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Oldest living Brooklyn Dodger dies in Greenwich at 100

By Robert Marchant Updated 4:44 pm, Tuesday, April 5, 2016



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Mike Sandlock poses with his catcher's glove during a visit to his home in Greenwich back in 2012.

GREENWICH — Mike Sandlock, the oldest living major-league baseball player and the last surviving ball player to have worn Dodger blue in Brooklyn, has died at age 100.

A Greenwich native and longtime resident, he died at his Cos Cob home late Monday.

Sandlock's longtime friend and personal attorney, **Frank Peluso**, called him a benevolent presence.



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"A real giving individual, I'm sure he's going to heaven," Peluso said. "He tried to do good in the world, over and over."

Sandlock played catcher for the **Boston Braves** (1942, 1944), the **Brooklyn Dodgers** (1945-46) and the **Pittsburgh Pirates** (1953).

He helped **Roy Campanella**, a teammate, work on his defensive skills as a catcher.

Sandlock was a knuckleball specialist behind the plate who also played the infield during a long career as a journeyman in major-league and minor-league baseball. Making the most of his talents, Sandlock was said to have been adept at stealing the other team's signs.

He was born in Old Greenwich on Oct. 17, 1915, the son of Polish immigrants.

His schooling was brief, and he learned to play baseball on the sandlots of Old Greenwich, serving as a batboy for the **Sound Beach Fire Department** team.

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Sandlock became an electrician during the Depression era, earning \$200 a month. He played minor-league ball up and down the Eastern seaboard, and when the Boston Braves held a try-out in Stamford in the early 1940s, talent scouts were impressed with the switch-hitting versatile infielder. He broke into the majors with the Braves in 1942. In his first big-league at bat, Sept. 19, 1942, he stroked a single against **New York Giants** pitcher Fiddler **Bill McGee**.

He credited his playing abilities to hard work and



Former Dodger Mike Sandlock celebrates 100th birthday

determination, honed in the Depression years.

"None of us made high school. From sunup to sundown you worked," Sandlock recalled in an interview with this newspaper. "Maybe I took trade school for two years. I got a job at Electrolux making

\$200 a month and I gave it up for \$75 a month just to go play baseball. But it was a good thing I did. I finally made the big leagues."

He married the former **Victoria Teresa** in 1940. She died in 1982.

Sandlock aided the war effort at a munitions plant in 1943 and then came back to the majors with the Braves and then the Dodgers. He was later sent down to the Dodgers' AAA team in Montreal, where he helped Campanella, a future Hall of Famer and one of the first African-Americans to play professional ball in the modern era, to develop his ability to throw out base-stealers.

Known as a friendly and generous ballplayer, Sandlock used to hit pop flies for kids in Old Greenwich and teach them how to play the game.

While playing for the Dodgers, he used to walk to **Ebbets Field** after riding the subway, signing autographs for neighborhood youngsters on the way. After the game, he would drink a beer with Dodgers' announcer **Red Barber** at **Grand Central Terminal** before heading back to Greenwich.

Sandlock became the starting catcher for the Hollywood Stars of the **Pacific Coast League** from 1949 to 1952, a team co-owned by **Bing Crosby** that attracted tinseltown royalty to the ball park.

His major-league career was resumed when Sandlock, then 37, got the call to handle a knuckleball pitcher in Pittsburgh, **Johnny Lindell**. After another 64 games with the Pirates, in which he played with **Ralph Kiner**, Sandlock finished his major-league career with a .240 batting average.

His best season came in 1945, when he hit .282 in 80 games with the Dodgers, including two home runs and 17 RBIs, under manager **Leo Durocher**.

After his playing days, Sandlock worked as an electrician and carpenter, running his own business. The former ballplayer carried a busy workload through his retirement.

"You've got to keep busy. The alternative is someone will dig a hole for you and that's it," he said.

He was a Mets fan.

An excellent golfer, he won several championships at the **Innis Arden Golf Club** and once sank a hole-in-one there. He played the game well into his 90's. Sandlock golfed on occasion with **Jackie Robinson** when Robinson, a former Brooklyn Dodger who broke the color line in professional baseball, was living in Stamford. The two played for pocket change.

Sandlock is survived by two sons, **Michael E. Sandlock** of Tennessee and Damon Sandlock of Cos Cob, and a number of grandchildren.

The switch-hitting catcher lived for nearly 90 years in the home of his birth in Old Greenwich before relocating to Cos Cob.

Memorial arrangements are pending.

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