

## WHEN BABE RUTH CAME TO TOWN

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE



### A PHOTO FOR THE AGES

In this photograph taken of the sports page of the Jan. 27, 1927 edition of *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Tommy Fitzpatrick shakes hands with Babe Ruth. Tommy was the first kid in Salt Lake to receive an autographed baseball from the home-run legend, according to the caption — which did not note that Tommy was the son of *Tribune* publisher John Fitzpatrick. *The Tribune* was a sponsor of Ruth's week-long visit to the city, and he wrote a guest column for the newspaper in between his vaudeville appearances at the Pantagones Theatre. Tommy died in 1998 at the age of 79, but his son John and daughter Mary both keep copies of this photo hanging in their homes. John had the photo in his dorm room at Harvard and it helped him land a date with his future wife, a Yankees fan.

**“It would be something worth talking about if [Lazzeri] went to the Yanks next spring with a home-run record excelling that of the famous Bambino.”**

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Associated Press file photo

From left, Tony Lazzeri, Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig were three of the regulars in the 1927 Yankees' famed and feared "Murderer's Row" lineup. Previously, Lazzeri hit 60 home runs with the Salt Lake Bees in 1925.

# Before Babe, Lazzeri was king in Salt Lake

**“Our Tone” »** Ruth's future Yanks teammate was dominant with Bees.

By **BILL ORAM**  
*The Salt Lake Tribune*

The Salt Lake City that Babe Ruth first met in 1927 was already educated on the magic of the home run.

Just two years earlier, Salt Lake Bees shortstop Tony Lazzeri chased Ruth's baseball home run record — set at 59 in 1921 — and capped the '25 season with 60.

Additionally, he tallied 222 runs batted in, 203 runs scored, 34 stolen bases and a .355 average. It was in that one season with the Pacific Coast League Bees — the last season before they moved to Hollywood — that Utahns dubbed Lazzeri, a San Francisco-born Italian-American, “Our Tone.”

Still, Ruth was begrudgingly

acknowledged as the greatest slugger when he arrived in Salt Lake.

“Thus arrived and was greeted baseball's brightest star,” said *The Salt Lake Tribune*. “Thus did Our Tone's only superior enter for the first time Our Tone's own town.”

In early July of that season, Bees owner Bill Lane, losing huge amounts of money on the team, met with Yankees scout Ed Holly, according to a 2006 article by Brigham Young University professor Richard Ian Kimball that appeared in the baseball journal *Nine*.

Lazzeri would join the Yankees in 1926, sold for \$50,000.

He spent the rest of '25 with the Bees, chasing the Babe's record, and eclipsing it — though in 46 games more than Ruth would need to hit 60 in 1927.

“When that Italian boy hits 'em,” Ruth wrote in his 1927 *Tribune* guest column, “he hits 'em

far. His batting average doesn't show just what kind of a hitter he is.” Lazzeri struggled in his first year with New York, Ruth told *The Salt Lake Telegram*. “He came up swinging like the garden gate and it couldn't be done against major league pitching.”

It got better for Our Tone. After famously striking out in the seventh inning of the deciding game of '26 series loss to St. Louis, he started at second base for five Yankees championship teams. He batted sixth in the '27 New York lineup known as “Murderer's Row.” In 1936, he became the first Major League hitter to hit two grand slams in one game. He also batted in 11 runs that game, another record.

In 1991, he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame and the last line of his plaque reads thusly:

“Belted 60 Home Runs for Salt Lake City (PCL) in 1925.”

He sure did, Our Tone.

### Likes Spence Adams; New Managers Make Race Hard to Dope

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(Column Two)

and I think he has been making a great fight for the things he considers best for baseball. He was in baseball a long while before any one of those fellows ever thought of being club owners. About the Ty Cobb-Tris Speaker proposition I have nothing in particular to say. I do not believe those men would do anything intentionally to hurt baseball or to injure the feelings of the thousands of fans who think so much of them. I have enjoyed all my dealings with both men. I trust things will be settled and that they will again be in the junior major league next season.

Frank Navin of Detroit, Cobb's former owner, is in Johnson's place. I do not know whether or not there is any significance to that or whether it will have any bearing on Cobb's case one way or another.

I see something about trouble in California because I took some boys up on the stage for a few minutes. Breaking the child labor laws or something. I will possibly know more about that when I return there after my Salt Lake engagement.

#### “OUR TONE” IS THERE.

Now about Bananas. That's our name for Tony Lazzeri. We think it is a good name. We call him “Poosh ‘Em Up Ton,” too. That came from Salt Lake with him. I think Tony Lazzeri is one of the best players in baseball. His work last year was sufficient to mark him as one of the greats and when you consider that he has just stepped into the majors and had a minor league reputation dragging on him, his showing last year was remarkable. I believe Tony will double his 1926 home-run record this year. When that Italian boy hits 'em he hits 'em far. His batting average doesn't show just what kind of a hitter he is. His mark was about .275, as I remember it, but almost every one of the hits registered there came just when needed. That's baseball. I am glad to be in Tony's home town and will probably meet a lot of his friends during my stay here. Spence Adams is another Utah boy who is coming to the front fast. Watch him next season.

