THE DUKE

The way it was way back then in Brooklyn with Edwin Snider and his pals—Pee Wee, Oisk, Jackie, Newk, Campy, Skoonj, Gil and Poison Pen

BY DICK YOUNG

One day, in a noisy little ballpark called Ebbets Field, in a ridiculed big city called Brooklyn, Duke Snider was down on his hands and knees, just off the first-base side of the batting cage. He looked like a guy lining up a putt for a $10 bet. Then he was back on his feet, screaming at Gil Hodges and Pee Wee Reese and Roy Campanella, and he was pointing to the leftfield stands, and then to the rightfield screen, and Hodges and Reese and Campy were waving their hands derisively at him, and shouting things back.

"You're full of shit," Pee Wee said. He'd say that a lot. Still does. If you were a friend of Pee Wee Reese, and that covers only about 99 per cent of the people who meet him, it made you feel good to have him smile and say it. Jackie Robinson could say, "Good morning," and make people mad. Pee Wee Reese could say, "You're full of shit," and make people love him. Don't ask. It just happens that way.

Anyway, when Snider walked away from the screaming match, I followed him into the clubhouse and said, "What the hell was that all about?"

"Those goddam righthanded hitters," he said. "They're always telling me how easy it is for a lefty to hit in Ebbets Field. The goddam righties actually are hitting downhill here, and I can prove it. Just get down on your knees the way I did and you'll see that the top of the leftfield fence is below home plate. That's how they drain the goddam place. You can't see the top of the wall with your eye on the ground, that's how much it slants. And they got a jet stream besides. And look at the high fence I got to shoot for in right."

The hard clacking of spikes on the wooden floor came through the door with a few sweaty ballplayers. "You're full of shit, Snider," said Pee Wee Reese, and they all laughed, including Duke Snider.

It is Duke Snider's unshakable theory that he would have been able to hit lefthanded pitching as well as anyone if he had seen enough lefthanded pitching. But with the rest of the Dodger lineup composed of those hairy righthanded hitters, the percentages dictated that opposing managers save their righty pitching for the Dodgers and use their southpaws elsewhere. What manager in his right mind would have thrown a lefty against Roy Campanella, Gil Hodges, Carl Furillo, Jackie Robinson? Even Warren Spahn, the greatest southpaw of that era, was sidetracked in the rotation when the Braves would come to Brooklyn.

"I did see *some* southpaws," says Snider. "I remember Cincinnati had three of them, and I hit a home run

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off all three, including a grand slam against Joe Nuxhall. Then we didn't see a lefty for another month!"

Ironically, Snider hit his first two big league homers off Curt Simmons, the Phillies' lefthanded counterpart of Robin Roberts in those days. One of the home runs off Simmons, Duke remembers, was an inside-the-park job.

It takes an uncommon blend of power and speed to circle the bases before they can get the ball back to home plate. Duke had that speed, remarkable speed for a big man. He had fluid grace. He bounced on the balls of his feet with the haughtiness of a show horse. Trotting to first on a walk, or into the dugout from centerfield at the end of an inning, there was a regal prance to the Duke's body. It said, there goes a champion.

And Duke had the swift, sweeping swing that sent balls in lofty flight onto Bedford Avenue, and into a parking lot across the street. The ball would take one high bounce and dent a fender, and I often wondered if the owner of the car would get angry, or would he show the damage to his neighbor and say, "The Duke's 30th did that."

That's the kind of dedicated madness it was to be a Brooklyn Dodger fan. It was more than a team; it was a religion. It lasted from 1946, when World War II ended, through 1957, when the Brooklyn Dodgers ended. Players and newsmen worked together and ran together. We laughed in the dugout before the game, and in the clubhouse, and in the trainer's room. I know of newsmen and players who went out in search of friendly women together, but that's as far as it goes here. This isn't that kind of story.

