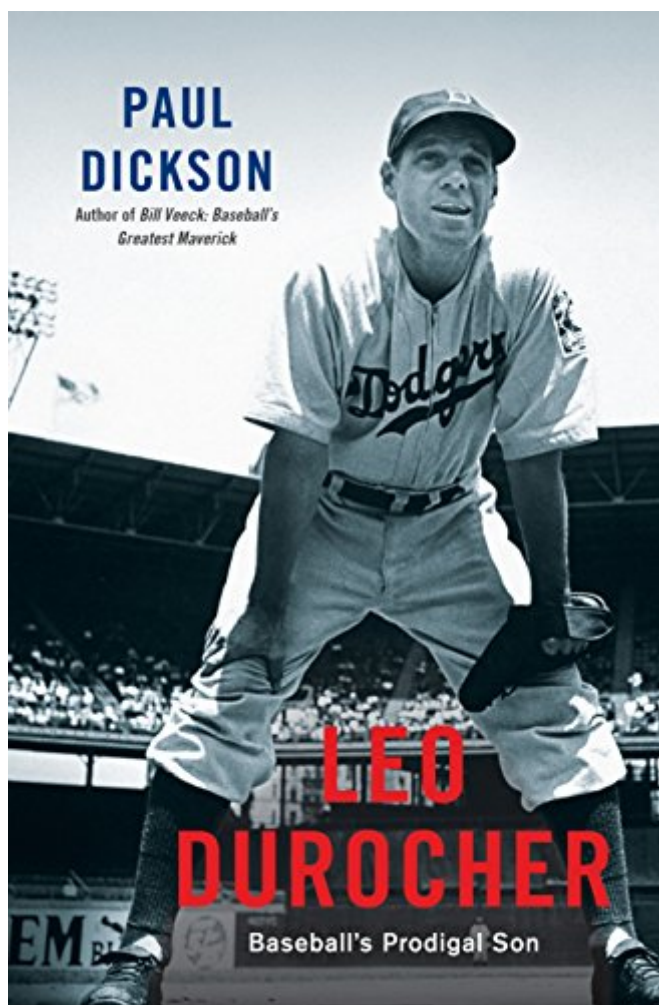


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# Leo Durocher: Baseball's Prodigal Son



## Synopsis

From Paul Dickson, the Casey Award-winning author of *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, the first full biography of Leo Durocher, one of the most colorful and important figures in baseball history. Leo Durocher (1906–1991) was baseball's all-time leading cocky, flamboyant, and galvanizing character, casting a shadow across several eras, from the time of Babe Ruth to the Space Age Astrodome, from Prohibition through the Vietnam War. For more than forty years, he was at the forefront of the game, with a Zelig-like ability to be present as a player or manager for some of the greatest teams and defining baseball moments of the twentieth century. A rugged, combative shortstop and a three-time All-Star, he became a legendary manager, winning three pennants and a World Series in 1954. Durocher performed on three main stages: New York, Chicago, and Hollywood. He entered from the wings, strode to where the lights were brightest, and then took a poke at anyone who tried to upstage him. On occasion he would share the limelight, but only with Hollywood friends such as actor Danny Kaye, tough-guy and sometime roommate George Raft, Frank Sinatra, and his third wife, movie star Laraine Day. As he did with Bill Veeck, Dickson explores Durocher's life and times through primary source materials, interviews with those who knew him, and original newspaper files. A superb addition to baseball literature, *Leo Durocher* offers fascinating and fresh insights into the racial integration of baseball, Durocher's unprecedented suspension from the game, the two clubhouse revolts staged against him in Brooklyn and Chicago, and Durocher's vibrant life off the field.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a very fine biography of one of baseball's prodigal sons, Leo "the Lip" Durocher. Between playing and managing, he lived in the eras of Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb up through Willie Mays, Mickey Mantle, and Ernie Banks. He managed three teams for fairly long stretches--Dodgers, Giants, and Cubs. As a manager, he won over 2,000 games--rating him very high on the list of winningest managers. But it's not so much the statistics; his persona also grabbed attention. The book takes a look at Durocher's life from his birth (he was born as French Canadian--his name would have been pronounced De-rochay) to his death. In between, a lot of things happened! A brouhaha with Babe Ruth over a watch (did Durocher steal it from the Babe or not?), acrobatic fielding as a shortstop--and a rather weak stick (career batting average=.247), represented his league in the All-Star game as a player, time as a player-manager (as his playing career wound down). He was a scrappy player who could get under other players' skin with his bench jockeying and aggressive performance. As a manager, he was no less scrappy and aggressive. As one reads the book, one is struck by how many games he was ejected from and his suspensions for being a "bad boy." Arguments with umpires were the stuff of legends, with kicking dirt on them, screaming at them, sometimes hitting them. He would fight to the very edge of the rules to win a game (and may have gone across the line a time or so!). He was hard on his players, and there were occasional revolts against his manner (Dodgers and Cubs). He could rip players to shreds (it is almost shocking to read of him trying to ride Ernie Banks (Mr. Cub) out of baseball. While he won a lot of games, he could blow it, too. His performance as manager with the Cubs is often looked at as a not so great job--overplaying the team in the miserable hot summers in Illinois, burning them out perhaps? He was also an early supporter of allowing African-Americans play major league baseball. We also learn of his personal life--his four marriages, his friendship with George Raft, his heavy involvement in gambling, his involvement with a Hollywood Crowd, including Frank Sinatra. All in all, an even handed look at Durocher, warts and all. The reader gets a sense of the best and the worst of the man.

