musicians. Likewise, in 1941, Tommy Dorsey, an even more competitive bandleader, hired Grover Cleveland Alexander, a famous pitcher who had been elected into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1938, to coach his team.

Dorsey’s interest in sports continued throughout the years. For instance, in February 1955, while on tour, he visited the New York Yankees’ Rookie School in St. Petersburg, Florida. Dorsey was a longtime rooter of the Yankees and their manager Casey Stengel.

Meanwhile, Gene Krupa once joked that his team beat Jan Garber’s by a score of 18 to 8, “due to the fact,” he explained, “that I didn’t play.”

A loyal fan of the Chicago White Sox, Krupa once pointed out the similarity between the lives of musicians and ballplayers: “... the road, the living out of suitcases, the constant time pressures to get to another place so that you can perform on schedule, the working with the same people every day, being watched all the time by the public, trying to live up to a reputation, and, of course, all the mental and emotional intangibles that must affect ballplayers just the way they affect musicians.”

John Edward Hasse, Curator of American Music at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, later added, “Baseball and jazz both use swing as a noun and a verb, and in both fields swing involves time and timing.”

We were surprised (but then, maybe we shouldn’t have been) to see so many bandleaders among the guests on Bill Stern’s “Colgate Sports Newsreel” over NBC in 1942-49: James, Kyser, Calloway, Spivak, Tommy Dorsey, Cugat, Vallee, Spike Jones, Herman, Whiteman, Kaye, Lombardo, Carle, and Heidt. On one show, Stern revealed that he had played saxophone with Ted Weems’ Orchestra!



Benny Goodman's softball team, 1938.

Standing [l. to r.] were saxophonist Bud Freeman, trumpeter Chris Griffin, bassist (and one of Benny's brothers) Harry Goodman, saxophonist Art Rollini, trumpeters Harry James and Ziggy Elman, trombonist Vernon Brown, and saxophonist Noni Bernardi. Kneeling [l. to r.] were guitarist Ben Heller, road manager (and later, band manager) Pee Wee Monte, drummer Dave Tough, and trombonist Red Ballard.



GOODMAN'S GARGANTUANS					BASIE'S BAD BOYS				
	AB	R	H						
Bernardi 3b	4	1	2		Washington				
H. Goodman					2b	5	0	3	
ss	5	3	3		Warren ss	4	1	2	
Elman 1f.	5	2	2		Morton 3b	5	0	2	
James p...	5	2	3		Evans 1b.	5	0	2	
Brown 1b.	5	1	3		Lewis c...	5	0	2	
Freeman rf	5	0	1		Clayton rf	5	0	1	
Rollini cf.	5	0	1		Green 1f.	4	1	2	
Griffin 2b.	4	0	2		Young p...	4	1	2	
Heller sf.	4	0	1		Edison cf.	3	0	0	
Godfrey c.	4	2	2		Roberts sf.	4	0	4	
	51	11	20			44	3	20	
GOODMAN...	2	0	4	1	0	0	3	0	1—11 20 0
BASIE.....	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0—3 20 0
Home run: James. Three base hits: Elman, James. Two base hits: Bernardi (2), H. Goodman (2), Godfrey. Struck out by James: 6. Base on Balls off James: 2; of Young: 1.									

Here's the box score of a game with Benny Goodman's "Gargantuans" vs. Count Basie's "Bad Boys," as reported in a 1938 issue of Metronome magazine. Harry James pitched for the Goodman team, Lester Young for the Basie players.



If you ask a sports fan about "Stan the Man," he'll figure you're speaking of Stan Musial of the St. Louis Cardinals. But if you ask a jazz fan about "Stan the Man," he'll insist that you're talking about Stan Kenton. Like others, the Kenton band got exercise playing ball while on the road. Kenton composer Pete Rugolo is shown above at bat.



Louis Armstrong [standing, r.] had a gig for three months in New Orleans during 1931.

While there, he became interested in a local sandlot baseball team known as "The Raggedy Nine" and generously purchased new uniforms and equipment for them.

To thank him, the team renamed itself "Louis Armstrong's Secret '9'."

Armstrong would throw out the first pitch at their games, and, supposedly, some of the players refused to slide because they didn't want to get their uniforms dirty.



Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra visit the "Birthplace of Baseball,"
Doubleday Field at Cooperstown, New York, in 1941.
(Lopez is near the middle, wearing a vest and tie.)

The Doubleday Field grounds had been in use since 1920, and
in 1939 The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum was established two blocks away.