As close as we were, the newspapermen were no Pollyannas. There was one rule: Anything off the field was off the record, unless a player got picked up by the cops and it became public record; anything on the field was fair game. So it was that the Dodgers' Gene Hermanski once grabbed me by the throat and rammed me against the dugout wall because he didn't like the word "clown" when applied to his pursuit of a fly ball, and Clem Labine once threw a newspaper in my face, and Pee Wee Reese would grin his little grin and say, "Here comes Poison Pen."

The guy who popped off the most was Snider. Duke would fit in perfectly today. If he got the red ass, which was often enough, he would let it all hang out. When the fans got on him, he got on them. This took a brave man, the Brooklyn fans being what they were. Apparently, Duke didn't care. "I was pretty stubborn," he now admits. And outspoken.

"I was a helluva rainy-day story," Duke recalls. That's a dying expression, "rainy-day story." It was used by newspapermen to signify a story they had to write whenever a game was rained out. The writers had to fill the space.

Anytime the Dodgers were rained out, and Duke Snider would drive home early, Beverly Snider would greet him: "Well, what sort of story are we going to have in the paper tomorrow?"

Even a mild shower, a game delay, was enough to get Snider in trouble. Batting practice had been washed out one evening, and feisty Chuck Dressen, then managing in Brooklyn, called a clubhouse meeting. He had something to get off his chest, something the front office apparently had griped about. Somebody had been abusing signing privileges on the road.

"This ball club is good enough to let you sign for your meals," said Dressen. "We want you to eat well, so you'll be strong, instead of going to hamburger joints. But some of you

Photograph by Ray Stubblebine

To Duke Snider, Pee Wee Reese was the heart and soul of the Dodgers' 1955 championship team. And a life-long friend.

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guys don't know when to stop. Instead of ordering the regular dinner, you're ordering a la carte. Last time we were in the Warwick," said Dressen, referring to perhaps the classiest dining room on the circuit at the time, Philadelphia's Warwick Hotel, "one of you ordered brussels sprouts. You know how much brussels sprouts is? A dollar a side dish!"

Dressen went on and on about the brussels sprouts, while Snider fidgeted. Finally, he could stand it no longer. "Fer crissake, Charlie," said Duke, "it stopped raining. Let's go out and hit, and forget about the goddam brussels sprouts. I don't know who ate it, but put it on my tab. And I didn't even eat in the hotel."

Dressen hit the ceiling. He threatened to fine Snider for insubordination. The incident hit the newspapers hard. Dissension on the Dodgers. Snider was a hot rainy-day story even when it cleared up.

Duke Snider's most spectacular outburst came, in fact, on a very dry day. The Dodgers got beat. It was 1955. The Dodgers were in a slump, and The Faithful were getting ugly.

On that day, Snider went 1-for-9 while the Dodgers were losing a doubleheader, and left a ton of men on the bases. He went to the clubhouse with the boos stinging his ears. The fans of Flatbush were rougher on Duke Snider than on any other player, dating back to a magazine piece Roger Kahn had written: "I play ball for the money," Duke, who peaked at $46,000, had been quoted. Today, that is taken for granted. In those romantic times, The Faithful believed that all Dodgers played for the glory of Brooklyn.

"Goddam fans!" he screamed, slamming his glove into the locker. "They don't deserve a pennant in Brooklyn!" The newsmen's pens moved quickly across their notepads. Pee Wee Reese looked at Bill Roeder, a young newsman for the *World-Telegram*. "He doesn't mean it, Bill," said Pee Wee.

"The hell I don't," shouted Duke.

It made the late editions. Front page. Big black type: Duke Says Fans Don't Deserve Pennant! Duke hadn't been home long when the phone rang. Buzzie Bavasi had seen the papers. "Duke? What the hell is going on? I want you to tell the newspapermen tomorrow that you apologize."

"What for?"

"Because the fans probably are going to tar and feather you if you don't, that's what for," said the general manager of the Dodgers.

