HALLOWEEN 2024 / Did the Dodgers save baseball?

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): The Dodgers won the World Series last night.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OirxYSHxu9I)*> MLB: Swing and a miss! And the Dodgers are World Series champions!*

SEAN: Los Angeles noticed.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPavDlRkGns&list=RDNSkPavDlRkGns&start_radio=1)*> AP: HONKS ayyoo mom we just beat new york! HONKS*

SEAN: Japan noticed.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLyAGYV8qeI)*> NIPPON: CHEERS*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLyAGYV8qeI)*>NIPPON: IN JAPANESE: I’m so happy to see this moment of dream come true.*

SEAN: New York certainly noticed.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://x.com/MLBONFOX/status/1851801908312265051)*> MLB: Atrocious defense from the Yankees!*

SEAN: But did the rest of the world notice?

SCORING IN – DODGERS CHARGE

SEAN: America’s pastime has been in a bit of a slump for the last several years.  
  
On *Today, Explained*, we’re gonna ask if the Los Angeles Dodgers’ absolutely bonkers season was enough to draw people back in.

[THEME]

*<CLIP> SANDLOT:   
 KID 1: The Sultan of Swat!  
 KID 2: The King of Crash!  
 KID 3: The Colossus of Clout!  
 KID 4: The Colossus of Clout!   
 SEVERAL TODAY, EXPLAINED STAFFERS: Today, Explained!   
 Kid 5: The GREAT BAMBINO!*

SEAN: Richard Parks III is the host of the Dodger Blue Dream podcast. It’s an entire show dedicated to just this one season of Dodger baseball.

RICHARD: There is something so delicious about following a baseball season from start to finish. It's better than a good book. It's better than the best movie that's coming out this weekend. And as a lifelong baseball fan, I just wanted to bottle that narratively and share that with other people who maybe otherwise would just have to listen to me talk too long at a cocktail party about it.

SEAN: Lucky for Richard, his team ending up winning the World Series. But even before that, the Dodgers had a once-in-a-lifetime cinematic season. Richard looked back on it for KCRW, public radio in Los Angeles, and now… he’s gonna do it right here for you.

RICHARD: Most baseball seasons start in the springtime. This season started way back in December. At least it felt that way for us Dodger fans.

*<CLIP> NEWS TAPE: Breaking news from Major League Baseball, where Shohei Ohtani is signing with the Los Angeles Dodgers, $700 million.*

RICHARD: $700 million, the largest contract in sports history. And you might be thinking, what's worth $700 million? Well –

*<CLIP> NEWSTAPE: it’s a high drive straightway centerfield.*

RICHARD: He hits towering home runs.

*<CLIP> NEWSTAPE: That is gone and way gone. Shohei Ohtani. On top of the batter's…*

*<CLIP> NEWSTAPE: Ohtani’s ready.*

RICHARD: And as a pitcher.

*<CLIP> NEWSTAPE: Trout’s ready.*

RICHARD: He's an ace.

*<CLIP> NEWSTAPE Three, two. He struck him out.*

RICHARD: He's the first player since Babe Ruth to both hit and pitch simultaneously at the Major league level. Within hours of his signing, Ohtani had broken the record for jerseys sold by a sports star.

*<CLIP> Ohtani:* The reason that why I chose the team…

RICHARD: And he and the Dodgers had a shared goal.

*<CLIP> Ohtani:* I knew that they were all about winning, and that's exactly how I feel. So that's one of the things that stood out.

RICHARD: The World Series. The Dodgers are a perennial first place team. They've made the playoffs every year for more than a decade. But they've won the World Series only once in that span in 2020. And L.A. didn't get a parade this off season. The Dodgers spent 1.4 billion with a B dollars, bolstering an already stellar roster of MVP's like Clayton Kershaw, Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman. The new Death Star Dodgers team made 2024 the most highly anticipated season in Dodgers history. But as soon as the season got underway in March, a bombshell.

*<CLIP> HOWARD STERN: You following that baseball player, Shohei Ohtani? $700 million contract with the L.A. Dodgers. And now there's some fucking weird stuff going on with gambling. $4.5 million betting scandal….*

RICHARD: A news story broke linking Ohtani to a gambling operation. Under federal investigation, wire transfers sent to an illegal bookmaker had surfaced totaling millions of dollars. With Ohtani’s name on them. Ohtani is then translator Ippei Mizuhara confessed to the truth. He had been draining Ohtani’s bank account for years to pay for a massive gambling addiction. And that's how the Dodgers kicked off the 2024 baseball season with a PR nightmare.

