History of the Brooklyn Dodgers

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For the history of the team from 1958 onward, see History of the Los Angeles Dodgers. For information on the franchise in general, see Los Angeles Dodgers.

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Early Brooklyn baseball



The 1865 Atlantics were one of the first dynasties in organized baseball

Brooklyn was home to numerous baseball clubs in the mid-1850s. Eight of 16 participants in the first convention were from Brooklyn, including the Atlantic, Eckford, and Excelsior clubs that combined to dominate play for most of the 1860s. Brooklyn helped make baseball commercial, as the locale of the first paid admission games, a series of three all star contests matching New York and Brooklyn in 1858. Brooklyn also featured the first two enclosed baseball grounds, the Union Grounds and the Capitoline Grounds; enclosed, dedicated ballparks accelerated the evolution from amateurism to professionalism.

Despite the success of Brooklyn clubs in the first Association, officially amateur until 1869, they fielded weak teams in the succeeding National Association of Professional Base Ball

Players, the first professional league formed in 1871. The Excelsiors no longer challenged for the amateur championship after the Civil War and never entered the professional NA. The Eckfords and Atlantics declined to join until 1872 and thereby lost their best players; Eckford survived only one season and Atlantic four, with losing teams.

The National League replaced the NA in 1876 and granted exclusive territories to its eight members, excluding the Atlantics in favor of the New York Mutuals, who had shared the same home grounds. When the Mutuals were expelled by the league, the Hartford Dark Blues club moved in, changed its name to **The Brooklyn Hartfords**^[1] and played its home games at Union Grounds in 1877 before disbanding.

The origin of the Dodgers

The team currently known as the Dodgers was formed (as the "Brooklyn Grays") in 1883 by real estate magnate and baseball enthusiast Charles Byrne, who convinced his brother-in-law Joseph Doyle and casino operator Ferdinand Abell to start the team with him. Byrne set up a grandstand on Fifth Avenue and named it Washington Park in honor of George Washington. The team played in the minor Inter-State Association of Professional Baseball Clubs that first season. Doyle became the first manager of the team, which drew 6,000 fans to its first home game on May 12, 1883 against the Trenton team. The team won the league title after the Camden Merritt club disbanded on July 20 and Brooklyn picked up some of its better players. The Grays were invited to join the American Association for the following season. [2]

After winning the AA championship in 1889, the team moved to the National League and won the 1890 NL Championship, the first Major League team to win consecutive championships in two different leagues. Their success during this period was partly attributed to their absorbing the players of the defunct New York Metropolitans and Brooklyn Ward's Wonders. In 1899, the Dodgers merged with the Baltimore

Orioles, as Baltimore manager Ned Hanlon became the club's new skipper and Charles Ebbets became the primary owner of the team.

The team's nickname

By 1890, New Yorkers (Brooklyn was a separate city until it became a borough in 1898) routinely called anyone from Brooklyn a "trolley dodger", due to the vast network of street car lines crisscrossing the borough as people dodged trains to cross the streets. When the second Washington Park burned down early in the 1891 season, the team moved to nearby Eastern Park, which was bordered on two sides by street car tracks. That's when the team was first called the **Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers**. That was soon shortened to **Brooklyn Dodgers**. [3] Possibly because of the "street character" nature of Jack Dawkins, the "Artful Dodger" in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, sportswriters in the early 20th Century began referring to the Dodgers as the "Bums".

Other team names used by the franchise which would finally be called the Dodgers were the Grays, the Grooms, the Bridegrooms, the Superbas and the Robins. All of these nicknames were used by fans and sportswriters to describe the team, but not in any official



Logo of the Brooklyn Dodgers/Superbas from 1910 through 1913

capacity. The team's legal name was the Brooklyn Base Ball Club. ^[4] However, the Trolley Dodger nickname was used throughout this period, along with these other nicknames, by fans and sportswriters of the day. The team did not use the name in any formal sense until 1932, when the word "Dodgers" appeared on jerseys for the team. ^[5] The "conclusive shift" came in 1933, when both home and road jerseys for the team bore the name "Dodgers". ^[6]