'Some headlines, Snider,' said Pee Wee Reese. 'Those bastards are going to eat you up tonight.'

The next afternoon, as Snider left for the ballpark, Bev kissed him and said, "Leave a ticket for me tonight."

"No, don't come," he said. He knew what she would hear. So did she.

"I'm going," Bev said.

The newsmen were at the ballpark early. They clustered around Snider's locker. "I was upset," he told them. That was as close as he came to an apology. The day was beginning badly. Don Gross, a lefty, was pitching for Cincinnati.

That day, it had been Pee Wee's turn to drive. They all lived close by in Bay Ridge, these friends, during their Dodger days. Pee Wee and Carl Erskine and Rube Walker and Gil Hodges and Duke. Long before there was a gas shortage, they car-pooled to the ballpark. When the car stopped to pick up Duke, Pee Wee didn't wait for him to get seated. "Some headlines, Snider," he said. "Those bastards are going to eat you up tonight!"

"I don't give a shit," said Snider.

When he walked onto the field for batting practice, they let him have it. Ebbets Field, capacity 30,000, was less than half-filled, but to Snider it sounded like a coliseum full of blood-thirsty Romans. And it was his blood they wanted. He was tempted to give them the finger, but he resisted. He stole a glance toward the stands in back of the plate, where the wives sat. Bev wasn't there yet. Good. Maybe the bastards would be all booed out by then.

They weren't. He came to bat in the first. "Batting third, Duke Snider, number four." The Romans let him have it. Snider singled sharply to right against Gross, stood on first, hitched up his pants and felt proud. "That's showing the bastards."

"Boooool!" shouted the bastards.

The second time up, he singled to center. There were some cheers. A few Romans had been converted back to Brooklyn citizenship. Third time up, Snider singled to right. As he stood on first, the fans were suddenly on their feet cheering. He looked over toward the wives' section. There she was, beautiful, wonderful, strong Bev, banging her palms together and beaming. Snider tipped his hat.

Pee Wee was driving on the way home. Duke was in the back seat. He leaned forward and purred into the driver's ear: "That good enough, Pee Wee?"

"You goddam ham," said Reese, his eyes glued to the road. They all laughed.

There was another ride. A bus ride. The Dodgers had clinched the pennant that day in Milwaukee. Walter O'Malley threw a victory party in Maders, where the beer and booze flowed. By the time everybody piled onto the two chartered buses, things were pretty smashed. "The first bus for the non-drinkers," announced Lee Scott, traveling secretary, "the second one for the drinkers." The second bus was more heavily occupied. Fresh supplies of champagne and other lubricants were carried aboard, and the happy caravan took off for Chicago, 90 miles to the south, where, scheduled for the next day, was a doubleheader.

Halfway to Chicago, somebody in the rear of the second bus yelled, "Piss-stop, Bussy!" In all the history of baseball, that is one thing that has never changed: All drivers of chartered buses are called "Bussy." The driver pulled off the road and the Dodgers piled out, beer drinkers first. Most of them went on the safe side of the bus. For some reason, Don Zimmer went on the highway side. As he finished, smiling his relief, and zipped up, he took a step backward, right into the path of an oncoming car. Snider reached out and jerked Zimmer by the arm. "What the hell are you doing?" said Zim.

"I just don't want Pee Wee to have to play two games tomorrow," said Snider. Walt Alston had announced that everybody, regulars and scrubeenies, was to play one game the next afternoon, regardless of condition.

By the time the buses reached Chicago, some of the guys had grown drunker, and some had slept it off. Most of those went out to try again. Among them was Russ Meyer, starting pitcher not too many hours later.

I have seen gutsy performances by athletes—football players who played with fractured bones, hockey players who skated back onto the ice stitched up like the back pocket on a pair of

Photograph by Ray Stubblebine

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Duke had remarkable speed for a big man, and the swift, sweeping swing that sent balls in lofty flight onto Bedford Avenue.

designer jeans—but rarely have I seen anything to match the dedication of Monk Meyer that day. Working on zero sleep, taking the catcher's signs through eyes that resembled road maps, he went seven.

