

Graham's Corner

By Frank Graham

How Sid Gordon
Made His Way.

From Brownsville
To the Polo Grounds.

GIANT FROM BROOKLYN

It was not yet noon but in the clubhouse at the Polo Grounds most of the Giants already were in uniform, some of them playing cards at a big round table in the lounging room, others lunching on sandwiches and milk or just sitting around, gabbing. Sid Gordon, in sweat shirt, pants and

stockinged feet, sat in front of his locker, smoking a cigaret and talking about the time when he was a boy in Brooklyn and how he became a ballplayer.



SID GORDON

"I was born in Brownsville," he said. "Later we moved to Flatbush, where we still live. I played ball in the streets and in Betsy Head Park in Brownsville, and, after that, in Prospect Park and other parks and on sandlots all over Brooklyn. Most of the kids I knew in Brownsville wanted to become fighters and some of them did, like Al Davis. I used to go to Beecher's gym on Livonia ave., to watch them train and I boxed a little but I wanted to be a ballplayer. I never wanted to be anything else."

"Did you want to be a Dodger?"

"When you're a kid and you want to be a ballplayer," he said, "you don't think about what team you would like to play with. You just want to get to the big leagues. But it happened that I had my first chance with the Dodgers. They were having tryouts at Ebbets Field and there were about a hundred of us there. After a couple of days, they told a few of us to keep coming back and sent the rest away. I went back every day for a week or so but nobody said anything to me, so I went to Mr. Stengel and asked him where I stood.

"I would just like to know," I said, "what you intend to do with me."

"He said for me not to worry and that I would hear from the club. Then he got fired and I didn't hear from him or from the club or anybody else, so I went back to the sandlots.

What His Father Would Have Wanted:

"I was playing ball in the Queens Alliance in 1937," he said, "when George Mack, the Giant scout saw me. He told Bill Terry about me and I was invited to go to Milford, in the Eastern Shore League, in the Spring of 1938 for a trial. The arrangement was that I would pay my own expenses and if I made good the Giants would reimburse me. I saved my money all Winter and I couldn't wait for it to be April, because that's when I was to go to Milford. But my father died in March and I decided I wouldn't go. I have two sisters but I am the oldest and I thought I should stay home to look after my mother but my mother said:

"You go ahead. This is what you've always wanted and what your father wanted for you. That's what he would want you to do now."

"So I went to Milford. I was a second baseman in those days, and there were four second basemen in the camp. They put one on first base one on second, one at shortstop and they put me on third. I made the club as the third baseman, signed a contract and was reimbursed for my expenses. I had a good year and the next year the Giants sent me to Clinton in the Three I League. I did all right out there and they brought me in to Jersey City before the season was over. I went back to Jersey City in 1940 and 1941. In 1941 I played the outfield for the first time. Near the end of the season, Terry brought me up. I made the last Western trip with the Giants and played in the outfield.

"I didn't care where I played, infield or outfield. I was with the Giants finally. I was in the big leagues. But I didn't stay long that time. The next Spring Mel Ott was the manager. We had a lot of outfielders. Babe Barna . . . Johnny Rucker . . . Joe Moore, I think, was still with the club. And Ott was playing right field. Mel couldn't find any room for me and sent me back to Jersey City as an outfielder. But I played some third base over there and when Mel brought me back in September, he put me at third base. In 1943, I played all over the ball park with the Giants. I don't know whether you remember it or not, but I played 41 complete games at first base."

"Make Them Come to You," Kress Said:

Sid joined the Coast Guard in the Fall of 1943 and was discharged in January of 1946. Still no regular place had been found for him in the Giant line-up when the 1946 season got under way. He played in the outfield or at third base, he was a pinch hitter, he did everything he could to help the ball club, and tried desperately to stay in the game. It was that way through 1947, too.

"All I could honestly say was that I was with the ball club," he said. "I was playing 130 and 135 games a year . . . complete games, I mean . . . and still I didn't have a regular job."

"It was not until last year that his courage and persistence began to pay off. Now he's a regular. Now, although he'd never admit it, he's the most valuable player on the team.

"If my hitting has improved" he said, "the credit belongs to Red Kress. He changed my stance and taught me to pull a ball. He has pitched to me for an hour and two hours at a time, so that my hands ached from gripping the bat. He cured me of swinging at bad balls.

"Make them come to you," he keeps telling me. "Make those pitchers come to you."

"Lately," Sid said, with a wry smile, "they've really been coming to me. They've knocked me down ten times. Well, I don't like to be thrown at, any better than any other hitter does. But at least when they throw at you it's a sign they respect you. And if they think I'm worth throwing at, Kress is the one who has done it. I can't tell him . . . or you, or anybody else . . . how grateful I am to him."

Then he said:

"They say about me that I eat, sleep and dream baseball. That's right. That's all I think about and all I talk about. It isn't only that I got to the big leagues. If I hadn't, I'd be sitting in the stands rooting for somebody else. I'd still think baseball is the greatest and cleanest and most honest sport in the world. Even when I have a bad day, I think it's the greatest game, and bad as I feel at the moment, there isn't anything else I'd want to be doing."

"By the way," the one to whom he was talking said, "where did you get those muscles? Did you ever work at anything?"

"Work?" he said smiling. "Yes, I worked. I drove a ten-ton coal truck in Brooklyn during the off season the first three years I was in baseball—when I came back from Milford, when I came back from Clinton and when I came back from Jersey City the first time. That's work, shoving one of those things around all day. After that, anything in baseball is easy.

"Well . . . there it is. That's the story of my life up to now. I don't see how it possibly could interest anybody but me . . . but you asked for it."