

= Walter Alston =

Walter Emmons Alston ( December 1 , 1911 ? October 1 , 1984 ) , nicknamed " Smokey " , was an American baseball player and manager in Major League Baseball ( MLB ) . He is best known for managing the Brooklyn / Los Angeles Dodgers between 1954 and 1976 . Alston signed 23 one @-@ year contracts with the Dodgers . He had a calm , reticent demeanor , for which he was sometimes also known as " The Quiet Man " .

Alston grew up in rural Ohio and lettered in baseball and basketball at Miami University in Ohio . Though his MLB playing career consisted of one game and one at @-@ bat with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1936 , he played and managed for several seasons in minor league baseball . His service included a stint as manager of the Nashua Dodgers , the first integrated professional team in modern baseball . He was promoted to manage the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1954 after several successful seasons in Brooklyn 's Class AAA minor league teams .

As a major league manager , Alston led Dodgers teams to seven National League ( NL ) pennants and four world championships . His 1955 team was the only World Series championship team while the club was in Brooklyn ; they clinched the NL pennant earlier in the calendar year than any previous pennant winner in league history . Alston retired with more than 2 @,@ 000 career wins and managed NL All @-@ Star teams to seven victories . He was selected as Manager of the Year six times .

Alston was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1983 . He suffered a heart attack that year , was hospitalized for a month and was unable to attend his Hall of Fame induction ceremony . He never fully recovered and he died at a hospital in Oxford , Ohio on October 1 , 1984 .

= = Early life = =

Alston was born in Venice , Ohio . He spent much of his childhood on a farm in Morning Sun , Ohio . When Alston was a teenager , the family moved to Darrrtown , Ohio . He attended Milford Township High School in Darrrtown . He received the nickname " Smokey " as a high school pitcher , owing to the speed of his fastball . He graduated from high school in 1929 and married longtime girlfriend Lela Vaughn Alexander the next year .

In 1935 , Alston graduated with a degree in industrial arts and physical education from Miami University in Oxford , Ohio . He said that finances were a challenge in college and that he had paid his way through school by playing pool . He lettered three years in both basketball and baseball .

= = Playing career = =

Alston played minor league baseball as an infielder for the Greenwood Chiefs and Huntington Red Birds in 1935 and 1936 , respectively . For the 1936 Huntington team , he hit 35 home runs in 120 games . Alston 's only major league game was with the St. Louis Cardinals on September 27 , 1936 , substituting for Johnny Mize at first base . He later described his major league playing career to a reporter by saying , " Well , I came up to bat for the Cards back in ' 36 , and Lon Warneke struck me out . That 's it " . He also committed one error in two fielding chances at first base .

Alston returned to the minor leagues after his brief MLB appearance . He split the 1937 season between the Houston Buffaloes and Rochester Red Wings , hitting for a combined .229 batting average . Alston played for the Portsmouth Red Birds in 1938 , finishing the season with a .311 average and 28 home runs as Portsmouth won its only Middle Atlantic League championship . He returned to Portsmouth in 1940 , hit 28 home runs and was a player @-@ manager for part of the season . He was a player @-@ manager for the next two seasons with the Springfield Cardinals and even appeared in seven games as a pitcher in 1942 . He returned to Rochester as a first baseman and third baseman in 1943 . He moved to the Trenton Packers , where he was a player @-@ manager in 1944 and 1945 . Alston had been offered the job in Trenton , a minor league farm club of the Brooklyn Dodgers , by Branch Rickey , the executive who had signed him as a player with St. Louis .

After his two seasons with Trenton , Alston served as a player @-@ manager for the first integrated U.S. baseball team based in the twentieth century , the Nashua Dodgers of the Class @-@ B New England League . Alston managed black Dodgers prospects Don Newcombe and Roy Campanella , leading Nashua to a New England League title in 1946 . Alston later said that he did not give much consideration to racial issues and that he had simply thought about how much they would benefit the team . Alston led the Pueblo Dodgers to the Western League title the next season . He appeared as a player in two games , which were his final professional playing appearances . For his 13 @-@ season minor league playing career , Alston hit .295 with 176 home runs . However , he hit only .239 in 535 at bats in Class AA , which was the highest minor league classification through 1945 .

= = Managerial career = =

= = = Minor leagues = = =

In 1948 , Alston managed the St. Paul Saints , a Dodgers Class AAA affiliate , to an 86 @-@ 68 win @-@ loss record . The team finished in third place , 14 games behind an Indianapolis Indians team managed by Al López . That year , Alston managed Campanella again , where Campanella integrated the American Association . The media was critical of Alston for playing Campanella ; they said that the catcher was simply there to integrate the league . Campanella hit 13 home runs in 35 games and fans were dismayed when he was called up to the Dodgers . The 1949 Saints finished with a 93 @-@ 60 record and four of its players collected more than 90 runs batted in ( RBI ) . The team finished in first place , half a game in front of Indianapolis . During the baseball off @-@ season , Alston worked as a teacher in Darrtown .

