

Baseball on Long Island

By Bill Francis

Long Island, has a rich baseball past dating back to the mid-19th century.

Though only 118 miles long and 23 miles at its widest, the 1,401 square-mile land mass east of Manhattan has played host to numerous events throughout the national pastime's storied history. In fact, the game forever changed due to an event that took place on Long Island more than 150 years ago when the first admission charges to a baseball game were inaugurated.

On July 20, 1858, at the Fashion Race Course in Newtown (now called Corona) in an All-Star contest between the best players from Brooklyn and New York City, a 50 cent admission charge, a significant amount for the times, was collected from the approximately 1,500 fans who attended.

Reporting on the game, a 22-18 victory for the team from New York, under the headline, "The Great Base Ball Match at the Fashion Course – Brooklyn Beaten," the next day's *New York Times* reported "the Base Ball match between the Brooklyn and New-York nines will be long remembered with pleasure by all lovers of this noble and invigorating game."



Brooklyn Dodgers 1947 Infielders - Spider Jorgensen, Ed Stanky, Pee Wee Reese and Jackie Robinson

To see an example of a game from this era, Old Bethpage Village Restoration, a living history museum depicting farm and town life on Long Island in the mid-19th century, hosts vintage baseball games played under the rules of the time.

Today, the westernmost part of Long Island, part of New York City, plays host to the big league New York Mets. An expansion franchise in existence since 1962, the Mets, with World Series titles in 1969 and 1986, have called Flushing, Queens, home since 1964. The team, which played at Shea Stadium from 1964 to 2008, currently plays at Citi Field.

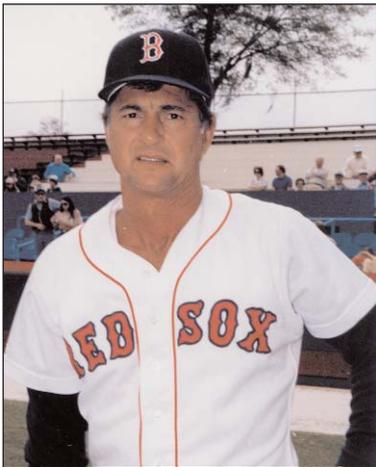
Also on the west end of Long Island were the Brooklyn Dodgers, a storied major league franchise that called beloved Ebbets Field home from 1913-57 before the team moved to Los Angeles. After a number of close calls, Brooklyn won its first and only World Series crown in eight tries with its 1955 triumph over their longtime rivals, the New York Yankees.

Moving east, the Long Island Ducks, a member of the independent Atlantic League, are based in Central Islip. Founded in

2000, the team, which plays in Bethpage Ballpark, captured a league championship in 2004.

The eastern counties of Long Island, Suffolk and Nassau, has been the birthplace of a number of recent big leaguers, including such veterans as Tony Graffanino (Amityville), A.J. Pierzynski (Bridgehampton), Pete Harnisch (Commack), Frank Viola (Hempstead), Jason Marquis (Manhasset), John Valentin (Mineola), Tom Verzyer (Port Jefferson), Billy Koch (Rockville Centre), Frank Catalanotto (Smithtown), Craig Biggio (Smithtown) and Carl Yastrzemski (Southampton).

In recalling his youth on the potato fields of Long Island, Yastrzemski, a longtime Boston Red Sox left fielder elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1989, said, "We worked together and, just as important, we played together. My father loved baseball. After the long hours we all put in on the farm, athletics were our relaxation."



Carl Yastrzemski



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