

SID GORDON

An American Baseball Story

*A Jewish Boy's Journey from the Brooklyn Sandlots
to Major League Baseball*

STEVEN D. CAHN

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Print ISBN: 978-1-66786-862-2

eBook ISBN: 978-1-66786-863-9

*“Everything I have I owe to baseball-My clothes, my happiness,
Everything. Baseball has been awfully good to me”*

Sid Gordon March 26, 1956

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WARMUPS

The origins of this book probably began when I was twelve years old and an aspiring little league baseball player. I'm not a professional historian, or even a journalist, so I hope I can do the story of Sid Gordon and the issues of his day justice. There are countless books on baseball, and lots of books on the great heroes of the game. Baseball is after all the most American of American institutions. Major League Baseball has been played in the United States for over one hundred and fifty years. Babe Ruth, recognized by many as the greatest of them all, last played almost hundred years ago. Since that time, thousands of men have played professional baseball, and many have had a huge impact on the game, on the fans, and some on the history of our nation. Some of these men remain anonymous to history. Their stories, that are important to complete our understanding of baseball and America, are known only to their families. This is Sid Gordon's story. It is also an American baseball story.

It is easy to write about the superstars of the game. The Hall of Famers and the household names like Ruth or DiMaggio. Most of the men who played the game, and made significant contributions, did not end up in the Hall of Fame. These men played the game with dignity and class. They helped win ball games, and they thrilled fans. They were good citizens and neighbors. They were good teammates and role models. These players' contributions both on and off the field have made the game truly the great American pastime. The history of America cannot be told, and never fully understood, without a discussion about the role of baseball. This book hopes

in some humble way to tell the story of Sid Gordon in the larger context of that history.

I have always had an interest in the career of Sid Gordon. As a young kid, I knew Sid and was fortunate to have spent a small amount of time with him. Years after he died, I began a quest to learn more about him and the impact he had on baseball. While I knew he was a very good player, I did not realize just how good he was, nor did I know the full story of his friendship with Jackie Robinson, or Gil Hodges. I had no real understanding of what he did off the field, and how he spoke out concerning the issues of the day. I did not comprehend how difficult it was to be a young Jewish kid from Brooklyn playing in rural Virginia and North Carolina in the late 1930's, or how much courage was required to barnstorm across the deep South, playing baseball with Black ball players in the 1940's and 50's.

While I had the advantage of a fairly detailed oral history told to me by various relatives along the way, some of this when researched more deeply, I learned was merely the recollection of biased fans, often told at the dinner table after the grown-ups had a few drinks. Some of the stories were fascinating, many were true, and some proved to be wild exaggerations. I corroborated them the best anyone could, since they were events that occurred so long ago, and in many cases were never reported.

In researching this book, I have read countless books and articles on baseball as well as American and world history. I am also relying to a large degree on a lifetime of reading history and the biographies of great Americans of years gone by. I could not even begin to guess how many books on the events of our past I have read in my lifetime. I have the benefit of my own memories of Sid, though they are faded with age and clouded by conversations with family, often drunk in their love for the family hero. I have included in the bibliography an accurate account of where the information has come from that tells this story. A good deal of the story of Sid Gordon comes directly from lengthy conversations with Sid's two sons, my cousins Michael and Richard, and four hours of recorded interviews with Sid's wife

Mary made before her death in 2015. I also relied on the personal papers of Mary, Richard, and Michael who all kept scrapbooks containing photos, news articles and personal information. We hope to make this research information, and some of the personal papers and photos available on our web site www.AmericanBaseballStories.com

There was endless research on the internet, most notably *Baseball-Almanac.com* and *Baseball-Reference.com*, as well as the research of past scholars published by the *Society for American Baseball Research*, www.Sabr.org. *The New York Times* archives and an assortment of articles on the internet also aided my inquiry. With the help of www.Newspapers.com I was able to read through hundreds of newspaper accounts of events from dozens of papers around the country. This was a time when the sports pages were written by true sports writers, who knew how to cover a story, and to tell it well. These were real journalists like Arthur Daley, and Louis Effrat of the *New York Times*, Jim McCulley, Dick McCann, Jimmy Powers, and Dick Young of the *New York Daily News*, Dan Parker, the *New York Daily Mirror*, Milton Richmond, *United Press International*, Barney Kremenko, the *New York Journal-American*, Red Smith, *The New York Herald Tribune*, and of course Roger Kahn who covered baseball for *The New York Herald Tribune* and has written several important books on the game. The Newspapers of the day often included colorful sports columns such as *Dimond Dust*, *Grahams Corner*, *Sports of the Times*, *Powerhouse*, and Wendall Smith's *Sports Beat*, in the influential African American paper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*. Many articles from the sports pages have no listed author. When possible, I have accurately given credit to the authors, who have long since passed, but contributed to the fun of being a baseball fan in an era before my time.