Joe DiMaggio, legendary baseball player with The New York Yankees, lends an ear at Liederkrantz Hall in New York City on August 8, 1941, as Les Brown and his Band of Renown prepare to record a musical salute, *Joltin' Joe Maggio*, co-written and arranged by Ben Homer and sung by Betty Bonney. The performance was first released as a 10" 78 rpm Okeh record, and in 1949 reissued on the parent Columbia label.





Les Brown argues a point with the umpire at baseball game believed to have been held in Lykens, Pennsylvania (which is in Dauphin County; Brown's home town, Reinerton, was nearby, in Schuylkill County).
In any event, Brown's team lost to Lykens 9 to 8.



Duke Ellington swings in a different way than he normally does, ca.1941 [top]
and with members of his Orchestra outside the Astor Motel while on tour in Florida, ca.1955 [bottom].
Note the era's segregation with the Motel's sign reading "colored."



Billy Eckstine shakes hands with Dick Stuart of the Pittsburgh Pirates at the opening game of the 1960 World Series, played at Forbes Field on October 5, 1960.



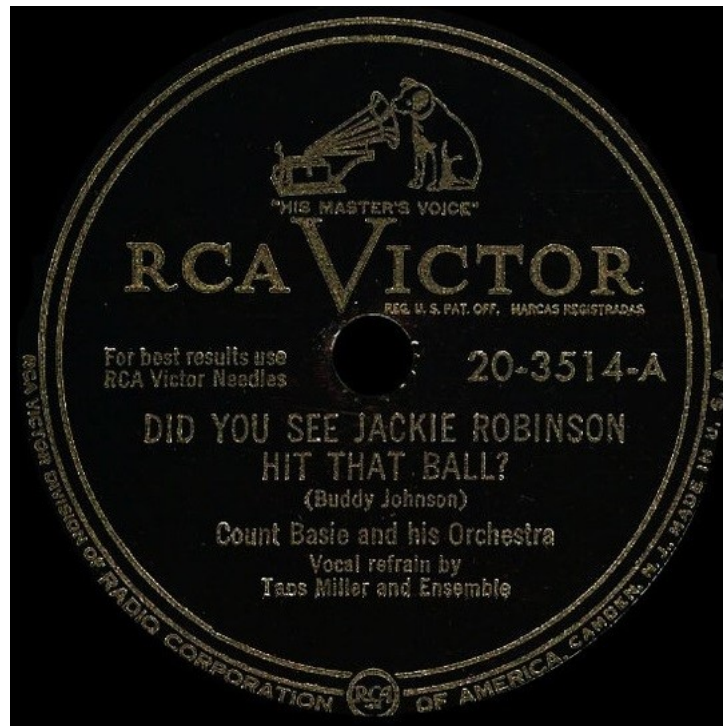
Pittsburgh was Eckstine's hometown, so his lifelong enthusiasm for the Pirates was well-placed.



Lionel Hampton in the dugout with Duke Henderson of the Kansas City Monarchs.



And with all-stars Roy Campanella, Larry Doby, Jackie Robinson, and Don Newcombe.



Both of these records scored solid hits: *Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball?* by Count Basie and his Orchestra and *Dodgers' Fan Dance* by Harry James and his Orchestra.



Paul Whiteman with baseball manager Connie Mack, 1950s.
In fact, Mack was the longest-serving manager in baseball history.



Switching to other sports, members of Bunny Berigan's Orchestra are shown in a gag golf photo, taken on a break during rehearsals at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago, 1939.

Drummer Paul Collins prepares to hit the golf ball out of pianist Joe Bushkin's mouth.

Others observing included arranger Andy Phillips, lead trumpeter Johnny Napton, saxophonists Charlie DiMaggio and Larry Walsh, band-boy Robert "Little Gate" Walker, saxophonist Don Lodice, trumpeter Jake Koven, saxophonist Gus Bivona, guitarist Tommy Moore, and trumpeter Joe Bauer.



In advance of the fifth annual Thunderbird Golf Tournament in Palm Springs, California, held in January 1956, Les Brown [r.] takes a swing in front of amateur golfer Newt Tarbie [l.] and professional Ellsworth Vines [ctr.]. The Tournament had a top prize that year of \$15,000.



Billy Eckstine on-stage with legendary boxer Sugar Ray Robinson, who may be sharing tips about golfing with Eckstine.