*<CLIP> NEWSTAPE:*  The season has not begun the way Shohei Ohtani, the Dodgers or Major League Baseball anticipated.

EVERYTHING STOPS

SEAN: Okay, Richard, I hate to interrupt you, and I even hate to ask this question because I know how much you love Shohei Ohtani, but we must acknowledge people out there believe that there was a cover up and that it was actually Ohtani who was doing the betting on ballgames. Your thoughts?

RICHARD: Yeah, it sounds like people who haven't read a 37-page federally investigated criminal complaint the way I have. Based on text messages on both Ippei’s phone and Shohei’s phone, that completely exonerates Shohei of any wrongdoing whatsoever.

SEAN: Say more.

RICHARD: It's something like 9000 pages of text message exchanges between these two men over the course of the previous several years. And there was no mention of gambling. You know, sports betting, wire transfers, anything like that.

RICHARD: There's overwhelming evidence Ippei dealt with the bank impersonating Shohei and giving the personal information that he needed to change the permissions and the passwords for this bank account that he had helped Shohei set up when he first came to the States. I mean, there's a text message where Ippei is texting with the bookmaker that he used for all of these bets. And the guy says, ‘Well, you didn't steal from him.’ And Ippei says, ‘Technically, I did steal from him. It's all over for me.’

SEAN: Okay. Thank you for clearing that up. Let's get back to the season.

RICHARD: Okay, cool –

SCORING BACK IN

RICHARD: As March turned to April, Ohtani had yet to hit his first home run as a Dodger. In May, third baseman Max Muncy was placed on the injured list indefinitely. And then on Father's Day at Dodger Stadium.

*<CLIP> No, no, no. No. No. No.*

RICHARD: Dodgers MVP Mookie Betts was hit by a pitch and fell to the ground.

*<CLIP> He's having trouble moving*

RICHARD: He'd fractured a bone in his left hand. Now he was out, too. The injury bug had arrived in the Dodgers clubhouse by the All-Star break in mid-July. The Dodgers had an entire starting rotations worth of ace pitchers all on the injured list. Then in late July, Freddie Freeman, another MVP, was scratched from the lineup indefinitely. Freeman's three year old son was hospitalized with a rare neurological disorder.

*<CLIP> FREEMAN: He woke up Monday morning with a limp, and by Monday night he couldn't walk anymore.*

RICHARD: Another key player and another team leader was out indefinitely. And yet, throughout it all, the team was finding ways to win. Veterans and backup players stepped up to fill in the gaps left by injuries and personal crises. The bullpen became the team's strength, picking up the slack for a banged up starting rotation. And a handful of trade deadline pick ups join the ranks ready to fight for a title.

*<CLIP> Freddie Freeman…*

RICHARD: One night in early August, Freddie Freeman was announced as a batter in the first inning. His son was going to be okay and he was back and a couple weeks after that. Mookie Betts returned from his injury and Shohei Ohtani was on fire. By mid-August, he was nearing a historic achievement. Only five players in the history of baseball had ever done it 40 home runs and 40 stolen bases in the same season and one magical night in late August at Dodger Stadium…

*<CLIP> NEWSTAPE: Fly ball right center field, series going back, he’s at the track he’s at the wall 40 40 walkoff grand slam. No way…. What a moment … HIstory…*

RICHARD: On September 19th, Shohei went 50, 50. 50 home runs and 50 stolen bases. Nobody had ever done that.

*<CLIP> The 0-2 pitch. A pop up*

RICHARD: A week later the Dodgers clinched the division.

*<CLIP> Tested and bruised but still unbroken. Division champs again.*

RICHARD: They finished the regular season with the best record in baseball. They beat the heavily favored Padres in the National League Division series. They beat the red hot New York Mets in the National League Championship Series. The stage was set for a Hollywood ending. Dodgers versus Yankees in the World Series.

