

Phillies-Dodgers evokes memories of long rivalry

By Rich Westcott
 For The Inquirer

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Rich Westcott is a baseball writer and historian and the author

of 20 books, including "The Philadelphia Phillies - Past and Present," which is due out next spring. This is his reminiscence of the decades-long rivalry between the Phillies and Dodgers.



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Phils coach Charlie Manuel talks about the Utley errors during Phillies and Dodgers workout day at Citizens Bank Park, one day before Game 3 of NLCS. on Oct. 17, 2009. (Elizabeth Robertson / Staff Photographer)



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Phillies head out to NYC



10/26: Phils workout



World Series Pep Rally

Buried deep in the archives of some dust-covered files, I once came across a most unusual picture. Even today, I can remember what it looked like.

It was a picture of former Phillies outfielder Dick Sisler standing on the upstairs porch of his home in Northeast Philadelphia, waving to a big crowd that had assembled on the street below.

A sign was spread across the front of the house with the words, "We Love That Man." A smaller sign described Sisler as "Our Hero."

The photo was snapped on the morning after Sisler had blasted a three-run homer in the 10th inning of the final game of the 1950 regular season to give the Phillies the National League pennant and a trip to their first World Series in 35 years.

Sisler's clout, undoubtedly the greatest home run in Phillies history, gave his team a 4-1 victory over the Brooklyn Dodgers at Ebbets Field.

When I interviewed him many years later, Sisler vividly recalled his spectacular hit.

"I didn't know if the ball would go out," he remembered. "So I just started running. As I rounded first base, I saw it was a home run. You can't imagine the thrill. Even my father [Hall of Famer George Sisler] stood up and cheered. At the time, he was working for the Dodgers."

That game had many other Phillies-Dodgers connections. In the bottom of the ninth, Phils centerfielder Richie Ashburn had cut down the potential winning run when he threw out the Dodgers' Cal Abrams at the plate. The coach who sent Abrams home was Milt Stock, the third baseman on the Phillies' first pennant-winner, in 1915. Abrams was a Philadelphia native, as was Brooklyn catcher Roy Campanella. And Dodgers manager Burt Shotton had been the skipper of the Phillies in 1932, when they had their only first-division finish in a 31-year period.

Over the years, the Phillies and Dodgers, both the ones in Brooklyn and the ones in Los Angeles, have been tightly linked.

Among such connections, the Phils traded Dolph Camilli to the Dodgers in 1938, and he won a most valuable player award. Johnny Podres, who pitched the Dodgers to their first world championship, in 1955, was the Phillies' pitching coach when the team won the pennant in 1993. Joe Torre's brother, Frank, played with the Phillies in the early 1960s. And Charlie Manuel played with the Dodgers in the 1970s. (Marcus Hook's Mickey Vernon was the team's hitting coach.)

On the field, the teams have been fierce rivals. That rivalry is epitomized by their many tumultuous battles in the National League Championship Series.

Demonstrating that TV-controlled playoffs that don't give a hoot about the fans (like a recent game played in subfreezing temperatures in Denver) are nothing new was the shameful decision to play the deciding game of the 1977 NLCS in a driving rain while league honchos watched from their box seats, arrogantly shunning any rain gear.

You want wet. I'll show you wet. Sitting in the stands watching the Dodgers' Tommy John beat the Phils for the pennant, we were soaked. So were the players and the Veterans Stadium field. Even the hot dogs were wet.

To make matters worse, just one night earlier Greg Luzinski had misplayed a fly ball, and umpire Bruce Froemming had blown a call on Larry Bowa's throw to first on a ball hit by Davey Lopes. (How's that for a piece of irony?) The Phillies lost, and the day was forever known as Black Friday.

The same teams met in the 1978 NLCS. Along with Garry Maddox's dropped fly ball in Game 4, my most vivid recollection is that of Steve Carlton pitching a complete game and hitting a three-run homer in the Phillies' only victory of the series. Naturally, Carlton chose afterward not to share his views with the media. He once justified this position by telling a writer seeking an off-the-record comment, "Policy is policy."

In 1983, the Phillies again faced the Dodgers - still managed by Norristown's Tommy Lasorda - in the NLCS. This time, the results were different. The Phils, losers of 11 of 12 games to L.A. during the

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regular season and managed by Paul Owens, who had replaced Pat Corrales at midseason, won the series, three games to one. Gary Matthews, who had played like a corporal through much of the season, became the Sarge we all knew and admired by hitting a home run in each of the last three games, driving in eight runs and winning the MVP award.

Afterward, the champagne and beer flowed freely in the clubhouse. Ever get champagne in your eyes? It stings. A lot. Your hair gets hard, too. And your clothes smell awful. Such is life when you cover a winner.

Twenty-five years later, the Phils and Dodgers met again, in the 2008 playoffs. The Phils had two ex-Dodgers, Shane Victorino and Jason Werth, in their lineup. Brad Lidge saved three of the Phillies' four wins. And who will ever forget home runs by Victorino and Matt Stairs in the fourth game. and two wins by Cole Hamels, including the clincher in Game 5?

The Phillies, of course, went on to win the World Series.

Now, the Phils and Dodgers are again vying for National League supremacy. When the series reaches Philadelphia, the red-clad fans will be there, the rally towels will flap endlessly, the stadium might even shake a little.

These two teams have enjoyed a magnificent rivalry. And if history repeats itself, this should be another memorable series.

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Hopefully history will repeat itself like the 1983 NLCS and not like the 1977 NLCS. In both years, the Phillies lost Game Two in LA, scoring only one run.

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