The most valuable source of information came in the winter of 2021 when Michael and Richard Gordon brought me three huge family scrapbooks with photos, box scores, game programs, personal letters, audio recordings and newspaper articles, in some cases eighty years old. Some of this information, like a program with handwritten notes from a minor-league game, could never be recreated. Some were torn, or damaged making it difficult to

determine the exact source yet were undoubtably authentic. When you see incomplete citations in the book, it is generally from these scrap book items. I spent many hours with Michael and Richard, reviewing old records, and just talking about baseball and their father. The times I spent with Michael and Richard were not only the most helpful, but the most enlightening experiences any writer, or historian, could ask for. What I learned quickly was the Gordons, including Mary, knew baseball. They are a baseball family. Before I could complete this project, Michael, like his father and grandfather before him, died from heart disease, on his father's 104th birthday, August 13, 2021. This book, therefore, at least in part, is dedicated to Mike, who told me, "*Take your time and get it right.*"

The story of Sid Gordon and his times is a fascinating story of baseball and American society. While this may be the first and last full-length piece dedicated solely to Sid Gordon, it certainly will not be the last word on baseball in the postwar era. History is not written by one but by many. Like any history project, this should not be the final word on the subjects raised, or the stories told, but hopefully kindle the interest of some other writer, with more time or talent than me, to challenge parts of the history as I have recorded it, or to take the story further. As many before me have observed, *we study our history to improve our future*. And now, let's play baseball.

CHAPTER I

LEADING OFF

Sid Gordon will be forever linked with one of the most famous lines in sports. “*Nice guys finish last.*” Leo Durocher has been given credit for this iconic quote. While this is somewhat of a shorter version of what he actually said, he quickly adopted the saying as his own. When he made these remarks, he was referring to Sid Gordon and a few of his 1946 Giants teammates. If you read the opening pages of Durocher’s 1975 autobiography, *Nice Guys Finish Last*, you have a good understanding of what Durocher meant and how he defined success at all costs. A profile of Gordon, his style of play and his off-the-field leadership, presents a clear contrast with Durocher. Like many men of his era, Gordon came from humble roots. Through hard work, and his ability to fight through adversity he made it to the highest levels of professional baseball. Gordon was a nice guy, and generally recognized as a top-quality ballplayer. He was a leader both on and off the field. Al Abrams, the sports editor of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, wrote of Gordon, “*Despite his quiet mannerisms, Gordon is a commanding figure, respected by his teammates and rival players.*”¹

Durocher, on the other hand, hung out with questionable characters, fought with umpires, fans, opposing players, and even his own teammates. Durocher in clear contrast to Gordon famously claimed, “*If a man is sliding*

1 *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 19, 1954, Sports Editor Al Abrams.

into second and the ball goes out into center field, what's the matter with falling on him accidentally so that he can't get up and go to third?" Durocher also wrote, *"Show me a sportsman and I will show you a guy I'm looking to trade."*² He claimed he believed in rules but also in seeing how far he could push them. In his very first major league game in 1928, Durocher was playing shortstop for the Yankees and tried to trip Ty Cobb. Cobb was not a player anyone ever described as a nice guy. The incident would have resulted in a fistfight if Babe Ruth did not step in to restrain Cobb.

This was not how Sid Gordon lived his life or played the game. Gordon was one of the few Jewish ballplayers in the majors during his career and always conducted himself like a gentleman. While he loved to win and always hustled, he did not look for the advantage by seeing how much he could get away with. Gordon, who had to struggle to make the major leagues, and then withstand anti-Semitism throughout his career, played the game hard but fair. He believed the best way to overcome discrimination and other obstacles was with determination and his play on the field. In a March 1949 *Sports Life Magazine* article profiling Sid Gordon, Leo Durocher, now with the perspective of being Gordon's manager, provides an excellent illustration of Gordon's style of play. Durocher describes a game in 1948 against the Reds in the Polo Grounds where Sid ran full speed for a fly ball headed into the seats behind third base. Gordon without breaking stride dove into the stands making the catch as he tumbled over the railing into the crowd. Battered and bruised, he came up with the ball. In recounting the play, Leo said, *"Some guys in this league outhit Gordon but nobody outhustles him."*³