"Walt Alston gave Monk enough chances to quit that day," says Duke. It is one of his favorite Dodger stories. "The Skipper must have made five trips to the mound. Alston would ask him, how do you feel, and Monk would say, beautiful. Alston would go back to the dugout, and the next inning he'd be on the mound again, saying, I think I better bring somebody in. Meyer said, I'm ahead, ain't I, and Alston would shrug and say, okay, okay, but don't die on me out here. I might need you in the World Series."

"Russ Meyer scattered 16 hits," the morning paper read. To this day, Russ Meyer uses that phrase to describe his moment of macho.

"What a gang," says Snider, recalling that rough ride. The rapport was unreal. No racial problem. Not by then.

It was there at the very beginning. There were the petitions by the southern ballplayers. Not petitions, really. More like threats. We, the undersigned, will not play if Jackie Robinson takes the field. Dixie Walker signed it. Bobby Bragan. A few others. Good guys in other ways. They shoved the piece of paper under the nose of Duke Snider and said, "Sign it."

"You got to be kidding. He's my idol," said Snider, who grew up in Southern California near Compton Junior College. Jackie Robinson went to Pasadena JC, the bitter rival.

"I was seven years younger," Duke recalls. "I remember one day they were having a track meet and playing baseball at the same time. They scheduled things so that Jackie could be in the long jump and the ballgame. As soon as the game ended, he ran over to the jumping pit. He didn't have time to change. So he just jumped in his baseball spikes, and won easily. He was just great."

And lo and behold, the Guy who arranges all the tricks of life fixed it so that one chilly day in April, in 1947, in Brooklyn, USA, Jackie Robinson and Duke Snider walked into a big league dugout for the first time. "For some reason," Duke says, "he got all the ink that day."

They are both in the Hall of Fame now. Jackie made it instantly, as soon as the rules permitted. Snider had to anguish through 11 years of voting, which seemed strange to many people. They remembered how they would gather on street corners, waiting for the *News* and the *Mirror* to come up, and then argue bitterly over who was better, Willie, or Mickey, or Dook. You would think that a man who was compared so favorably, so violently, to Willie Mays and Mickey Mantle, would not have had to wait until 1980 for his recognition.

There were eight daily newspapers in New York City then, and each sports section whipped up the Mantle-Mays-Snider debate. Fights broke out in bars. I can remember coming out of the Polo Grounds at dusk, an hour or more after a Dodger-Giant game, and the fans would still be there at the entrance to the Eighth Avenue subway, knotted around Looey Kleppel, "Dirty Looey," an eccentric Giant fan who dressed in a smelly overcoat, even in July, and carried stacks of sports sections under his arm. There would stand Looey, telling them that Snider and Mantle couldn't carry Willie Mays' jock.

"Hey, Young," he'd shout, when he spotted me. "That's right, ain't it? Mays is better than both them bums."

"Anything you say, Looey," and I'd duck into the subway before he and that overcoat got too close.

Billy Loes, who pitched for Brooklyn in six of the Snider years, has an explanation for history's delayed recognition of the Duke. "People think that Ebbets Field, with its short

Wide World Photos

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fences, helped Duke Snider. It hurt him. Duke's homers would have gone out anywhere, most of them. What he didn't have was the running room in the outfield that Mays and Mantle had in their parks. If he had the space they had to make great catches, he would have been even greater."

Loes remembers the day in Philadelphia when Snider pushed back the fences. "No greater catch was ever made. It was on Puddinhead Jones, in Philly."