*<CLIP> The Los Angeles Dodgers have just about done the impossible.  
<SFX> TV TURNS ON**<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3ykZoQMJLI)*> CHEERS! START THE PARTY LOS ANGELES. YOUR DODGERS HAVE WON THE WORLD SERIES  
<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3ykZoQMJLI)*> THEY’VE DONE IT!*

REVERB DELAY RINGS OUT

SEAN: I'm talking to you at 12:48 a.m. East Coast time. Yes. Which is which is nine. 9:48 p.m. for you in California in Los Angeles.

RICHARD: Very specifically Pacific Time.

SEAN: The Dodgers won the World Series an hour-ish ago.   
  
RICHARD: Wow.   
  
SEAN: How does it feel to have followed this team in great detail? In a podcast, in a, in a winning season?

RICHARD: It feels complete and fulfilling and transcendent beyond words, obviously.

SEAN: The World Series ended up being kind of lopsided. Did you care?

RICHARD: You know, I dreamed of this match up my entire life, the pinstripes, you know, versus my Dodgers. Dem Bums. I had always wanted these two teams to meet because it's basically like East Coast versus West Coast. Biggie versus 2pac.

<CLIP> 2PAC: West Side!

RICHARD: You know, it's good versus evil.

SEAN: <laughs>

RICHARD: And so I dreamed of this. And of course, I wanted it to be a hard fought series with all of the delicious tension of October baseball in every inning. And it didn't end up being that way. But There's nothing better than winning. I'll take it any way that I can get it. Yeah.

SEAN: A friend of mine texted from Los Angeles, like, 20 minutes ago and said, ‘I just wish I cared about baseball.’   
  
RICHARD: <laughs>  
  
SEAN: Do you think this World Series between these two titans was enough to get people who don't care about baseball excited?

RICHARD: Yeah, I think so, because you had all the greatest superstars in the game on the same stage doing this project. I've been getting feedback from those who are listening, and I think that this is a season where baseball is, you know, pushing outside of its typical parameters because you have these larger than life figure is like Shohei Ohtani and Aaron Judge. And you know baseball is sexy again, like get with it…

SCORING IN – SEXY DUDE APM  
  
SEAN: Richard Parks III. His show is *Dodger Blue Dream*. It’s the definitive account of this historic season the Dodgers just had.

Shoutouts to KCRW, public radio in Los Angeles, for asking Richard to summarize his show in seven minutes. You can hear *Today, Explained* on their air Monday to Friday.  
  
When we are back, we’re gonna ask a baseball guy named Diamond if the Dodgers' success was enough to bring people back to baseball.

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

*<CLIP> Frank Sinatra “New York, New York”   
Start spreading the news  
I’m leaving today …*

SEAN: Explaiiiiiiiiiiiiiined.   
  
JARED DIAMOND (baseball reporter at *Wall Street Journal)*: I’m Jared Diamond and I’m a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*.

SEAN: And what do you report on, Jared Diamond?

JARED DIAMOND (reporter, WSJ): I’ve been covering baseball for the Journal since 2013, soI was clearly born for this job.  
  
SEAN: <chuckles>  
  
JARED: I've learned recently that there's a word for this. It's called an aptonym.   
  
SEAN: Huh!   
  
JARED: It's a word that refers to someone's name that is indicative of their job. Someone told me this fact recently and now is my new favorite word.

SEAN: Aptonym

JARED: Aptonym.

<CLIP> ROBOTS SAYING APTONYM: [Aptonym,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSVJNUMODjA) [Aptonym](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HWbfFmltho), [A-P-T-O-N-Y-M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8qGOuhqCtA)

SEAN: I used to be a bank teller and the manager of my branch. Her name was Janice Dollar.

JARED: See, it's another great example.

SEAN: Tell me this. It sounds like you've been into baseball for a long time. When you were growing up, it was known as America's pastime. It still is known as America's pastime. Why is it known as America's pastime?

JARED: Baseball has been part of the fabric of America going back to the Civil War, essentially. It's really the, the oldest, truly American sport.

