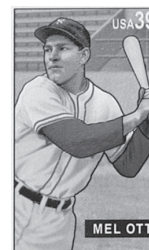


This Day in History... March 2, 1909

Happy Birthday, Mel Ott

Melvin Thomas “Master Melvin” Ott was born on March 2, 1909, in Gretna, Louisiana. Playing baseball with the New York Giants for his entire career, Ott was a twelve-time All-Star and six-time National League home run leader.

Ott enjoyed sports from an early age and proved to be a talented athlete, particularly at baseball. When he was 16, he joined a semi-pro team near New Orleans and was an immediate sensation. However, the town’s minor league team didn’t want to sign him because he was shorter than the average player. So, Ott got a job at a lumber company and joined their baseball team.



From the 2006 Baseball Sluggers Issue

Ott wowed his boss, who then convinced John McGraw, the manager of the New York Giants to give him a tryout. Ott wasn’t sure about it initially, but when his boss bought his train ticket, he agreed. Ott arrived in New York in September 1925. He immediately impressed the spectators and the manager signed him to the team in January 1926. McGraw exclaimed, “This lad is going to be one of the greatest left-hand hitters the National League has seen.”



The Polo Grounds were Mel Ott’s home field.

Ott initially played as a catcher, but McGraw thought he was too small, so he trained him to be an outfielder. He played part-time for two years before McGraw made him the team’s regular right fielder in 1929. In his first year playing full-time, Ott hit 41 home runs and had 151 RBIs – both of which were records for a player under 20 years old.

Ott stayed with the Giants 22 seasons, playing in three World Series. He was an All-Star every year from 1934 to 1945. When he retired as a player, he had 511 career home runs, the first National Leaguer to hit 500. He averaged more than 80 runs batted-in per year. Ott also held the National League career record in bases on balls. Pitchers grew wary of him early in his career; Ott walked 113 times at the age of 20. Ott was also the youngest player to hit for the cycle (hitting a single, a double, a triple, and home run in one game).

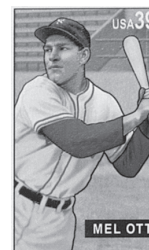
In 1942, Ott became the team’s player-manager. He continued to play for five years and then managed the team for part of another year after that. In a nationwide vote by war-bond buyers in 1944, Ott was elected the most popular sports hero of all time, over Babe Ruth and Joe Louis. Mel Ott was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1951. Ott later had a brief career as a broadcaster for the Detroit Tigers. However, in 1958 he was injured in a car crash and died a week later, on November 21, 1958. The following year, the National League named their annual home run award after Ott.

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