Gordon was as Durocher described a *"Nice Guy"* and a sportsman. Gordon's and Durocher's careers cross and present interesting comparisons at a critical time in both baseball and American society. Gordon was a gifted ballplayer and a role model to many. He fought through adversity to make it to the major leagues. He was an example of what an athlete could

2 *Nice Guys Finish Last*, Leo Durocher, p. 11

3 "The Kid from Brooklyn," *Sports Life Magazine*, March 1949, Milton Richmond.

represent and what America could become. Gordon and Durocher liked and respected each other yet had entirely different approaches to the game. No one ever described Leo Durocher as a nice guy. Durocher in his long career was famously ejected from 100 major league baseball games. Sid Gordon was never thrown out of a major league game.

During the 1949 season, the *New York Times* wrote a comprehensive article on Gordon who was a two-time all-star and one of the more popular players in New York. The *Times* acknowledging Gordon's challenging climb to fame wrote, "*It's hard to think of Sid as a full-fledge star because he's been lurking in the shadows for so long, filling in for this guy and then filling in for that one, but never holding a position he could call his own.*" In a tribute to the effort it took for Gordon to make it from such a challenging start to the highest level of the game, the *Times* captured the essence of Gordon and his path to success. "*He has made it through his own iron-willed perseverance and tireless eagerness to learn his trade.*"⁴

Even before he was a starter with the Giants, he was a neighborhood hero as well as a local rising star. While popular in his Brooklyn neighborhood, Gordon was far from the flashy superstar athlete. He was a quiet, hardworking, and effective leader both on and off the field. A solid teammate who led by example. The *Sporting News* wrote of Gordon in December of 1948, that he was known for his "*courage under fire, his modest demeanor, his friendliness and his ability to come through in a pinch.*"⁵ A family man who was able to blend family and baseball in a manner that brought people together. Gordon was a popular and well-liked ballplayer in his day. Yes, Gordon was known as a nice guy. In the early 1950s, when the Dodgers were looking for just the right Jewish ballplayer, Brooklyn's owner Walter O'Malley said they were looking "*for a player like Sid Gordon.*"⁶

4 *The New York Times*, September 19, 1948.

5 *The Sporting News*, December 1, 1948, Stan Baumgartner.

6 *Sandy Koufax, A Lefty's Legacy*, Jane Levy p. 65; Also see *Rickey & Robinson; The Untold Story of the integration of Baseball*, Roger Kahn p. 89

Gordon was a Brooklyn kid. He grew up in the shadows of Ebbets Field yet was a Yankee fan who began his major league career with the Giants in 1941. During his career and this critical time in American life, Gordon played an important role in the social changes facing both baseball and our country. He was not brash or outspoken. He lived a relatively normal life and was loved by the New York fans because he was one of them. In his early years, he often took the subway home from the Polo Grounds, sharing the ride with fans returning home to Brooklyn.⁷ He represented the ordinary working-class guy, who played hard, led by example, and, as a result, made a difference in the social advances of baseball. As a result of his own life experiences, he was a strong supporter of Black players when they entered the game. When Jackie Robinson came into the league in 1947, Gordon was one of the first to welcome him, and they soon developed a close personal friendship.

The Gordon-Robinson friendship is a fascinating story. They were friends both on and off the field and often shared the podium as guest speakers promoting various social causes. They, along with their wives, vacationed together and were simply friends at a time in America where it was not very common for Blacks and Whites to socialize. He simply led by example, and as a result, he was much admired by his fans and respected by his peers.

In contrast to Gordon, Durocher's high-profile off-the-field behavior at times impacted and interfered with his career. He was the Dodgers manager in 1947 and played a well-documented role in helping Jackie Robinson break into the majors, changing not only baseball but America forever. He did not get the chance to manage Robinson in his rookie season. He was famously suspended by the commissioner of baseball for his "*off the field moral behavior*." After serving a yearlong suspension, he was back with the

7 It is difficult to comprehend a professional athlete in any sport traveling home on public transportation after a game. The subway from the Polo Grounds to Flatbush takes at least an hour and must have been a long painful ride after a tough loss. After the Gordons received an automobile as a "Sid Gordons Day" gift at Ebbets Field in 1948, Sid often rode the subway to work in the Polo Grounds, and Mary went to the games with Michael and drove the family home.