"The old Philly ballpark had a tongue-and-groove fence, sort of ribbed," Snider recalls. "We had a one-run lead, and the Phils had men on first and second. If the ball hits the fence, we lose. I got a good jump toward left-center, put my foot out at the fence, and the spike dug in, giving me a boost. Just as I caught it, I turned my hand and squeezed, so as not to drop it when the glove hit the wall. Labine was so excited, he beat the leftfielder out there to shake my hand." Snider says that, to this day, Richie Ashburn, the Phillies' centerfielder, claims Duke trapped the ball against the wall. "Hell, Richie, I tell him, if I did trap it, it would be a better play than I made." It was the kind of catch that, if made in a World Series, would be talked about till the end of time, like Mays' catch on Vic Wertz in 1954.

"Snider was a great World Series hitter," says Loes. The records bear it out. Eleven World Series home runs rank Duke fourth on the all-time list. Four of them came in 1955, the year Brooklyn went mad with joy.

Most people remember the 1955 World Series for the game-saving catch by Sandy Amoros. I remember 1955 for the wild celebration in downtown Brooklyn, where delirious fans turned Borough Hall, October 4, into Times Square, New Year's Eve.

Duke Snider recalls the 1955 World Series because he stepped in a drainage hole in Yankee Stadium. "Something popped in my knee," he says. "I was never the same." During the off-season, Buzzie Bavasi told Duke to visit Dr. Dan Leventhal, then the orthopedic specialist for the Los Angeles Rams. "We decided to go ahead with minor surgery, but the minor became major. They found three different things wrong with my knee. I was two hours on the table. They repaired deep tears in the cartilage. After that, I had to change my batting stance."

It is Duke Snider's firm conviction that, had his knees held up, he would have retained his standing in the Mays-Mantle-Snider syndrome. The knee and the rightfield fence at the Los Angeles Coliseum did him in. The knee was an accident. The fence was premeditated, the result of Walter O'Malley's move from Ebbets Field to the freak ballpark in Los Angeles, a converted track-and-field stadium built for the 1932 Olympics.

The way the diamond was laid out at this temporary home of the nomadic Dodgers, righthanded batters had a 250-foot chip shot at a high screen. The lefty batters, like Duke, had a two-iron drive to left-center.

It was too late for Snider by then. His home run production dropped from 40 to 15 the year the club moved. He hit six in Los Angeles. He was through when the Dodgers moved out of Brooklyn, through as a star at age 31, this greatest natural talent ever to wear a Brooklyn uniform, although he hung around for seven more seasons, drifting finally to the Mets, and to the hated Giants.

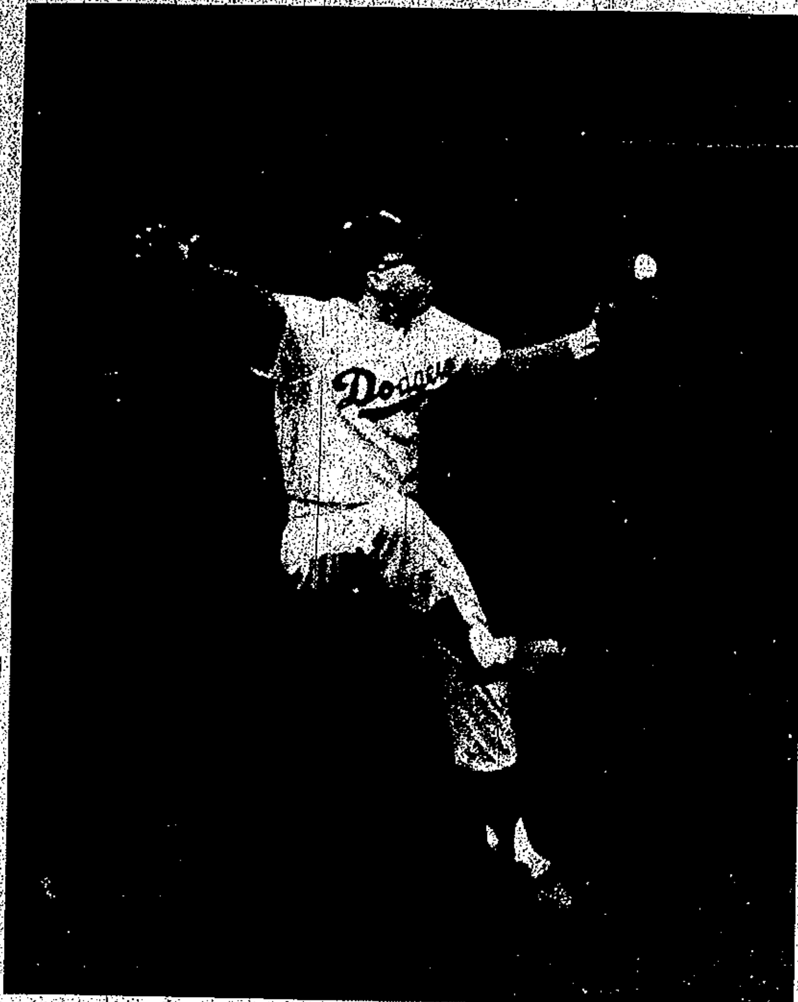
During his one-season stopoff with the Mets, Snider learned that ballplayers had changed, and that you can't go home again. He stood around the batting cage watching a kid named Ed Kranepool take some swings. The BP pitcher kept jamming the kid. "Gimme some outside," shouted Kranepool, impatiently.

