

**This interview with
VIN SCULLY
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on May 26, 2017**



Vin Scully

Library of Congress: For that historic game, the last at the Polo Grounds, do you remember your state of mind—was it a bittersweet moment for you?

Vin Scully: It was very bittersweet....

As for background: I was born and raised in New York, born in the Bronx, grew up in Washington Heights. Our school was about 20 city blocks from the Polo Grounds. School in those days let out at 2:30 and the games at the Polo Grounds started at 3:15—of course they had to be played during the day at that time. I was a member of two city clubs—the Catholic Youth Organization and the Police Athletic League--and, because I was a member, I got to the games three times every week for nothing. You could go and sit in the grandstand and that's where I fell in love with the game and followed my idol, who was a player named Mel Ott.

Now [on weekends] to sit in the bleachers, it cost 55 cents. Used to be you could bring a soda pop bottle back to the store for what they called a “deposit” and you’d get five cents back. So, if I saved up enough bottles during the week, I could go for “free” to the game on Saturday and sit in the bleachers.

So that's really where I grew up--literally and figuratively.

From the time was 11 years old, I was allowed to walk home alone. My house was a good mile or more from the Grounds. So, I'd go to school early in the morning and then walk home after the game, so that consumed a good portion of the day.

When I used to sit in the bleachers, you could look over at the press box. If you look at a photo of the old Polo Grounds, the press box is right on the façade of the second deck, right above homeplate. So, I would sit there and look up and think, “Boy, I would love to sit there and watch a game or broadcast a game.”

So it was a lot more than just a park for me, more than just a team.

All those years ago.... We're talking 1938. Then I wind up with the job and then, in 1957, to know it was the last game at the Polo Grounds and I would never see it again....

(Of course, I was wrong—because the Mets played there a few more times when their stadium was still being built...)

But, at the time, I thought that that was the last game I was ever going to see there. I had lived a part of my life in that ballpark. It was very personal, it wasn't just another game and that's why, if you listen to the broadcast now, I keep saying, "Watch it, enjoy it, let it soak in." We didn't want to forget it—of course, we never did. And you hear me saying to the players, "Hey, fellas, slow down! Don't make it a fast game. This is the last dance, let's enjoy it, let's let the music play on in the ballroom...."

So that's what made the broadcast special for me, it really was a piece of my life skittering off.

LOC: Did you get the sense from the crowd gathered there that day that they too were feeling a kind of closure?

VS: I'm sure, I'm sure. You know, one of the great moments in the Grounds was certainly when a bit of Giants-Dodgers history occurred. And I was a Dodgers announcer. I was only in my second year, it was when Bobby Thomson hit a home run in 1951. It was what became known as the "Shot heard 'round the world!"

It was the middle of August, the Dodgers were leading the League, they lead with 13 and a half games. The Dodgers thought they had clinched it, everyone thought they had clinched it, but then, every day or two, their lead kept dwindling. Finally—the final game in 1951, the Dodgers lead in the 9th and they lost it because of Bobby Thomson's hit!

Yeah, so the fans had experienced some gut-wrenching moments there. And, now, another one in 1957. The Polo Grounds figured very prominently in both teams's history.

LOC: Having only recently retired, what are the major changes you've observed in both baseball?

VS: First, there's the expansion. Teams are so spread out. When I started, the National and American Leagues each had eight teams. Today they have 30 teams! When a team moved to St. Louis, we thought that that was way out west but now baseball is coast to coast.

The other big change as far as the game is a combination—the addition of domes to stadiums so that they can play all year round and the addition of AstroTurf. Originally, the AstroTurf came in because of the domes, they couldn't grow grass on the fields anymore so they had to put down AstroTurf. Then, parks without domes started putting down Astroturf to save money on the grounds keeping.

As for the game itself, I think the biggest change was in the American League when they noticed that they had all these wonderful players who were growing older and couldn't play every day or play defensively anymore but they could still hit and they still had a glamour to them. So the owners thought, "Well, if they can still hit, why don't we use them as hitters?" And that, of course, was the birth of the designated hitter. The teams kept a lot of the line-up and held on to a little more glamour for the team; they still had a star.

LOC: What do you think is the biggest change in sports coverage and sportscasting of games?

VS: Well, I'm not sure; I can't really speak about other broadcasters. I can tell you that the biggest change was when we went from radio to television. Television is the biggest single thing that ever happened to baseball. Without TV, you would not have superstars. It made a HUGE impact.

For instance, when I started, I was paid the same as a first-year player, and that was \$5,000 a year. And that was in Brooklyn where there were a lot of superstars coming up, like Jackie Robinson. But the largest salary for a Brooklyn player was \$42,000 [a year].

Now, first year players get at least \$500,000. I think it was John F. Kennedy who said, "High tides raise all boats" and that was certainly true. If one salary rose, they all did.

It's an interesting financial study of player's salaries and how they have gone to the moon. It used to be that the philosophy was you got paid for what you did. And, in those days, if you had bad years, they'd cut your pay by 20%. Now, young players are paid for what they are going to do, or say they are going to do. They have five-year contracts that they sign at age 30, 35, 36.

And the point is, you couldn't have that happen without television.

Of course, the other big revolution is the lights and night games. Now almost all the games are at night, even Sunday games are being played at night.

LOC: What do you consider the key elements that make for good sportscasting?

VS: Well, number one is accuracy. Let's face it, if you aren't calling it accurately, it's no good. And part of that is the faith that the listener has to have in your degree of accuracy.

Also, you don't want to sound like a guy that only talks about the great plays his team makes. You can't demean the other team.

And part of accuracy is preparation. I remember reading a line from Laurence Olivier, the great actor, once about what made a great actor and he said it was "the humility to prepare and the confidence to bring it off." I like that. No matter what game I was announcing, or what sport, I would try so hard to prepare for whatever I was going to do. And I found that the more I prepared, the more confident I was.