

## OBITUARIES

# Wally Moon, Whose Homers Helped the Dodgers Win a World Series, Dies at 87

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN FEB. 11, 2018

Wally Moon, who became a celebrated figure in the early history of the Los Angeles Dodgers when he lofted “moon shot” home runs over the short left-field screen at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to help take an aging team to a 1959 World Series championship season, died on Friday in Bryan, Tex. He was 87.

His death was announced by the Dodgers.

Moon, a left-handed-hitting outfielder, was the National League’s rookie of the year in 1954, batting .304 for the St. Louis Cardinals, and had several fine seasons afterward. But the Cards traded him to the Dodgers before the 1959 season, when he was coming off an injury.

In their second season in Los Angeles after leaving Brooklyn, the Dodgers still had a lineup with Duke Snider, Gil Hodges and Carl Furillo from their “Boys of Summer” pennant-winning teams, but all were approaching the ends of their careers.

When Moon was installed in left field, he emerged as something of a hero for fans who had long hungered for major-league baseball.

“It was unforgettable,” he told The Los Angeles Times, recalling his long-ago fly-ball home runs. “I can still hear it, still feel it, still see it after all these years.”

The Coliseum, the Dodgers' home until 1962, when they moved into Dodger Stadium, opened in 1923 and had been used mostly for football and track and field.

Its dimensions were bizarrely suited for baseball. The wall behind right-center field was some 440 feet from home plate, but it was only 251 feet down the left-field line, where a 42-foot-tall screen had been erected.

Moon's former Cardinal teammate Stan Musial, one of baseball's greatest hitters, suggested that Moon try an in-and-out swing that might send opposite-field pops over the screen.

Moon took his advice. He hit 14 of his 19 homers in 1959 at the Coliseum. That year he also batted .302; led the National League in triples, with 11; stole 15 bases; and finished fourth in balloting for most valuable player.

The Dodgers defeated the Milwaukee Braves in a pennant-playoff series and bested the Chicago White Sox in a six-game World Series, with Moon hitting a home run at Comiskey Park in the final game.

The Russians had launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, in 1957, and with America beginning to gear up for a Cold War race with the Soviet Union to reach the moon, Vin Scully, the master phrase maker in the Dodgers' broadcast booth, rose to the occasion in riffing on Moon's feats.

"Scully was really the one who started it," Moon recalled in an interview with The Akron Beacon Journal. "Remember back then that everyone was really interested in space shots, and when Scully started calling my opposite field home runs 'moon shots,' it really caught on."

Moon hit 39 of his 47 home runs from 1959 to 1961 at the Coliseum. He won a Gold Glove award for his fielding in 1960 and hit .328 with 88 runs batted in, both career highs, in 1961. He was an All-Star in 1957 and 1959.

He received two more World Series championship rings with the Dodgers, in 1963 and 1965, but his playing time had diminished as the Dodgers' rebuilding brought the outfielders Tommy Davis, Willie Davis, Ron Fairly and Frank Howard.

Wallace Wade Moon, named for the prominent Alabama football coach of the time, was born on April 3, 1930, in Bay, Ark., the middle of three children of Henry Moon, a factory worker, and the former Margie Vernon.

He played baseball and basketball at Texas A&M and was signed by the Cardinals' organization in 1950 while still in college. He earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in education while playing in the minors.

Moon made his debut with the Cardinals in a home game at Sportsman's Park on the opening day of the 1954 season, a few days after they traded their future Hall of Fame outfielder Enos Slaughter to the Yankees. Moon had grown up when much of the South was Cardinals country, and as he told The St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "They were my favorite team and Slaughter my favorite player. I admired the way he hustled."

Fans unhappy with Slaughter's loss may have been a bit mollified when Moon hit a home run in his first at-bat.

He batted close to the .300 mark during the next three seasons but tailed off in 1958, when he was injured in an outfield collision. The Dodgers acquired him along with a pitcher in exchange for outfielder Gino Cimoli before the 1959 season.

Moon retired after the 1965 season with a career batting average of .289 and 142 home runs.

He was later a coach for the San Diego Padres, a baseball coach and athletic director at John Brown University in Arkansas, a minor league manager, and the owner of the Dodgers' San Antonio farm team.

Survivors include his daughters Zola, Elizabeth, Mary and LaRhesa; his son, Wally Joe, and grandchildren. His wife, the former Bettye Knowles, died in 2016.

When the Dodgers opened their 2017 season at home, Moon and their longtime former manager Tommy Lasorda threw out the ceremonial first pitches. The Dodgers went on to win their first pennant since 1988, when they also won their last World Series championship.

But for all their World Series rings, the “moon shot” man and the manager who famously bled Dodger blue could provide only so much inspiration last fall: The latter-day Dodgers lost the World Series, in Los Angeles, to the Houston Astros.

***Correction: February 12, 2018***

An earlier version of this obituary misstated the year the Los Angeles Coliseum, where the Dodgers played from 1958 until 1962, opened. It was 1923, not 1932.

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