From 1950 to 1953 , Alston managed another Dodgers AAA affiliate , the Montreal Royals of the International League . The team won between 86 and 95 games during each season of Alston 's tenure . The 1951 and 1952 Montreal Royals won International League pennants . In 1951 and 1953 , Montreal won the Governors ' Cup playoff tournament . Alston was inducted into the International League Hall of Fame many years later .

= = = Major leagues = = =

= = = = Brooklyn Dodgers = = = =

Alston was named manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers for the 1954 season . His predecessor , Charlie Dressen , had moved on from the Dodgers after the team 's leadership refused to sign him to a two @-@ year or three @-@ year contract . Dressen had won two pennants in three years and nearly won a third . Dodgers executive Buzzie Bavasi fought for Alston to be hired in Brooklyn . Bringing Alston to Brooklyn has been described as Bavasi 's biggest contribution to the team 's history . Alston was an unknown at the major league level and the New York Daily News reported his hiring with the headline " Walter Who ? "

Becoming immediately known for his quiet nature , Alston was sometimes referred to as " The Quiet Man " . Alston 's personality contrasted with that of Dressen , who was much more outspoken . Sportswriters had difficulty writing about Alston at first because he did not say much . He also seemed more conservative in his decisions on the field , which drew criticism from his players even though he had managed many of them in the minor leagues . Don Zimmer said that he had learned more from Dressen and that Dressen knew more about baseball than Alston . Jackie Robinson did not like Alston at first either , according to Robinson 's wife .

Alston commented on his approach , saying , " I never criticized a player for a mistake on the spot . Whenever I got steamed up about something , I always wanted to sleep on it and face the situation with a clear head . " Sportswriter Jim Murray said that Alston was " the only guy in the game who

could look Billy Graham right in the face without blushing and who would order corn on the cob in a Paris restaurant . " The 1954 Dodgers finished second in the NL as both Gil Hodges and Duke Snider hit at least 40 home runs and registered 130 runs batted in .

The 1955 Dodgers got off to a strong start . Even so , an Associated Press article noted that Alston was reticent in response to questions and that he did not seem like a manager who had won ten consecutive games . The 1955 Brooklyn team won the pennant and its only World Series championship . They clinched the NL pennant earlier in the year than any team had in NL history . In the World Series , Alston started Johnny Podres , who had a mediocre 9 @-@ 10 regular season record , in the third and seventh games ; Podres won both games . The pitcher had struggled with arm problems for much of the season .

Sandy Koufax emerged as a pitcher for the Dodgers during that championship season . Alston was criticized by Jackie Robinson and others over his sparse use of Koufax in his early career . During Koufax 's second MLB start , he pitched a shutout , giving up two hits and striking out 14 batters . However , that success did not prompt a lot of opportunities for Koufax . The pitcher appeared in only 12 games that season , mostly in relief .

The 1956 team repeated as NL champions ; the team was bolstered by the play of Duke Snider , who hit a league @-@ leading 43 home runs and also led the league in walks . They fell to third place ( 84 @-@ 70 ) in 1957 .

= = = Early years in Los Angeles = = =

The team finished in seventh place ( 71 @-@ 83 ) in 1958 , the club 's first season after moving from Brooklyn to Los Angeles . Criticism of Alston had begun to mount during that season , but he led the Dodgers to a world championship in 1959 . Six players on the 1959 team finished with double @-@ digit totals in home runs , while 22 @-@ year @-@ old Don Drysdale led the team 's pitchers with 17 wins . Several Los Angeles players , including Wally Moon , characterized Alston as indecisive in the late 1950s and 1960s . However , Moon later came to describe Alston as a good manager who had gotten " good mileage " out of his players .

Managing the NL All @-@ Star Team in 1960 , Alston attracted some controversy when he left Milwaukee Braves pitchers Warren Spahn and Lew Burdette off the All @-@ Star roster . An Associated Press report said the omission may have been a snub directed at Dressen , who was by then managing in Milwaukee . The 1960 Dodgers finished in fourth place . The following year , the team finished in second place after veteran Duke Snider missed two months with a broken arm . The Dodgers lost the lead in the 1962 NL pennant race and rumors surfaced that Alston and coach Leo Durocher might be fired , but the team retained both men for 1963 .

The Dodgers won the 1963 World Series . This series represented the first time that the New York Yankees had lost a World Series in four games . Alston 's pitchers excelled , as Koufax struck out 23 batters over two games and Drysdale threw a shutout in Game 3 . Over the four games , Alston employed only three starting pitchers and one relief pitcher in the series . In 1964 , the team finished 80 @-@ 82 in its first losing season in several years . Alston used the team 's 1964 performance to motivate them moving forward . In spring training before the 1965 season , he said that he would not let his team forget the difficulties they had in the previous season .