A very well-balanced portrayal of a man who had his obvious strengths -- and weaknesses. My

initial thought was that Durocher was already in the Hall of Fame. At a point that point was brought up as Durocher's career lengthened. It was probably fair to him and the game that he didn't live to accept the honor as his moral standing in the game was always in question. Obviously (and under-appreciated by me) he was an outstanding fielding shortstop, good enough to man the position on many accomplished Major League teams. I didn't think I would enjoy reading about his career, but Dickson's research and fine writing made it "a keeper."

This is a very well written account of the life of Leo Durocher, a man who was not universally loved but who could not be ignored due to his forceful personality. The author succeeds in giving us a picture of the inner Durocher, as well as presenting us with a factual narrative of his life. He was a complex man with theatrical abilities to make himself noticed, even when his baseball career was not going well. He was one of the pioneers of racial integration in the major leagues but, after taking Robinson in, did not treat him well. Still, together with Casey Stengel, Durocher is one of the most colorful characters of baseball and reading this volume is a good way to get know the man in his multiple facets.

Interesting stories and tales about Leo Durocher that I never knew. Book would probably appeal more to those of the age that could remember the 1950 era of baseball. However even the young baseball fan would be able to read how many papers were in existence and how many writers were assigned to cover a major league team.

I was born in Brooklyn to a Dodger loving family. The ten years before they had children my parents were at Ebbets Field rooting for our "Beloved-Bums" almost every weekend. Our family actually moved from New York to Los Angeles the same year as the Dodgers. Leo "The Lip" exploits with Brooklyn were before I was born but along with stories of Jackie Robinson from the time I could understand there were just as many stories about "The Lips" antics handed down to me from my Father AND Mother. From the minute I could read I read everything printed about not only the Dodgers but the entire history of baseball. I learned pretty quickly about the hatred the bean balls the flying spikes and fists between my heroes and the crosstown rival Giants. Though I've read other Durocher biographies over the years this new one by Paul Dickson (though perhaps time

has dulled some of the detail of prior author's work as the last one was over a decade ago) seems to flow the smoothest covers all the bases and brings back thrilling memories of old-school-baseball. AND I MEAN OLD-SCHOOL! I remember like it was yesterday when my Dad was instilling in me the will to win in every game. One of our favorite Durocher quotes I was raised on is sure enough right on page five: "IF I WAS PLAYING THIRD BASE AND MY MOTHER WAS ROUNDING THIRD WITH THE RUN THAT WAS GOING TO BEAT US, I'D TRIP HER!" Even my dear-old Mom loved that one! And of course "Nice guys finish last!" The author's writing style is silky smooth. Happily he doesn't resort to the repetitive repertoire that too many authors rely on when writing about historical sports events such as "He recalled..." Etc. Each ball game event is written in a fresh vein even if it was from eighty-years ago. From his youth in Massachusetts to playing ball with the Murderer's Row Yankees with his "buddy" Babe Ruth (and of course they were anything but "buddy's" whether you believe Leo actually stole the Babe's watch or not. And the author also has the intimate details when years later when Ruth was a coach on the Brooklyn Dodgers and in a private clubhouse meeting Leo knocked Ruth against a locker) his time on the World Champion "Gashouse Gang" St. Louis Cardinals and of course when he became the player-manager for the Brooklyn Dodgers. I'm sure many younger fans don't realize Durocher not only made the All-Star team multiple times but he was also considered one of the greatest fielding shortstops of the era. When he went from the Yankees to the Reds despite all his unsettling problems the then owner of the Reds Sidney Weil became one of the greatest friends in Leo's life. Off the field his personal travails with marriage money gambling mobsters and other undesirables is covered from A-Z and integrated as seamlessly as a 6-4-3 double play with his ball playing. Leo's travels from the Dodger dugout to the Giants' dugout to the Cubs to the Astros along with many front row and clubhouse confidential titillating incidents are reported in a truly enjoyable non-stop barrage by the author. "The Lip" "The Lip" "The Lip"

relationship with all the greats from Ruth to the Dean Brothers to Frankie Frisch to the Jackie to the Say Hey Kid to Ernie to Ron and Billy and everyone in between are shown with precise detail regardless how long ago it took place. His link with not only big name entertainers and undesirables but also with guys named Memphis Engleberg to Connie Immerman and you can't forget Sleep-Outside. The fights on the field in the runway in the clubhouse in an alley with players fans umpires and reporters provide an absolute old-school-baseball-fans dream come true. Books like this don't just show up like the sun on a new day. For me this was like eating candy delicious enjoyable addicting. There were fights on the field that got small suspensions and fines today there would have been perhaps lifetime bans (of course that's on top of his season long ban in 1947 for hanging around with the wrong people and losing that season deprived him the historical chance to manage Jackie Robinson's rookie year) but could you imagine the suspensions in today's game for pushing an umpire and after being ejected refusing to leave the field and throwing a wet towel in the umpire's face??? "Leo the Lip" was baseball's problem child, he routinely attracted adjectives for aggressiveness: combative, fierce, feisty, bellicose, pugnacious, cheeky, contentious, truculent and scrappy. "He was one of the fiercest bench jockeys of all time. And everywhere he went. The attendance rose! I miss you Leo. P.S. Here's a couple of my Leo Durocher memorabilia from over SEVENTY-FIVE-YEARS-AGO! P.S.S. When my youngest granddaughter BROOKLYN was going through a ranting raving stage between one and two-years-old I used to lovingly call her LEO-THE-LIP!

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