Speaking of sharing, fellow northeast Ohioan Glenn Mittler, a retired elementary art teacher from Elyria, sent this photo to us: it's Glenn Miller [l.] on a golf course in Pennsylvania with his caddy for the round, James Ball [r.]. Mittler also passed along the story that on the ninth green that day Miller impaled an empty Chesterfield cigarette pack with a golf tee and left it standing by the cup hole on the green.



Billy Eckstine [l., in striped shirt] confers with Leroy Tyrus and world heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis on the North Park Golf Course in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for the United Golf Tournament in 1958.



From a later period, Eckstine [r.] with golfing partner Jimmy Jordan.



A chipper-looking Glen Gray and his Casa Loma Orchestra on the golf course, 1939. Gray is standing sixth from the left, with trombonist Pee Wee Hunt to his left.



Speaking of happy, Phil Harris makes the crowd laugh during a Bing Crosby Pro-Am Golf Tournament in Pebble Beach, California. Crosby is seated in the foreground.



Ted Lewis shooting some golf balls.



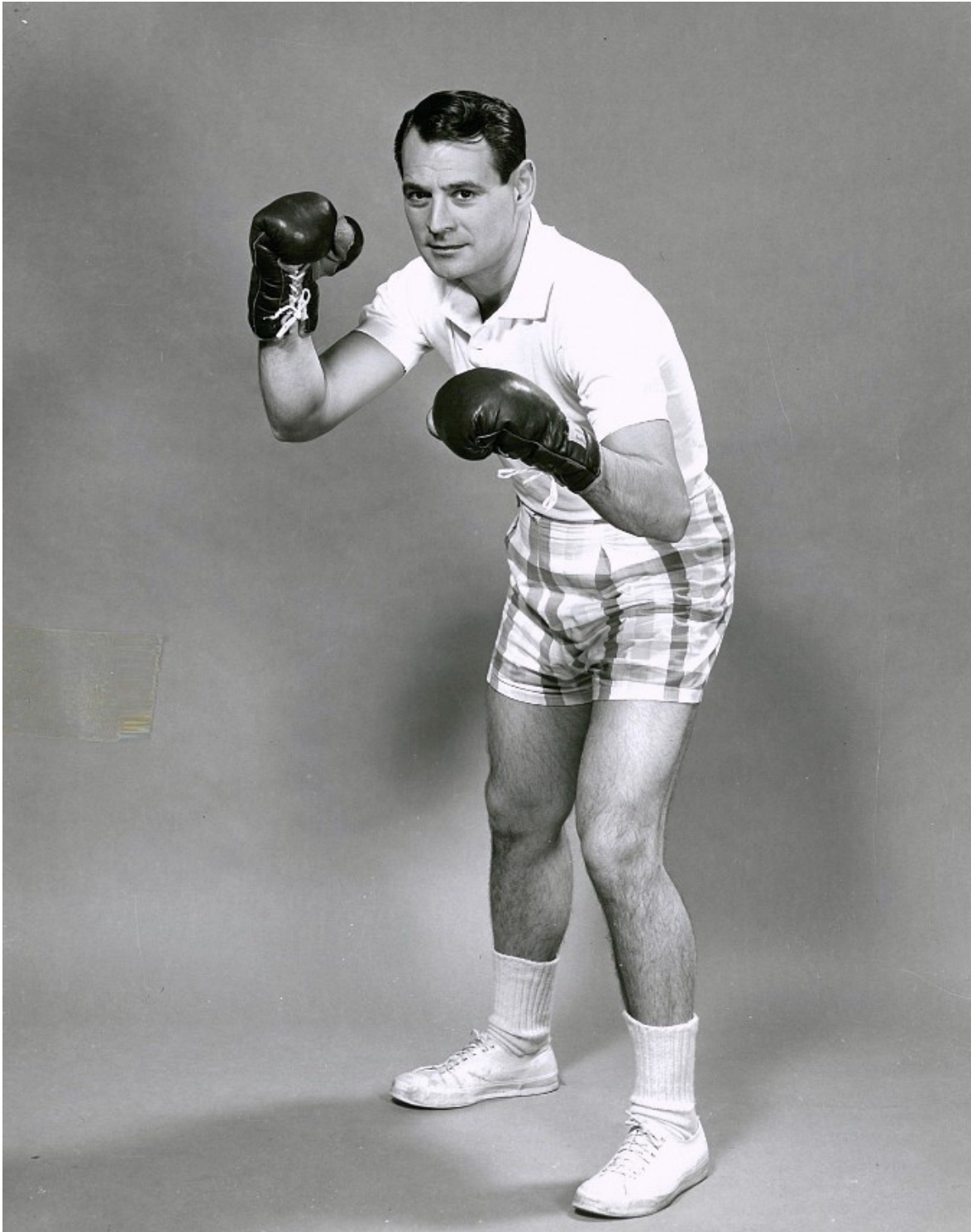
Harry James and his wife Betty Grable enjoyed a sport of another sort... horse racing.