Examples of how the many popularized names of the team were used interchangeably are available from newspaper articles from the period before 1932. A New York Times article describing a game the Dodgers played in 1916 starts out by referring to how "Jimmy Callahan, pilot of the Pirates, did his best to wreck the hopes the Dodgers have of gaining the National League pennant", but then goes on to comment "the only thing that saved the Superbas from being toppled from first place was that the Phillies lost one of the two games played". What is interesting about the use of these two nicknames is that most baseball statistics sites and baseball historians generally now refer to the pennant-winning 1916 Brooklyn team as the Robins. A 1918 New York Times article does use the nickname Robins in its title "Buccaneers Take Last From Robins", but the subtitle of the article reads "Subdue The Superbas By 11 To 4, Making Series An Even Break". [8]

Another example of the interchangeability of the different nicknames is found on the program issued at Ebbetts Field for the 1920 World Series, which identifies the matchup in the series as "Dodgers vs. Indians", despite the fact that the Robins nickname had been in consistent usage at this point for around six years. [9]

Rivalry with the Giants

Main article: Dodgers-Giants rivalry

The historic and heated rivalry between the Dodgers and the Giants is more than a century old. It began when both clubs played in New York City (the Dodgers in Brooklyn and the Giants in Manhattan). When both franchises moved to California after the 1957 season, the rivalry was easily transplanted, as the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco have long been rivals in economics, culture and politics.

"Uncle Robbie" and the "Daffiness Boys"

Manager Wilbert Robinson, another former Oriole, popularly known as "Uncle Robbie", restored the Brooklyn team to respectability. His "Brooklyn Robins" reached the 1916 and 1920 World Series, losing both, but contending perennially for several seasons. [10] Charles Ebbetts and Ed McKeever died within a week of each other in 1925, and Robbie was named president while still field manager. [11] Upon assuming the title of president, however, Robinson's ability to focus on the field declined, and the teams of the late 1920s were often fondly referred to as the "Daffiness Boys" for their distracted, error-ridden style of play. [12] Outfielder Babe Herman was the leader both in hitting and in zaniness. The signature Dodger play from this era occurred when Herman doubled into a double play, in which three players – Dazzy Vance, Chick Fewster, and Herman – all ended up at third base at the same time. After his removal as club

president, Robinson returned to managing, and the club's performance rebounded somewhat.^[12]

When Robinson retired in 1931, he was replaced as manager by Max Carey. [12] Although some suggested renaming the "Robins" the "Brooklyn Canaries", after Carey (whose last name was originally "Carnarius"), the name "Brooklyn Dodgers" returned to stay following Robinson's retirement. [12] It was during this era that Willard Mullin, a noted sports cartoonist, fixed the Brooklyn team with the lovable nickname of "**Dem Bums**". After hearing his cab driver ask, "So how did those bums do today?", Mullin decided to sketch an exaggerated version of famed circus clown Emmett Kelly to represent the Dodgers in his much-praised cartoons in the *New York World-Telegram*. Both image and nickname caught on, so much so many a Dodger yearbook cover, from 1951 through 1957, featured a Willard Mullin illustration of the Brooklyn Rum

Perhaps the highlight of the Daffiness Boys era came after Wilbert Robinson left the dugout. [12] In 1934, Giants player/manager Bill Terry was asked about the Dodgers' chances in the coming pennant race and cracked infamously, "Is Brooklyn still in the league?" Managed now by Casey Stengel (who played for the Dodgers in the 1910s and would go on to greatness managing the New York Yankees), [12] the 1934 Dodgers were determined to make their presence felt. As it happened, the season entered its final games with the Giants tied with the St. Louis Cardinals for the pennant, with the Giants' remaining games against the Dodgers. Stengel led his Bums to the Polo Grounds for the showdown, and they beat the Giants twice to knock them out of the pennant race. [12] The "Gashouse Gang" Cardinals nailed the pennant by beating the Cincinnati Reds those same two days. [12]

One key development during this era was the 1938 appointment of Leland "Larry" MacPhail as Dodgers' general manager. [12] MacPhail, who brought night baseball to MLB as general manager of the Reds, also introduced Brooklyn to night baseball and ordered the successful refurbishing of Ebbets Field. [12] He also brought Reds voice Red Barber to Brooklyn as the Dodgers' lead announcer in 1939, just after MacPhail broke the New York baseball executives' agreement to ban live baseball broadcasts, enacted because of the fear of what effect the radio calls would have on the home teams' attendance.

MacPhail remained with the Dodgers until 1942, when he returned to the Armed Forces for World War II. (He later became one of the Yankees' co-owners, bidding unsuccessfully for Barber to join him in the Bronx as announcer.) MacPhail's son Leland Jr. and grandson Andy also became MLB executives.