THE GOLDEN YEARS

SNIDER, EDWIN DONALD (Duke) 179 lbs. BL TR 6'
B. Sept. 19, 1926, Los Angeles, Calif.

			G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	HR%	R	RBI	BB	SO	SB	BA	SA	PINCH HIT AB	PINCH HIT H	G by POS
1947	BKN	N	40	83	20	3	1	0	0.0	6	5	3	24	2	.241	.301	15	4	OF-25
1948			53	160	39	6	6	5	3.1	22	21	12	27	4	.244	.450	6	2	OF-47
1949			146	552	161	28	7	23	4.2	100	92	56	92	12	.292	.493	1	1	OF-145
1950			152	620	199	31	10	31	5.0	109	107	58	79	16	.321	.553	1	1	OF-151
1951			150	606	168	26	6	29	4.8	96	101	62	97	14	.277	.483	0	0	OF-150
1952			144	534	162	25	7	21	3.9	80	92	55	77	7	.303	.494	2	1	OF-141
1953			153	590	198	38	4	42	7.1	132	126	82	90	16	.336	.627	4	3	OF-151
1954			149	584	199	39	10	40	6.8	120	130	84	96	6	.341	.647	1	1	OF-148
1955			148	538	166	34	6	42	7.8	126	136	104	87	9	.309	.628	1	0	OF-146
1956			151	542	158	33	2	43	7.9	112	101	99	101	3	.292	.598	1	1	OF-150
1957			139	508	139	25	7	40	7.9	91	92	77	104	3	.274	.587	3	2	OF-136
1958	LA	N	106	327	102	12	3	15	4.6	45	58	32	49	2	.312	.505	15	4	OF-92
1959			126	370	114	11	2	23	6.2	59	88	58	71	1	.308	.535	21	7	OF-107
1960			101	235	57	13	5	14	6.0	38	36	46	54	1	.243	.519	25	6	OF-75
1961			85	233	69	8	3	16	6.9	35	56	29	43	1	.296	.562	18	4	OF-66
1962			80	158	44	11	3	5	3.2	28	30	36	32	2	.278	.481	33	6	OF-39
1963	NY	N	129	354	86	8	3	14	4.0	44	45	56	74	0	.243	.401	29	6	OF-106
1964	SF	N	91	167	35	7	0	4	2.4	16	17	22	40	0	.210	.323	47	10	OF-43
18 yrs.			2143	7161	2116	358	85	407	5.7	1259	1333	971	1237	99	.295	.540	223	59	OF-1918
WORLD SERIES																			
6 yrs.			36	133	38	8	0	11	8.3	21	26	13	33	1	.286	.594	1	0	OF-35
						6th		4th	6th	10th	7th		3rd						

Wide World Photos



"If Duke had the running room of Mays and Mantle, he'd have been greater."