Paul Whiteman in 1925, at the Jockey Club in Florida.



Tennis, anyone? Rudy Vallee on the courts in California around 1938.



Ray Anthony has his boxing gloves laced up.



Cab Calloway is seated across from Joe Louis [bottom, l.] in August 1938.



Eleven years later, on August 18, 1949, Calloway recorded a salute to *Ol' Joe Louis* for RCA Victor's revived Bluebird label.



Sammy Kaye reviews the sheet music of *You Can Run But You Can't Hide* with Joe Louis in 1956. Louis had been asked about a competitor, Billy Conn, who planned to “hit and run” in their upcoming match. Louis responded, “He can run, but he can’t hide.” Sammy probably wasn’t knocked out by the song. (Get it? “Knocked out”?)



Is this a fair fight?

In a 1957 photo, Armstrong has to protect his chops, with the help of his wife Lucille.



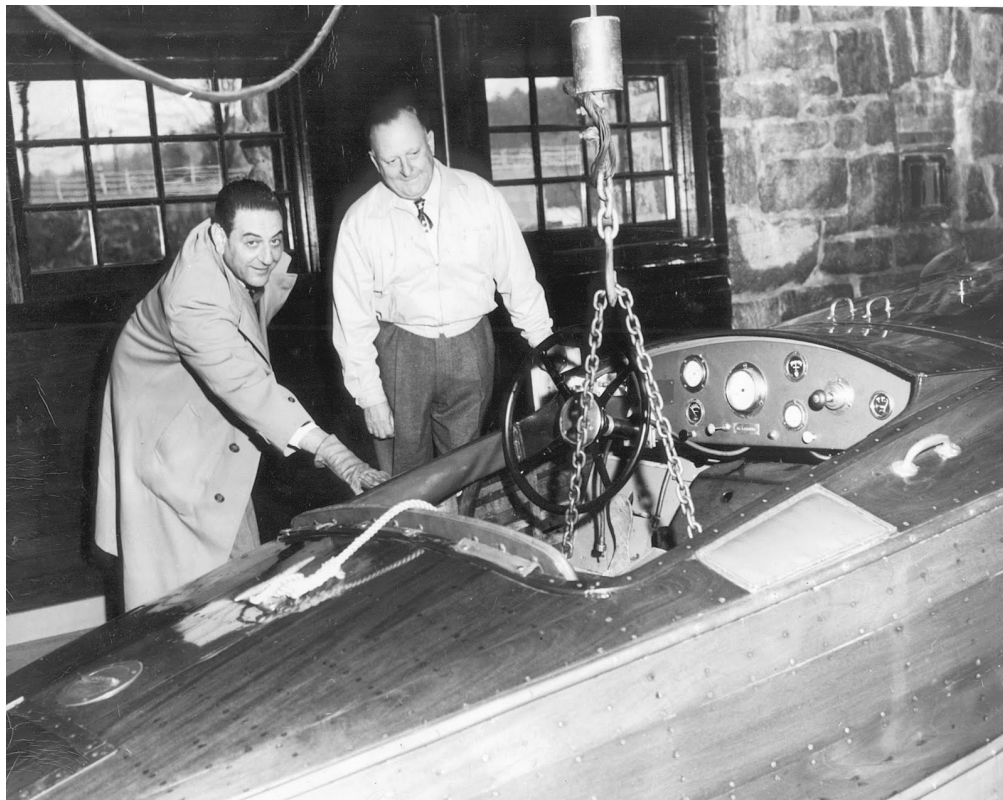
Guy Lombardo [r.] and his brothers always presented a united front if anyone questioned their musical style over the years.



But Guy had to fend for himself in 1973 against world welterweight boxing champion Jose Napoles.



Lombardo's favorite sport was hydroplane racing.
In Detroit in 1946 he won a Gold Cup with his speedboat Tempo VI.





Desi Arnaz must be fishing for some fun with Jimmy Durante.



Earl "Fatha" Hines enjoyed bowling.

Our own Father, Howard Popa, was a good amateur bowler, and in 1970 won the "King of the Hill" competition at the Christopher Columbus Society in our hometown of Alliance, Ohio for rolling a perfect 300 game.



