

Vin Scully, Voice of the Dodgers for 67 Years, Dies at 94

The team has had many great players since World War II, but it was Mr. Scully, a gifted storyteller and a master of the graceful phrase, who became the enduring face of the franchise.

By Richard Goldstein

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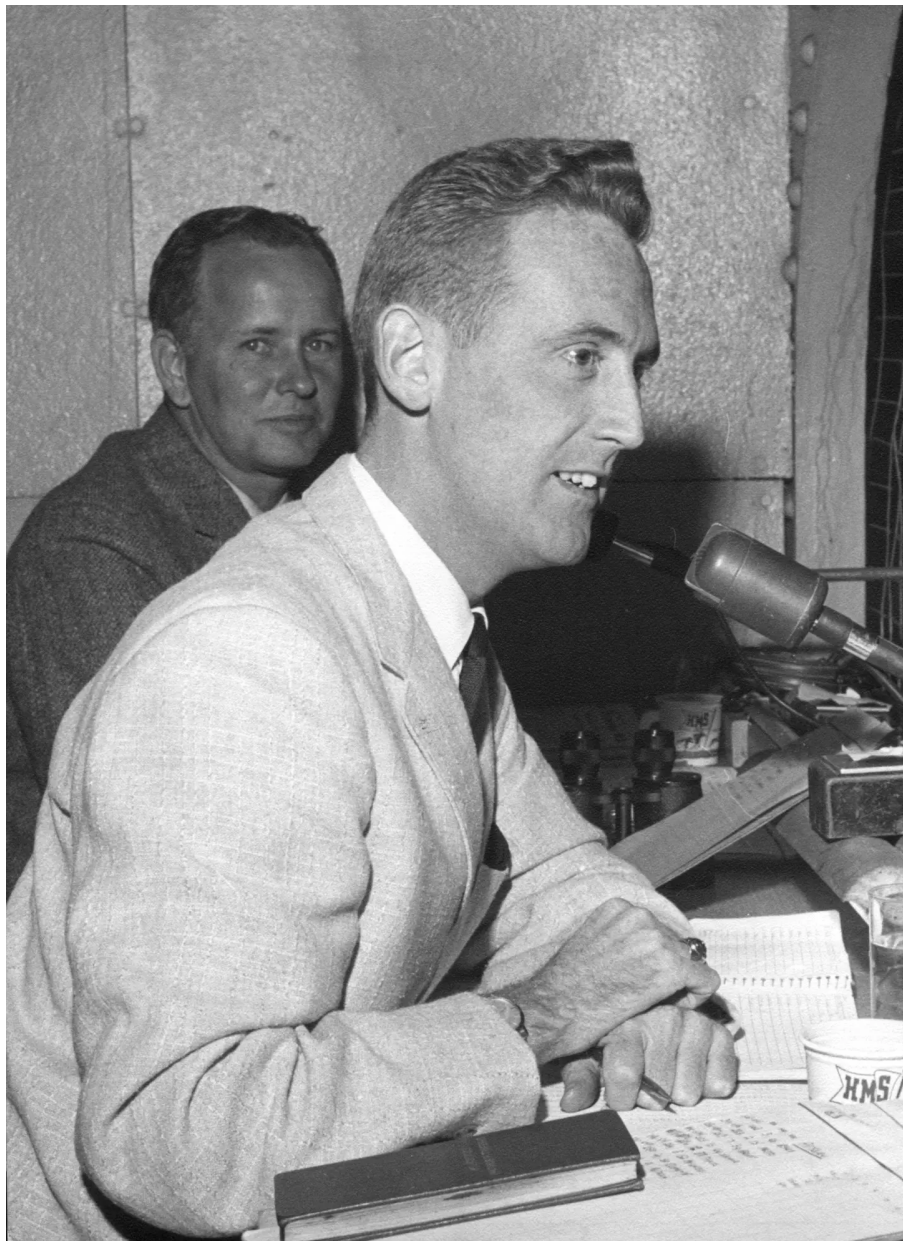
Vin Scully, who was celebrated for his mastery of the graceful phrase and his gift for storytelling during the 67 summers he served as the announcer for Dodgers baseball games, first in Brooklyn and then in Los Angeles, died on Tuesday at his home in Los Angeles. He was 94.

His daughter Erin confirmed his death.