"Eddie," said Duke, "it might be good to take them all inside. That's where your problem seems to be."

"You ain't doing so f----- good yourself," snapped Kranepool. Newsmen heard it. They were appalled. Duke Snider looks back at it and laughs. "It wasn't that bad," he says. "We really got to be good friends. Maybe it's the way I said it that upset him." That's Mellow Duke. He badmouths nobody now. I know of no man who has changed so completely, nor any who can look back and analyze the shortcomings of his youth as acutely as Duke Snider. If he were then the diplomat he is now, Snider would have stood in Cooperstown 10 years ago.

And now he is campaigning that another injustice be undone. At every opportunity, he plugs for the induction of Pee Wee Reese into the Hall of Fame, pointing out that Reese was the heart and soul of that championship team. "He was the father to us all. He was wonderful," says Snider. Rex Barney, a power pitcher of those teams, remembers that when Snider would go into a tirade, Reese would say, "Aw, Duke, who stole your candy today?"

"Being traded to the Mets for that one season was a blessing in disguise," says Duke. "They were playing in the Polo Grounds, and I was able to go over 400 home runs and 2,000 hits." He wound up with 407. Mays went on and on, to 660. Mantle had 536. Mays batted .302 lifetime, Mantle .298, Snider .295.

"We never took the competition as seriously as the fans did," insists Snider. "When we'd play the Giants, I'd say, hey, Willie, I got three more ribbys than you, and he'd laugh and say, yeah, but I got you by 10 points."

Every old ballplayer you meet admits he really didn't appreciate what he had while he was living it. "You look back and see how special it was," says the Duke of Flatbush. Carl Erskine always appreciated it. He pitched with pain in his shoulder every inning of his big league life, had a knotted muscle the size of a golf ball behind his right shoulder, and thought of himself as the luckiest man in the world. He talks about those rides to the ballpark. "We were playing at the Polo Grounds, and we would drive through the Battery Tunnel and up the West Side Drive. As we come out of the tunnel, a cop pulls us over for speeding. Pee Wee is driving. As the cop parks his bike and is walking back to the car, Duke says, okay, Pee Wee, show us your stuff.

"Pee Wee hands the cop his license, which reads Harold H. Reese. The cop says, where do you work, Mr. Reese? Pee Wee, always the gentleman, says he is employed by the Brooklyn Dodgers. The cop says, the Dodgers! Hey, you're not Pee Wee Reese, are you?

"Pee Wee says, yessir, and this is Duke Snider and Rube Walker and Carl Erskine. We're on our way to play the Giants tonight, and I guess we were pushing it too hard. The cop says, listen, Pee Wee, I love you guys. Good luck tonight, and I'm sorry I bothered you. We take off, and Pee Wee is smiling from ear to ear. Was that good enough, Duke? he says.

"The next night is Duke's turn to drive, and he's wheeling through the tunnel and up the West Side Drive when here comes a motorcycle cop. He pulls us over, and we can see it's a different cop. Pee Wee says, okay, big boy, let's see you do your stuff.

"Duke pushes his wallet through the window, showing his license, and says, I'm Duke Snider of the Dodgers, and this is Reese, and Walker, and Erskine. We're on our way to the Polo Grounds for tonight's game. The cop says, I don't like baseball. With that, Duke gets red in the face and says, I don't like cops, either, so just give me the damn ticket."

Part of the old camaraderie that is missing today derived from the physical togetherness born of riding together in trains and buses and cars in The Snider Days. Today, it's planes and an occasional bus. When a guy drives a car, it's often by himself.