The first major-league baseball game to be televised was Brooklyn's 6–1 victory over Cincinnati at Ebbets Field on August 26, 1939. Batting helmets were introduced to Major League Baseball by the Dodgers in 1941

Breaking the color barrier



Civil Rights movement.[13]

For first half of the 20th century, no Major League Baseball team employed a black player. A parallel system of Negro Leagues developed, but most of the Negro League players were denied a chance to prove their skill before a national audience. Jackie Robinson became the first African-American to play Major League baseball in the 20th Century when he played his first major league game on April 15, 1947 as a member of the Dodgers. Robinson's entry into the league was mainly due to General Manager Branch Rickey's efforts. The deeply religious Rickey's motivation appears to have been primarily moral, although business considerations were also present. Rickey was a member of The Methodist Church, the antecedent denomination to The United Methodist Church of today, which was a strong advocate for social justice and active later in the

Besides selecting Robinson for his exceptional baseball skills, Rickey also considered Robinson's outstanding personal character in his decision, since he knew that boos, taunts, and criticism would be directed at Robinson and that Robinson would have to be tough enough to withstand this abuse without attempting to retaliate. [14]

The inclusion of Robinson on the team also led the Dodgers to move its spring training site. Prior to 1946, the Dodgers held their spring training in Jacksonville, Florida. However, the city's stadium refused to host an exhibition game with the Montreal Royals – the Dodgers' own farm club – on whose roster Robinson appeared at the time, citing segregation laws. Nearby Sanford similarly declined. Ultimately, City Island Ballpark in Daytona Beach agreed to host the game with Robinson on the field. The team would return to Daytona Beach for spring training in 1947, this time with Robinson on the big club. Although the Dodgers

ultimately built Dodgertown and its Holman Stadium further south in Vero Beach, and played there for 61 spring training seasons from 1948 through 2008, Daytona Beach would rename City Island Ballpark to Jackie Robinson Ballpark in his honor.

This event was the continuation of the integration of professional sports in the United States, with professional football having led the way in 1946, with the concomitant demise of the Negro Leagues, and is regarded as a key moment in the history of the American civil rights movement. Robinson was an exceptional player, a speedy runner who sparked the team with his intensity. He was the inaugural recipient of the Rookie of the Year award, which is now named the Jackie Robinson award in his honor. The Dodgers' willingness to integrate, when most other teams refused to, was a key factor in their 1947–1956 success. They won six pennants in those 10 years with the help of Robinson, three-time MVP Roy Campanella, Cy Young Award winner Don Newcombe, Jim Gilliam, and Joe Black. Robinson would eventually go on to become the first African-American elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

"Wait 'til next year!"

After the wilderness years of the 1920s and 1930s, the Dodgers were rebuilt into a contending club first by general manager Larry MacPhail and then the legendary Branch Rickey. Led by Pee Wee Reese, Jackie Robinson and Gil Hodges in the infield, Duke Snider in center field, Carl Furillo in right field, Roy Campanella behind the plate, and Don Newcombe on the pitcher's mound, the Dodgers won pennants in 1941, 1947, 1949, 1952, and 1953, only to fall to the New York Yankees in all five of the subsequent World Series. The annual ritual of building excitement, followed in the end by disappointment, became a common pattern to the long suffering fans, and "Wait 'til next year!" became an unofficial Dodger slogan.

While the Dodgers generally enjoyed success during this period, in 1951 they fell victim to one of the largest collapses in the history of baseball. [15] On August 11, 1951, Brooklyn led the National League by an enormous 13½ games over their archrivals, the Giants. While the Dodgers went 26–22 from that time until the end of the season, the Giants went on an absolute tear, winning an amazing 37 of their last 44 games, including their last seven in a row. At the end of the season the Dodgers and the Giants were tied for first place, forcing a three-game playoff for the pennant. The Giants took Game 1 by a score of 3–1 before being shut out by the Dodgers' Clem Labine in Game 2, 10–0. It all came down to the final game, and Brooklyn seemed to have the pennant locked up, holding a 4–2 lead in the bottom of the ninth inning. Giants outfielder, Bobby Thomson, however, hit a stunning three-run walk-off home run off the Dodgers' Ralph Branca to secure the NL Championship for New York. To this day Thomson's home run is known as the Shot Heard 'Round The World.