Here's Ted Lewis enjoying himself ice skating outdoors in Columbus, Ohio, not far from his hometown of Circleville, Ohio, in 1956.



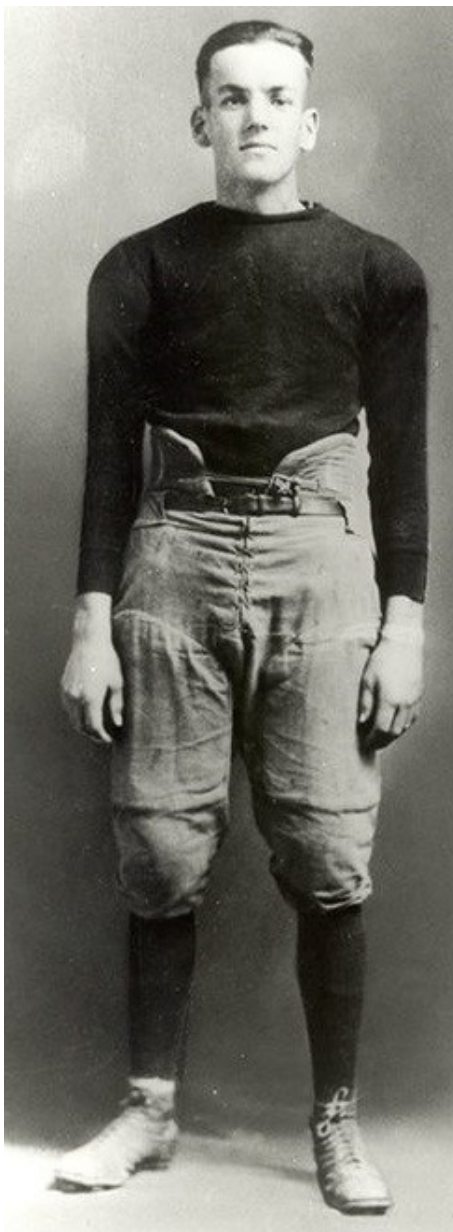
We couldn't end this without mention of one more sport... football.
Did you know that Glenn Miller had been a pretty good football player in the early 1920s?



In another photo shared by retired educator Glenn Mittler, here is Miller in 1941 [ctr.]
with Brooklyn Dodgers' quarterback Ace Parker (1912-2013) [l.],
who was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio in 1972,
and Jock Sutherland (1889-1948) [r.], who was the Brooklyn Dodgers' coach in 1940-41
and had played a few games in 1919 with the Massillon Tigers of the Ohio League,
which was the direct predecessor to the modern National Football League (NFL).
Canton and Massillon are near our hometown of Alliance, Ohio. Small world, as they say.

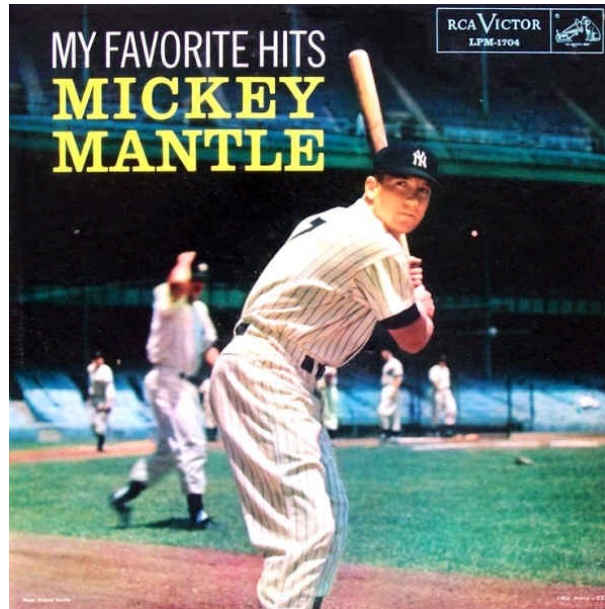


Here, Miller has taken his overcoat off and seems ready to pass the ball, but quarterback Parker doesn't look impressed.



But what about Miller playing football? While attending high school in Fort Morgan, Colorado, he was named to Colorado's all-state team.

Despite those athletic talents, his interests soon shifted to music. He was encouraged by his father, Lewis Miller, and influenced by high school band director Elmer Wells. According to local legend, Wells once bailed Miller out of jail and paid his \$10 fine for Miller having sneaked up on the roof of the school to play his trombone.



SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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