

# THE DAY THE BUMS LEFT HOME



# Dodgers

by Harvey Frommer

Once, the borough of Brooklyn was one huge fan club and Ebbets Field was home away from home for millions. On the job and in school rooms, in bars and beauty parlors, the sound of the Dodgers playing baseball was always on the radio. Followers of the team could move through their daily routines in Brooklyn from butcher shop, to candy store, to laundromat, moving from one to the other without missing a pitch. Today all the excitement and drama belong to another age and to another city, but the streets and avenues where some of the best moments in Brooklyn Dodger history unfolded still remain, forever anchoring those moments in memory.

Downtown Brooklyn was definitely the hub of Dodger ardor. The area was always overflowing in tribute to "the beloved bums." On Court Street, Fulton Street, Flatbush Avenue, store windows and bars showcased pictures, schedules, autographed baseballs and

red, white and blue bunting—identification with the Dodgers of Brooklyn. At 24 DeKalb Avenue, there was the "Dodger Cafe," a coffee shop where fans would congregate and linger, lovingly arguing about the merits of their favorite players.

Annually, victory parades moved through the streets of downtown Brooklyn. There are still those who remember the sight of Johnny Podres, the hero who had won the final game of the 1955 World Series to give the Brooklyn team their only championship title, riding in an open convertible heading a massive victory parade down Flatbush Avenue.

There are still those who remember the signs: "Moider the Yanks," "Reese for Mayor," "Brooklyn Has Those Atomic Bums," "El Diario Felicita a Olmo Estamos Contigo." The *El Diario* sign was a salute from the Spanish newspaper (then located on Fulton and Willoughby Streets) to Luis Olmo, a

part-time Dodger outfielder of Spanish descent.

And there are specific locations remembered, as well. Some remain. Others, like Ebbets Field, are mere memories.

And, like Ebbets Field, there no longer is a 215 Montague Street, the office building that housed the main headquarters of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

It was at 215 Montague Street that Jackie Roosevelt Robinson and Wesley Branch Rickey first met and sealed the agreement that broke baseball's color line forever.

Robinson, a 26-year-old shortstop for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro Leagues, paused at the newsstand at the corner of Montague and Court Streets on August 28, 1945. When he entered 215 Montague, he was under the impression that he was going to be interviewed for a position on the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers, a black team that Rickey was allegedly forming.

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The Bible-quoting Rickey had built the St. Louis Cardinal baseball dynasty. In 27 years as head of that team, he had won six National League pennants and four world championships. Appointed Brooklyn Dodger general manager in 1942, he'd made a secret decision to break baseball's color line and build the Dodgers into a National League powerhouse by tapping into the lode of black talent that previously was off limits to organized baseball.

The Rickey-Robinson meeting lasted almost three hours. The older man role played all the types of bigots that Robinson, as a baseball pioneer, would have to face. Rickey tested Robinson, probing for the strength of character that would be needed if Robinson were to succeed as the first member of his race to play major league baseball. The meeting ended with a handshake between the two very different men.

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson, grandson of slaves, played first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers and shattered baseball's color line forever. Three hotels—the St. George, the Bossert and the Towers—housed players and executives of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Conveniently located just blocks away from 215 Montague Street, the hotels were just a 20-minute subway ride and a two-block walk to Ebbets Field.

Pugnacious Leo Durocher had a suite for a time at the Bossert when he was a player and, later, manager for the Dodgers. Pitcher Johnny Podres also resided at the Bossert, as did outfielders Carl Furillo and Gino Cimoli, among others.

Fans would linger on the streets of Brooklyn Heights outside of the hotels, eager to gawk at their Dodger favorites; some still have the autographed baseballs and ticket stubs stuffed away in drawers and on shelves from those

sidewalk rendezvous those long years ago.

The Bossert was the scene of many press conferences. One of the most famous was staged by Branch Rickey on October 26, 1950, the culmination of a bitter power struggle engaging Rickey and Walter O'Malley for control of the Dodgers.

A series of maneuvers conducted behind closed doors forced Rickey out as general manager and president. The Ohio-born orator greeted the assembled press with these words: "Comest thou here to see the reed driven in the wind?" He then resigned and was succeeded by Walter O'Malley, a man who began his career with the team as a lawyer for the Brooklyn Trust Company. O'Malley had ambitious plans for the Dodgers. Foremost among them was an innovative idea, a new, domed stadium. Ebbets Field and baseball in Brooklyn were doomed.

NEW BROOKLYN  
SEPTEMBER  
1982



# Robinson



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