MUSIC IN - Gentle Push 7 - External Organs (strings and organ)

JARED: It is certainly not the most popular sport in America. I think we could I think we could say that definitively, right? The NFL has been the juggernaut of American sports for decades. If we, if we go way back, start going back to sort of 50 years ago as television started to take over from radio as the primary means of watching sports. That hurt baseball in many ways. Football is the dream television sport, there's an incredible jolt of action followed by a lull where they could sort of talk about it and so replaced by another big jolt of action. And as that sort of happened, baseball started to lose its athletes right? The best athletes stopped playing baseball and started gravitating toward football and basketball as they were perceived to be cooler. Essentially, they were the better way to sort of showcase their athleticism. They were faster paced. Whereas baseball at the decades have gone on, has gotten slower. And not only were they long, but football games are even longer. So it's not just the length. It's what was happening in that time, which was a lot of nothing.   
  
SEAN: <chortles>   
  
JARED: A lot of just you turning on the game and you literally are just seeing people standing around scratching themselves for long periods of time.

SEAN: And spitting…

JARED: And spitting, right. And it really hurt baseball's cachet. And as that started to happen and as attention spans got shorter, baseball was getting longer, slower and more boring. And that's where we are.

MUSIC OUT

SEAN: And now Major League Baseball is trying to combat that perception of the sport, right? They, they've changed the rules to make it a quicker, more exciting game. Tell me what's going on there.

JARED: So what they did was the most really the most dramatic thing baseball has done in terms of rules, which is the pitch clock.

<[CLIP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC5a5BwnVaQ)> WKYC: it speeds up the game like no other, 15 seconds between pitches when there is nobody on base, 20 seconds with a runner on base.

JARED: It forced pitchers to stop standing around doing nothing.

<[CLIP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC5a5BwnVaQ)> WKYC: So the game is constantly moving. It's so much fun

JARED: And the impact was it was enormous

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLM-bpx5iUA)*> ESPN\_RICH EISEN SHOW\_DAVID SAMSON (host): There were many days, I think I would have had a better family life if the game times weren’t 3:35 every single night.*

JARED: Instantly because of the pitch clock. The game got half an hour shorter and all it did was literally eliminate wasted space, dead time, the void.  
  
SEAN: Hm!  
  
JARED: Attendance climbed back over 70 million last year for the first time since 2017. That doesn't mean baseball solved all of its problems. It absolutely hasn't. But what they have done is sort of pushed a much needed fast forward button. It's like anything else, if you're listening to an audiobook, maybe some people are listening to this podcast on double speed. I don't know. People do that with podcasts, right?

SEAN: Rude! If so!

JARED: That's sort of what they did to baseball.

SEAN:Okay, so attendance is climbing back up, which is great for everybody. However, last year's World Series between the Texas Rangers and the Diamondbacks of Arizona, I believe, was the lowest rated World Series ever. So is this really working or people down to go to games but but still not down to be, I don't know, interested in the World Series.

JARED: That was a real low point. So there's a couple there's two big things. First of all, nobody was surprised. Nobody. Including Major League Baseball. I think you had trouble even remembering the name of the Diamondbacks.

SEAN: <laughs>

JARED: Just trying to just trying to remember they existed. But that's most people. Right. It was a rough match up that did not have the biggest teams or the biggest stars. Why does that matter? It matters. Number two, because what baseball struggled to do is captivate people nationally, meaning getting people to watch when their team is out. This year was a different story.

SEAN: Exactly. So this year, I have to imagine, is the dream scenario for everyone in Major League Baseball except all the teams that lost. But you got the West versus the East. Two of the most storied teams in Major League Baseball facing off. Not to mention they're both previously, you know, inter-city rivals

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3k1NL9oyv0)*> Classic Baseball on the Radio\_1957 09 29\_Last Game of Brooklyn Dodgers: This is a Brooklyn Dodgers Radio network.*

SEAN: Because, of course, the L.A. Dodgers come from Brooklyn. Was this World Series the ultimate test of of baseball's appeal? And if so, I must ask, was it a failure? Because while I was excited to see my Dodgers in the World Series, I couldn't really find a lot of people in my life who shared my excitement. I went to a bar on Friday night to watch Game one and they had it on one of the three TVs on mute and no one cared, in the entire bar, no one was watching until someone noticed the Grand Slam …

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.mlb.com/video/freddie-freeman-hits-a-grand-slam-1-to-right-field-chris-taylor-scores-to)*> MLB\_World Series Game 1 Grand Slam: She is gone! (cheers fade out)*

SEAN: … the historic Grand Slam finished the game.