#### TOO MANY MANAGERS.

About the prospects for the coming year I can only surmise. Huggins has a pretty good outfit lined up for the coming year. I think it will deliver. Funny thing about this stove league baseball and even spring training camp baseball. Even the wise ones get fooled and get fooled often. No one but ourselves believed we would come through last year. We will enter the race this year with more backers. I hope we will live up to the expectations. There are so many new managers in the majors this year that it is hard to dope things out. There's William Carrigan of the Boston Americans, a good man; Jack McAllister of Cleveland is no slouch; George Moriarty of Detroit, a former umpire, is a master at handling men; Rach Schalk of Chicago is a popular little fellow, and being a catcher, has ample opportunity (in fact, it is a necessity) to know men and how to handle men; Dan P. Howley of St. Louis should pep the Browns up considerable. It is reported that Sisler is going to be at first base for the St. Louis team this year, despite his demotion. He will be hard to beat now that he has been relieved of his managerial worries. So you see you folks know about as much about the chances this coming year as I do. I know about what Huggins, Harris and Connie Mack have and what they will do, but are five teams about which I can only guess.

I am glad of the opportunity to meet Salt Lake folks. My long connection with *The Salt Lake Tribune* makes me feel at home here, although this is my first visit.

### Babe Has Backup Thanks to Fellow Maulers in Lineup

(Continued from Page One.)  
(Column Four)

Pirates, owners of a fine 94-60 record that won them the National League, were simply out-matched and bowed out after a four-game sweep in the title series.

While Ruth knocked 60 balls out of parks throughout the American League and recorded a .356 average, it was the prowess of the men bookending him in the New York lineup that lifted those Yankees to such legend.

Earl Combes led off and swatted 231 hits, a team record that stood until Don Mattingly came along in 1986. Then there was Mark Koenig, a shortstop who hit .285 that year. Then Ruth, whose numbers paled only to those of the cleanup man, Lou Gehrig.

Gehrig, that Iron Horse, was responsible for 175 runs batted in, a tally made possible by his .373 consistency at the plate.

Then came the left fielder, Bob Meusel, whose .337 would lead the big leagues most modern years, but in '27 was only fourth best on his own team. Then, Tony Lazzeri — Our Tone — who provided power in the six hole, batting .309 with 18 home runs.

Those men were the principal ingredients in Murderers' Row, the most famed lineup in baseball history. They were supported by third baseman Joe Dugan and catcher Pat Collins, but the real meat and fame came in the first six batters' slots.

#### 1927 YANKEES LINEUP.

1. Earl Combes — CF
2. Mark Koenig — SS
3. Babe Ruth — RF
4. Lou Gehrig — 1B
5. Bob Meusel — LF
6. Tony Lazzeri — 2B
7. Joe Dugan — 3B
8. Pat Collins — C

### Charismatic Slugger Proves Plenty Popular Wherever He May Go

(Continued from Page Ten.)  
(Column Three)

He roundly declined to comment on Cobb's and Speaker's brush with baseball's enforcement arm. And rightly so. Between his arrival on Jan. 25 and his departure on Feb. 2, not only were the powerful pair exonerated, but Speaker had signed on for a season with the Washington Senators of the American League.

Ruth's own dustup over labor laws, too, came into clearer focus. *The Tribune* asserted, “Ruth not in as bad as report would indicate.”

Soon enough, that \$70,000 from the Yankees would come in too, and The Great Bambino would be entrenched with the team and the town with which he will forever be mostly closely associated.

Throughout his career, Ruth would be a great draw in New York, and on the road in Boston, and Washington, and Detroit, and Cleveland.

He would, of course, barnstorm throughout the country with his colleague Lou Gehrig — the Bus-tin' Babes and the Larrupin' Lous — again in the fall of 1927, at the immediate conclusion of that fine season.

From then, he would always be Babe Ruth, the swatter of 60 ding-ers, a record that would be the best ever until Roger Maris in 1961, and would not be further relegated until the reigns of Mark McGwire and Barry Bonds.

But those names and records were unthinkable in the winter of 1927, when it was just The Babe and the flirtatious imagination of what he might go on to in his yet still-rising career. And, for a brief, magical, almost lost clipping of time, he brought those major-league dreams to our minor-league desert city.

For that week, Salt Lake City belonged to Babe Ruth, and, however briefly, Babe Ruth belonged to Salt Lake City.