For all the Dodgers' marquee players since World War II, Mr. Scully was the enduring face of the franchise. He was a national sports treasure as well, broadcasting for CBS and NBC. He called baseball's Game of the Week, All-Star Games, the playoffs and more than two dozen World Series. In 2009, the American Sportscasters Association voted him No. 1 on its list of the "Top 50 Sportscasters of All Time."

Mr. Scully began broadcasting at Ebbets Field in 1950, when he was a slender, red-haired 22-year-old graduate of Fordham University and a protégé of Red Barber. When the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles in 1958, fans at the cavernous Coliseum brought along hand-held transistor radios, recently popularized in America, so that Mr. Scully could guide them through the pioneering days of major league baseball on the West Coast.

"I regard him, all things considered, as the master of radio and TV," the sports broadcaster Bob Costas once told The Arizona Republic, recalling listening to Mr. Scully with a transistor radio under his pillow as a youngster in Los Angeles in the early 1960s. "I regard him as the best baseball announcer ever."



Mr. Scully in the Ebbets Field press box in the 1950s, when the Dodgers still played in Brooklyn. National Baseball Hall of Fame & Museum

Never a Cheerleader

Mr. Scully offered no gimmicks and shunned trite expressions. Tommy Lasorda, the longtime Los Angeles manager, claimed to bleed Dodger blue, but Mr. Scully was never a cheerleader.

He called the play-by-play for the Dodgers' local TV and radio broadcasts without a color analyst, lest he lose his connection to the viewers and listeners he invited to "pull up a chair."

The Dodgers largely limited their broadcasts to radio in their early years in Los Angeles. But they gradually expanded TV coverage, and Mr. Scully called all nine innings of their telecasts. He began simulcasting on radio for the first three innings of every game in 2000. In his later years he limited himself to broadcasting home games and Western road trips.

In a poll of fans conducted by the Dodgers in 1976, Mr. Scully was voted the most memorable personality from the team's first two decades in Los Angeles. In 1982, he was elected to the broadcasters' wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1995, he received an Emmy Award for lifetime achievement in sports broadcasting.

He narrated a succession of big events of baseball history, and knew when to remain quiet.

Five of Vin Scully's Most Memorable Calls

Vin Scully calls Hank Aaron's historic 715



Hank Aaron Breaks Babe Ruth's Record, 1974

"What a marvelous moment for baseball. What a marvelous moment for Atlanta and the State of Georgia. What a marvelous moment for the country and the world. A Black man is getting a standing ovation in the Deep South for breaking a record of an all-time baseball idol."

He was at the microphone in 1955 when the Brooklyn Dodgers won their only World Series championship, and in 1956 when Don Larsen of the Yankees pitched a perfect game against the Dodgers in the World Series.

When Sandy Koufax retired all 27 Chicago Cubs batters at Dodger Stadium on Sept. 9, 1965, Mr. Scully placed his stamp on the moment:

"On the scoreboard in right field, it is 9:46 p.m. in the City of the Angels, Los Angeles, California. And a crowd of 29,139 just sitting in to see the only pitcher in baseball history to hurl four no-hit, no-run games. He has done it four straight years and now he capped it: On his fourth no-hitter, he made it a perfect game. And Sandy Koufax, whose name will always remind you of strikeouts, did it with a flourish. He struck out the last six consecutive batters. So when he wrote his name in capital letters in the record books, that K stands out even more than the O-U-F-A-X."

When Hank Aaron of the Braves hit his 715th home run, breaking Babe Ruth's record, on April 8, 1974, in Atlanta against the Dodgers, Mr. Scully said simply: "To the fence. It is gone."

He then walked to the back of the broadcast booth, took his headset off, had a sip of coffee and waited as the roar of the crowd resounded.

Finally, he returned to the microphone: "What a marvelous moment for baseball. What a marvelous moment for Atlanta and the State of Georgia. What a marvelous moment for the country and the world. A Black man is getting a standing ovation in the Deep South for breaking a record of an all-time baseball idol."

When an injured Kirk Gibson pinch-hit a game-winning home run for the Dodgers against the Oakland A's in the opener of the 1988 World Series at Dodger Stadium, Mr. Scully observed, "In a year that has been so improbable, the impossible has happened."

In his biography of Mr. Scully, "Pull Up a Chair" (2009), Curt Smith quoted the sportscaster Dick Enberg: "All those phrases, those wonderful things that he does, go instantly from the brain to the mouth. I'll be listening to him and think, 'I wish I could call upon that expression the way he does.'"