JARED: So this World Series was viewed by Major League Baseball as sort of a critical test of where it stands right in sort of the national consciousness. You had the Yankees and Dodgers. The two most popular teams from the two biggest markets with all the biggest stars, right?   
  
SEAN: Yeah.  
  
JARED: It did start very good for baseball. Actually. The television ratings for the first two games were the highest rated World Series games since 2017.

SEAN: Okay!

JARED: It was heading toward the World Series that they had dreamed about. Something happened that they couldn't have predicted, unfortunately. And that's just the reality of it, which was this incredibly hyped Battle of the Titans showdown was a dud.   
  
SEAN: Ahhhhhhh.  
  
SEAN: The Dodgers, they just steamrolled the Yankees, like it wasn't competitive at all.

SEAN: Where do you think baseball goes from here?

JARED: So there's, there's two things that I think are going to happen next. One, baseball has to and I believe will market its stars. And look, it is hard, it's hard in baseball. The reason for that is if you're the NFL and you have Patrick Mahomes …   
  
 <[CLIP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH3xC_FvXeM)> NFL Mahomes SB LIV Intv: yeah no, so they actually did a nice party for us at the hotel, the Chainsmokers came through, DJ Khaled came through.

JARED: … your star quarterback, the best quarterback in the NFL …

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH6en3NXDOc&t=5s)*> CBS Mornings\_Patrick Mahomes: Nate Burleson: Two Super Bowls, two super bowl MVPs, breaking record after record after record.*

JARED: … it almost doesn't matter who else is on the team ..

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hfl_nd9mVW8)*> New Heights\_Travis Kelce\_alright now: Alright now.*

JARED: A Patrick Mahomes quarterback squad is going to be good. Baseball is not like that at all. And the best proof of that is Shohei Ohtani.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHLlxvaH-Aw)*> MLB\_Shohei Ohtani Intro to Angels: Hi, My name is Shohei Ohtani.*

JARED: For his first six seasons, he was on the Angels.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM0YQZdRKGw)*> Announcers loving Ohtani: First pitch swinging. And first pitch crushing!*

JARED: He was still this unicorn once in a many lifetime superstar. And guess what? They never made the playoffs once, but they still do try to find a way to combat that. The other thing is, I don't think they're done with rule changes. I actually think there's going to be even more dramatic rule changes coming because of everything they did with the pitch clock. It didn't actually address the underlying factors that made the pitch clock necessary. Like, why did the games get slower? Why did they get more boring? Why do they get less entertaining? Why was there less action? The starting pitcher, which for most of the baseball history, was sort of the protagonist of the game, has now been relegated to more of like a cameo role that hurt baseball. And I think they're going to have to make further rule changes to try to bring the game back to what it was before. And that's going to take some very direct intervention and they've been opposed to do. But I think they realize that it's sort of the next frontier.

MUSIC IN - Basic Barbara

JARED: Baseball has been in air quotes, dying for I'm not exaggerating 120 years. You could go back and read newspaper articles going back to 1905 and 1910 from breathless sportswriters saying that baseball will never recover from this scandal or this thing or this trend or this problem. And that's the end of baseball. And here we are in 2024 and it's still here and it's still standing and it's still, again, more popular in this country than any sport other than football

MUSIC BUMP

JARED: But I just I really do believe that baseball is not dying. It is taking some hits. It's not what it was, but it's not it's not going anywhere. I think it's always going to have sort of an important place in American society and American culture for no other reason that it just it's just the game still that gets passed down from grandfather to mother to son to daughter. There's still something about baseball that I think captures people's imaginations in that way, where if it's the middle of the summer and you're grilling hotdogs and hamburgers in your backyard. There's something about that that just goes with baseball's still like the background noise of summer for so many people around the country. And maybe the World Series isn't what it was. But it doesn't mean it isn't still, you know, it's. It's still here. It's still standing.

SCORING BUMP  
  
SEAN: Jared Diamond! Wall Street Journal. His middle name isn’t baseball. We asked.

Peter Balonon-Rosen and Eliza Dennis are the pinch hitters. Amina Al-Sadi is the manager. Laura Bullard and Matthew Collette are keeping score. And Rob Byers and Andrea Kritinsdottir are our closers.

I’m Sean Rameswaram. I guess I’mmmmmmmmmmm a … fan … here at *Today, Explained*.