In 1955 by which time the core of the Dodger team was beginning to age "next year" finally came. The fabled "Boys of Summer" shot down the "Bronx Bombers" in seven games^[16], led by the first-class pitching of young left-hander Johnny Podres, whose key pitch was a changeup known as "pulling down the lampshade" because of the arm motion used right when the ball was released. Podres won two Series games, including the deciding seventh. The turning point of Game 7 was a spectacular double play that began with left fielder Sandy Amoros running down Yogi Berra's long fly ball, then throwing to shortstop Pee Wee Reese, who doubled up a surprised Gil McDougald at first base to preserve the Dodger lead. The Dodgers won 2–0.

Although the Dodgers lost the World Series to the Yankees in 1956 (during which the Yankees pitcher Don Larsen pitched the only postseason perfect game in baseball history, and the only post-season no-hitter until Roy Halladay's no-hitter for the Phillies over the Reds on October 6, 2010), it hardly seemed to matter. Brooklyn fans had their memory of triumph, and soon that would be all they were left with – a victory that decades later would be remembered in the Billy Joel single "We Didn't Start the Fire", which included the line, "Brooklyn's got a winning team."

Move to California

Real estate businessman Walter O'Malley had acquired majority ownership of the Dodgers in 1950, when he bought the shares of his co-owners, Branch Rickey and the estate of the late John L. Smith. Before long he was working to buy new land in Brooklyn to build a more accessible and better arrayed ballpark than Ebbets Field. Beloved as it was, Ebbets Field had grown old and was not well served by infrastructure, to the point where the Dodgers could not sell the park out even in the heat of a pennant race (despite largely dominating the league from 1946 to 1957).

New York City Construction Coordinator Robert Moses, however, sought to force O'Malley into using a site in Flushing Meadows, Queens – the site for what eventually became Shea Stadium. Moses' vision involved a city-built, city-owned park, which was greatly at odds with O'Malley's real-estate savvy. When

it became clear to O'Malley that he was not going to be allowed to buy any suitable land in Brooklyn, he began thinking elsewhere.

Walter O'Malley was free to purchase land of his own choosing but needed Robert Moses to condemn land along the Atlantic Railroad Yards (O'Malley's preferred choice) in downtown Brooklyn under Title I authority. Title I gave the city municipality power to condemn land for the purpose of building what it calls "public purpose" projects. Moses interpretation of "public purpose" was to build public parks, public housing and public highways/bridges. What O'Malley wanted was for Moses to use this authority rather than pay market value for the land. With Title I, the city, aka Robert Moses, could have sold the land to O'Malley at a below market price. Robert Moses refused to honor O'Malley's request and responded by saying, "If you want the land so bad, why don't you purchase it with your own money?" [18]

Meanwhile, non-stop transcontinental air travel had become routine during the years since the Second World War, and teams were no longer bound by much slower railroad timetables. Because of these transportation advances, it became possible to locate teams further apart – as far west as California – while maintaining the same game schedules.

When Los Angeles officials attended the 1956 World Series looking to entice a team to move to the City of Angels, they were not even thinking of the Dodgers. Their original target had been the Washington Senators (who would in fact move to Bloomington, Minnesota to become the Minnesota Twins in 1961). At the same time, O'Malley was looking for a contingency in case Moses and other New York politicians refused to let him build the Brooklyn stadium he wanted, and sent word to the Los Angeles officials that he was interested in talking. Los Angeles offered him what New York would not: a chance to buy land suitable for building a ballpark, and own that ballpark, giving him complete control over all its revenue streams.

Meanwhile, Giants owner Horace Stoneham was having similar difficulty finding a replacement for his team's antiquated home stadium, the Polo Grounds. Stoneham was considering moving the Giants to Minneapolis, but was persuaded instead to move them to San Francisco, ensuring that the Dodgers would have a National League rival closer than St. Louis. So the two arch-rival teams, the Dodgers and Giants, moved out to the West Coast together after the 1957 season.

The Brooklyn Dodgers played their final game at Ebbets Field on September 24, 1957, which the Dodgers won 2–0 over the Pittsburgh Pirates.

On April 18, 1958, the Los Angeles Dodgers played their first game in LA, defeating the former New York and now new San Francisco Giants, 6–5, before 78,672 fans at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.^[19] Sadly, catcher Roy Campanella, left partially paralyzed in an off-season accident, was never able to play for Los Angeles.

A 2007 HBO film, *Brooklyn Dodgers: The Ghosts of Flatbush*, is a documentary covering the Dodgers history from early days to the beginning of the Los Angeles era.

See also

 Bums: An Oral History of the Brooklyn Dodgers (1984 winner of the CASEY Award, as the best baseball book of the year)

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