Mr. Scully at Dodger Stadium in 2008. He was elected to the broadcasters' wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1982 and received an Emmy Award for lifetime achievement in 1995. Danny Moloshok/Associated Press

Red Skelton Wasn't on the Line

Vincent Edward Scully, the son of Irish immigrants, was born in the Bronx on Nov. 29, 1927.

His father, Vincent Aloysius Scully, a silk salesman, died when Vincent was a child. His mother, Bridget, remarried, and the family moved to the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. As a boy he listened to the college football broadcasts of Bill Stern and Ted Husing, fascinated by the crowd noise over the airwaves.

While broadcasting the 1997 World Series between the Florida Marlins and the Cleveland Indians, Mr. Scully reflected on a bit of baseball history, and on his personal story as well.

The Marlins' seven-run ninth inning in Game 3 led him to recall that the Yankees' 18-4 trouncing of the New York Giants in Game 2 of the 1936 World Series had made him feel so sorry for the victims "that I became a Giants fan that day." His boyhood hero was the Giants' future Hall of Fame slugger Mel Ott.

Playing the outfield at Fordham Prep, where he excelled in oratory, and then at Fordham University, Mr. Scully was a left-handed batter, like Ott, and emulated his batting style, lifting his right leg before swinging.

Mr. Scully hit one home run as a college baseball player, an inside-the-park variety, against City College. But he flourished as a broadcaster for the Fordham radio station, WFUV, working basketball and football games and also calling baseball in his senior year, having left the team after two seasons so that he could get behind the microphone.

After graduating in 1949, Mr. Scully worked as a fill-in at WTOP, the CBS affiliate in Washington, broadcasting sports, news and weather. On a visit to the CBS offices in New York that July, he was introduced to Red Barber, who was in charge of sports for CBS Radio in addition to broadcasting Dodger games.

When Ernie Harwell, one of Mr. Barber's partners on Dodger broadcasts, was reassigned from broadcasting a Boston University-Maryland football game at Fenway Park on the afternoon of Nov. 12, 1949, Mr. Barber checked WTOP for references on Mr. Scully and, satisfied with what he learned, assigned him to do the game in Boston.

Mr. Scully got the news from his mother.

"I came home to our apartment one day in New York," he remembered. "She was so excited and flustered. She said, 'You'll never guess who called — Red Skelton!' And I said, 'No, you must mean Red Barber.'"

There was, Mr. Scully later recalled, no room for him in the Fenway Park press box. "I had to walk along the right-field roof, following the play," The Boston Globe quoted him as saying.

Mr. Barber heard a recording of the broadcast, liked what he heard, and assigned Mr. Scully to the Harvard-Yale game the next week.

In 1950, after Mr. Harwell left the Dodgers' broadcast team, Mr. Scully got his biggest break: He was hired as the team's No. 3 announcer, behind Mr. Barber and Connie Desmond.

Mr. Barber became his mentor, advising him to be well prepared, to stay away from imitating other announcers and to avoid becoming a rooter. "He told me to always be myself," Mr. Scully said in an interview with The Christian Science Monitor in 1986. "He told me not to get emotionally involved, not to have a good friend out there on the field; it might affect your judgment."

When Mr. Barber joined the Yankees' crew in 1954, Mr. Scully got the Dodgers' top broadcasting job. He worked with Mr. Desmond and Andre Baruch and later teamed with Al Helfer and Jerry Doggett in Brooklyn. (Mr. Desmond left late in the 1956 season.)

Mr. Scully in 1965 with Jerry Doggett, one of his many broadcast partners over the years. Los Angeles Dodgers

While continuing to call Dodger games, Mr. Scully covered pro football and golf for CBS-TV in the late 1970s and early '80s. With Joe Garagiola as color commentator, he handled baseball's Game of the Week, the World Series, the playoffs and the All-Star Game for NBC-TV in the '80s. He covered the World Series for CBS Radio in the '90s.

Mr. Scully's first wife, Joan Crawford Scully, died in 1972, and his second wife, Sandra Hunt Scully, died in 2021. In addition to Erin, he is survived by two more daughters, Kelly Scully and Catherine Scully; two sons, Kevin Scully and Todd Scully; 21 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

Another son, Michael, an engineering supervisor for a pipeline company, died in 1994 at 33 in the crash of a helicopter inspecting the status of a pipeline following an earthquake in the Los Angeles area.