"We were all together in Brooklyn," says Snider, "except maybe Skoonj," meaning Carl Furillo. "He was pretty much a loner, but he was the most underrated player on the club. It was just great playing alongside him. We both knew the wall. I'd go in front and take the rebounds low, he'd go in back and take them high. We never collided. Once, just once, he stepped on my foot playing a rebound."

Wide World Photos

There is a touch of Henry Fonda in his face, and in his soft, chosen words.

Photograph by John D. Hanlon

The warmth extended to the Brooklyn Dodger wives. There is much talk about the cattiness among ballplayers' women, but Dodger wives had no claws, especially Beverly Snider, Millie Walker, Betty Erskine and Dotty Reese. Their marriages and their friendships have survived.

"One night," Snider remembers, "we were kissing our wives goodbye before going to the ballpark. Pee Wee suddenly said, you know, we're lucky to have the four prettiest wives in the world. And I said, yeah, and flat-chested. When we came back that night, they were all giggling. We knew something was up. Then we took another look. They all had stuffed their bras with apples."

It wasn't the same for the women, either, when the team moved to California. "Bev and I rationalized at the time that it would be great for us. After all, we were both from California," Duke says. "But it just didn't work that way."

Heroes are not transferable. Willie Mays learned that when the Giants moved to San Francisco. There, they had Orlando Cepeda and Willie McCovey. There, Willie Mays was not the king he had been in Harlem for so long. And Snider, in Los Angeles, was not the Duke. The people there wanted their own identity. Maury Wills, Frank Howard, Tommy Davis, Willie Davis; on with the new, off with the old.

The temporary Dodger home in Los Angeles was no place for a lefthanded hero. "When I first got there, I was in for a shock," says Duke. "I walked into the place, and the Giants were working out. Willie Mays grabbed me and said, c'mere, I want to show you something. He led me to the plate and pointed out toward right. I couldn't believe it. It was 300 down the line, dropped off sharply to about 390, then 440 in right-center and 425 in center.

"Willie was laughing his head off. He said, look what I have to shoot at, and he pointed to that short Chinese wall they had built in left for righthanded hitters. Those dimensions made a minor league manager of Rube Walker overnight. He'd hit those 390-foot outs to right. I hit only two over that fence all year, and another one bounced on top and went in."

Duke Snider passed virtually unnoticed from the majors at the end of the 1964 season. He tried some minor league managing, some major league coaching and even some private business before drifting into broadcasting, where he seems to have found his niche. He has been broadcasting Montreal Expo games for eight years, and there have been reports that he may be coming to the Mets. He was an avocado rancher, 30 acres worth, at Fallbrook, between Los Angeles and San Diego. Then, because of other business losses, he had to sell off the land. The 30 acres became three, and then just a lot with a comfortable home above the sixth tee of a golf course, "where I play as often as I can."

He still hits the long ball, and is a pull hitter in a game that does not reward it. He was a silvery, handsome figure standing there on the platform in Cooperstown on that cloudy Sunday morning, August 3, when he got his long overdue. There is a touch of Henry Fonda in his face, and in his soft, chosen words.

"When I was younger, people told me that, about Fonda," he says. "My oldest daughter, Pam, she looks something like Jane Fonda."

He is 54 now, and he doesn't go to Brooklyn anymore, not even when he comes to New York to do the telecasts for the Expos' games. "What for?" he says. "It isn't there anymore."

It wasn't too long after the move to Los Angeles that a manila envelope came, addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Duke Snider. It was from their friend, Barney Stein, a photographer on the *New York Post*. The picture showed a huge wrecker's ball banging into a brick wall at Ebbets Field. The ballpark was being demolished to make way for a housing project. "We cried," says Snider.

The picture, framed, hangs on their wall at home in California. ■

Dick Young, long-time newspaper sports columnist, covered the Brooklyn Dodgers during their Golden Age.