

The World Series I'll Never Forget

The Los Angeles Dodgers slugger was a goat in his first fall classic; then came the '52 games and a dramatic chance for revenge

By **DUKE SNIDER**
as told to John M. Ross

Duke Snider was an idol in his Brooklyn days—especially when his bat rocked the Yankees.

SOMETIME BEFORE the first pitch of the 1961 World Series, practically every contestant in the classic will engage in the traditional whistling-past-the-gravestone routine.

"It's just another ball game," they'll say, and they'll even try to convince themselves that they believe it.

I doubt if any player really becomes calloused to the excitement and tension of the Series. I've been in six big ones, and each time I stood out there and waited for the band to finish playing the National Anthem I had to fight the "butterflies" in my stomach. I'm not ashamed of that. Why, even the bat boy, the trainer, and the umpires get caught in this strange grip. And as for rookies—well, they really have troubles.

In my first Series in 1949, for example, the thing that gave me nightmares was the pitching of the New York Yankees. It had been my first full season with the Dodgers, and I hadn't done too badly for a young fellow. My batting average was .292, and I had beefed up this figure with 23 home runs and 92 runs batted in. Needless to say, I was hoping to put a little frosting on the cake with a few hits in the Series. But then I met up with Allie Reynolds, Vic Raschi, Joe Page, and Eddie Lopat, the Yankee pitchers.

To say that this meeting was disastrous would be an understatement. By the time the Yankees had finished us off in five games, these fellows had me eating out of their hands. Reynolds, in the very opening game, struck me out three times in succession. The ball he threw resembled a little pea by the time it got up to the plate. And when his partners were throwing, it wasn't any easier to hit. I came up with three hits for a .143 average, and my eight strike-outs tied an all-time Series record for futility. The only consolation here was that I joined a pretty good hitter in the record book—Rogers Hornsby.

It was three years before I met up with Reynolds and his partners again, and I wasn't too sure that I would enjoy it. I had had a pretty fair season in 1952, hitting for a .303 average, but season averages don't always hold up in a Series. The record book is full of such examples: Ted Williams' Series average was only .200. Stan Musial's is .269; Willie Mays, .222; Ty Cobb, .262; Hornsby, .245.

As we came up to the '52 Series, I was lucky—I was on a good hitting spree. But when I dug in against Reynolds in the opening game, I didn't exactly feel I had the upper hand. In the fourth inning, however, I clipped him for a double, and I felt a little better. Well, at least I got one hit off him, I told myself. Maybe things won't be as bad as '49.

In the sixth inning, with the score tied at 1-1 and Pee Wee Reese on first, Reynolds fed me a high curve, and I hit it over the Ebbets Field right-field screen. I was so tickled I felt like jumping up and down as I made the tour of the bases. In the dug-out, the players climbed all over me as if I had discovered a new world. At least I had discovered how to hit the great Reynolds—and it helped us win the opener, 4-2.

THE SECOND GAME WAS 1949 all over again—only this time it was Raschi who fanned me three times as we lost, 7-1. I contributed little more than a single as we won the third game, but a determined Reynolds came back and blanked us in the next game, 2-0, to even up the Series.

In the fifth game, Carl Erskine, my roommate and bridge partner, was matched against Ewell Blackwell, and I helped my buddy to a 4-0 lead by hitting a three-run homer in the fifth. Then the roof caved in.

In the bottom of the fifth, the Yankees rallied for five runs, sparked by a three-run blast by Johnny Mize—his third homer in three days. Most

pitchers, jolted in this manner, generally get the hook at this point. Manager Charley Dressen, however, had a hunch, and he permitted Erskine to remain in the game. It was a perfect move. Erskine settled down again to pitch hitless ball for the next six innings. We tied the score in the seventh, and in the 11th I managed to knock across the winning run with a double.

This undoubtedly was the most exciting game in which I have ever played.

WE HAD our big chance to finish off the Yankees in the sixth game, and I got another crack at solving Raschi's baffling stuff. By the third time around, I found the answer and tagged his fast ball for a home run to give us a 1-0 lead. The next time, I clipped him for another homer—my fourth in the Series—but by now the Yankees had pushed ahead. We lost, 3-2.

We saw all the Yankee pitching stars—Lopat, Reynolds, and Raschi, plus a terrific relief stint by Bob Kuzava—in the final game, but it took a miraculous shoestring catch by Billy Martin to save the game for New York in the last inning. The Yankees were winners and still champions.

A ballplayer lives for his hits, and I was pretty pleased with my four big ones against the Yankees. But, honestly, I would have traded them gladly for a Series victory for our club. Baseball is as simple as that—nothing else seems important when you lose.

But, of course, it was some strong consolation that I'd been able to answer the challenge those strong-armed Yankee pitchers had thrown in my face. I've had some good days since then—I hit another four home runs in the '55 Series (Editor's note: This is an all-time Series record)—and I've seen our Dodgers win the Series twice. But getting back at Reynolds & Co. made the 1952 World Series the one I'll never forget.

COVER:

Lawrence Schiller flew to the French Riviera to photograph lovely Deborah Kerr for today's cover. The smiling gentleman in the background is husband Peter Viertel. Read about Deborah's two lives on page 4.

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