The Last Season

Mr. Scully confined himself to local Dodger broadcasts after leaving network TV and radio in 1998.

He continued to spin his yarns. In October 2006, when two Dodgers were tagged out in succession at home plate in a playoff game against the Mets at Shea Stadium, the gaffe reminded him of the August day in 1926 when the Dodgers' Babe Herman doubled into a double play at Ebbets Field, leaving the team with three men on third base. "We turn the clock back to the daffy days of the Brooklyn Dodgers," he said.

But he also drew on the world beyond the diamond. On June 6, 2015, the 71st anniversary of D-Day, he offered vignettes from the invasion of Normandy and told how J.D. Salinger came ashore at Utah Beach with several chapters of his uncompleted novel "The Catcher in the Rye" packed in his gear.

Mr. Scully savored his connection with successive generations of baseball fans, telling The Daily News of Los Angeles in 2007:

"One of the nicest residual effects of this job is to have people say to me, 'You know, when I hear your voice I think of summer nights with my Dad in the backyard and a barbecue,' or 'I can remember fishing with Dad,' or 'I remember Mom and Dad taking me somewhere and I heard the game.' It's a nice feeling. I really do love that."

Throughout his last season at the microphone, in 2016, the tributes flowed.

Visiting players, managers and umpires came up to Dodger Stadium's Vin Scully Press Box, named for him in 2001, to convey good wishes and sometimes tell of listening to his broadcasts in their youth.

When the Dodgers opened their final regular-season home series of 2016, against the Colorado Rockies, Mr. Scully was honored at home plate. "When you roar, when you cheer, when you are thrilled for a brief moment, I'm 8 years old again," he told the crowd. "You have allowed me to be young at heart. I owe you everything."

His last broadcast came on Oct. 2, the final Sunday of the regular season, when the Dodgers played the Giants in San Francisco. The fans waved cards reading "Thank you, Vin" and cheered when Mr. Scully, heard over Dodger TV and radio stations but also over the Giants' stadium loudspeaker, intoned, "It's time for Dodger baseball."

Willie Mays, the Giants' Hall of Fame center fielder, was in the press box for the unveiling of a plaque honoring Mr. Scully.

Saying hey: At a Dodgers-Giants game on Oct. 2, 2016, Willie Mays joined Mr. Scully in the booth for his last broadcast. Jason O. Watson/Getty Images

"I was thinking," Mr. Scully said, "sitting in the booth talking to Willie: Who would ever think that little redheaded kid with the tear in his pants, shirttail hanging out, playing stickball in the streets of New York with a tennis ball and a broom handle, would wind up sitting here, 67 years of broadcasting, and with my arm around one of the greatest players I ever saw, the great Willie Mays?"

When the last out was recorded, he signed off:

“That was awfully nice. The umpire just stood up and said goodbye, as I am saying goodbye. Seven runs, 16 hits for the winning Giants, 1-4-1 for the Dodgers. The winner, Matt Moore; the loser, Kenta Maeda. I have said enough for a lifetime, and for the last time I wish you all a very pleasant good afternoon.”

But the honors continued to flow.

‘You Are an Old Friend’

A month after Mr. Scully’s retirement, President Barack Obama presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom at a White House ceremony.

When told President Barack Obama planned to present him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Mr. Scully asked: “Are you sure?” Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

“Most play-by-play announcers partner with an analyst in the booth to chat about the action,” Mr. Obama said. “Vin worked alone and talked just with us. When he heard about this honor, Vin asked with characteristic humility: ‘Are you sure? I’m just an old baseball announcer.’ And we had to inform him that to Americans of all ages, you are an old friend.”

Before the Dodgers faced the Houston Astros in Game 2 of the 2017 World Series at Dodger Stadium, Mr. Scully walked to the mound to throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

“Somewhere up in heaven Duke Snider, Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella and Gil Hodges are laughing their heads off,” he told the crowd. “Look at who’s throwing out the first ball at the World Series!”

He started his windup, with the longtime Dodger catcher Steve Yeager ready to receive the pitch, when he stopped, explaining, “I think I hurt my rotator cuff.”

“I’m going to go to the bullpen,” he said. “I need a left-hander. Is there a left-hander down here?”

Out popped Fernando Valenzuela, a Dodger star of the 1980s, who had become a Spanish-language broadcaster for the Dodgers. He threw a strike, and Mr. Scully left the mound with him to yet another ovation.

Alex Traub and Mike Ives contributed reporting.