The Dodgers returned to the 1965 World Series . Alston could not start his number one pitcher , Koufax , in the opening game of that series because Koufax was observing Yom Kippur . Instead , Alston turned to Drysdale , who struggled , lasting 2 2 ? 3 innings and surrendering seven runs . When Alston came to the mound to remove him , Drysdale said to his manager , " I bet right now you wish I was Jewish , too . " The team recovered from losing that first game and they won the World Series in seven games . Koufax appeared in three games during the series , registering two shutouts .

Alston 's Dodgers teams of the 1960s benefited from the strong pitching by Drysdale and Koufax . In 1966 , both players held out of spring training and demanded three @-@ year contracts each worth \$ 500 @, @ 000 , which was more money than anyone was making in baseball at the time . The players were eventually signed for lesser amounts . Drysdale struggled that year , but Koufax

won 27 games . The Dodgers went to the 1966 World Series but were defeated in four games . Koufax retired after the season on the advice of doctors who examined his sore arm . Drysdale retired three years later . Both men had pitched their entire major league careers for Alston .

= = = = Final years as manager = = = =

Alston guided his teams to at least 85 wins per season between 1969 and 1976 . They finished in second place in their division six times during that span . The team came very close to a pennant in 1971 ; after falling 11 games out of first place , the team performed well late in the season and finished one game behind the San Francisco Giants . Beginning in 1973 , Alston 's team featured an infield of Steve Garvey , Davey Lopes , Bill Russell and Ron Cey . The group played together for eight years , remaining together long after the end of Alston 's tenure .

In 1974 , the Dodgers won the NL pennant and went to the World Series to face the Oakland Athletics . Alston used closer Mike Marshall in a record @-@ setting 106 games that season and Marshall won the Cy Young Award . Alston received some media attention when he considered using Marshall as a starter . Marshall ended up appearing in all five games of the series and gave up one run in nine innings , but he did not start a game . The Dodgers lost the series four games to one . The 1975 and 1976 Dodgers won 88 and 92 games respectively , but they finished well out of first place in both seasons .

In September 1976 , Alston announced that he would retire at the end of the season . At a press conference , Alston said , " I 've been in baseball for 41 years and it 's been awfully good to me . This has been a pretty big day . I had three birdies playing golf for the first time in my life and now I 'm announcing that I 'm stepping down as manager . I told Peter this afternoon to give somebody else a chance to manage the club . " Alston retired with 2 @,@ 063 wins ( 2 @,@ 040 in the regular season and 23 in the postseason ) . Alston was named NL Manager of the Year six times . He also managed NL All @-@ Star squads a record nine times and won seven of those games . At a time when multi @-@ year contracts were on the rise , Alston 's managerial career consisted of 23 one @-@ year contracts . He earned seven NL pennants in that span .

Sportswriter Leonard Koppett described Alston 's role with the Dodgers , pointing out that O 'Malley was always seen as " the boss " while Alston stuck to the on @-@ field management of the team . Koppett said that Alston 's loyalty and subdued nature contributed to the stability that the team enjoyed . O 'Malley once commented that Alston was " non @-@ irritating . Do you realize how important it is to have a manager who doesn 't irritate you ? "

= = Later life and legacy = =

The Dodgers retired Alston 's number the year after he stepped down as manager ; he was only the fourth Dodger to receive that honor . He was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in 1983 . Alston suffered a heart attack that year and was hospitalized for a month . Alston 's grandson traveled to Cooperstown to represent the ill former manager at the Hall of Fame induction ceremony . Alston died in an Oxford hospital from complications from the recent heart attack on October 1 , 1984 . He was 72 . A funeral home spokesman said that Alston had remained ill since the heart attack . He is interred at Darrrtown Cemetery in Darrrtown , Ohio .

Upon Alston 's death , MLB commissioner Peter Ueberroth referred to him as one of baseball 's greatest managers . Former Dodgers great Duke Snider acknowledged occasional run @-@ ins with Alston , but he said that Alston excelled at utilizing the specific strengths of each team that he managed . Tommy Lasorda , who played and coached under Alston and ultimately succeeded him as manager , commented on how easy it was to play for Alston . Broadcaster Vin Scully said , " I always imagined him to be the type who could ride shotgun on a stage through Indian territory . He was all man and two yards tall . He was very quiet , very controlled . He never made excuses . He gave the players the credit and he took the blame . He was so solid , so American . "

Ohio State Route 177 was named the Walter " Smokey " Alston Memorial Highway in 1999 . He was inducted into the International League Hall of Fame in 2010 . In April 2013 , readers of the Los

Angeles Times named Alston number 16 on a list of the 20 greatest Dodgers of all time . A memorial to Alston is located at Milford Township Community Park in Darrrtown .