Dodgers for the 1948 season. His '48 stint did not last long. His behavior continued to aggravate Branch Rickey, and his public feud with Robinson was disruptive to the team. By midseason Rickey had just about all he could take from Durocher and maneuvered a deal with Giants' owner Horace Stoneham that ended up with Leo Durocher as the Giants manager by early July. This move brought Durocher and Gordon together and had a dramatic effect on the ultimate career of Gordon.

When Durocher made the move to the Polo Grounds from Ebbets field, he helped push the Giants owner Horace Stoneham to integrate the team in 1949. Gordon was not just the only player, but likely the only man in baseball to be part of integrating three separate ball clubs. His participation in some of the more interesting and socially relevant integrated barnstorming tours introduced many Americans to Black and White ballplayers sharing the same athletic field. Gordon's support of Robinson and other Black teammates, such as Hank Thompson, Monte Irvin, Sam Jethroe, Curtis Roberts, Roberto Clemente, and Willie Mays was quieter, more personal, and, in the long run, more meaningful.

As the Giants manager Durocher wanted a different style of play and worked to create a team in his own image. The Giants were built around their power hitters, Willard Marshall, Johnny Mize, Bobby Thompson, Whitey Lockman, Walker Cooper, and Sid Gordon. These Giants power hitters were affectionately known as the "window breakers" and brought fans out to the game who were entertained by the thrill of the long ball. In 1947 this Giants group led the majors and set a club and Major League record in team home runs with 221. Durocher was not satisfied and wanted a better fielding team that could run and, more importantly, manufacture runs. He wanted stronger defense, especially in the middle infield. He wanted a team that fit in his gritty, scrappy, and often questionable style of play.

Sid Gordon had all-star seasons in 1948 and '49. Despite hitting 26 HRs and 90 RBIs, a controversial postseason trade engineered by Durocher sent several players, including Gordon and Willard Marshall, to the Boston Braves

and Alvin Dark and Eddie Stanky to the Giants. Stanky was a Durocher favorite and the polar opposite of Gordon. Stanky was Durocher's kind of player. He had played for Durocher in Brooklyn before he was traded to the Braves. He was the kind of player Leo was when he was a member of the Gashouse Gang in St. Louis in the mid-thirties. Stanky was a strong fielder but only an average hitter and, like Durocher, would knock down his own mother if she were in the basepath. Stanky was also well known for pushing the rules as far as he could to win a game.

This is clearly one way to play the game. This is not how a sportsman would play, but that was Leo, and this was what he brought to the game. Was this what Durocher meant when he coined the phrase "*nice guys finish last*"? Was this the style of play he was looking for when he convinced the Giants management to make trades in '48 and '49? The Giants owner wanted to win. Durocher was a winner. Leo was not without risk and controversy. The question of course is win at what cost? The Giants made a clear choice to turn away from the Mel Ott team and go with the wild ride, which was an inevitable part of a Leo Durocher managed club. Gordon was one of the players whose career was most impacted by Stoneham's desire to win at all costs. The immediate post-war era was an exciting time for both America and baseball, and Gordon, who was in his prime was in the thick of the action.

To truly understand one man, to gain a perspective on a player's career both on and off the field, it is helpful to focus not only on that player and what he accomplished, but to understand their contemporaries and the world in which they lived. Durocher was Gordon's manager in some of his best years. Their careers and personalities intersect at a fascinating time on the baseball diamond and in American life. Baseball during the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the critical postwar years is a story of the contributions of immigrants, selfless patriots, and the heroes of the game of baseball. Gordon's life and career provide an opportunity to examine, in addition to his contributions to baseball, the broader issues concerning baseball, sports, and the way we play the game.

Sid Gordon had an outstanding baseball career. While not a Hall of Fame player, he had consistently strong seasons and, more importantly, played baseball the way the game should be played. He played alongside the greatest players of the game—Robinson, DiMaggio, Berra, Williams, Kiner, Spahn, Musial, Irvin, Clemente, and Mays—and he himself was an all-star. Gordon was a hero in his native Brooklyn and in the larger Jewish community around the country. He used his status as a ballplayer to make positive changes in the world around him, whether it was youth baseball or broader issues concerning discrimination in society. Our baseball heroes have come to symbolize some of the greatest attributes of American society. They have transcended baseball and are true American heroes. Gordon's story and his legacy represent baseball at its finest and are in clear contrast to Durocher and those who had different values and ideas about the way the game should be played.

Roger Angell wrote a piece in the *New Yorker* in 2013, that captures well the sportsmanship and character of Sid Gordon when he played the game. He writes of a long-forgotten game at the Polo Grounds that likely took place on July 9, 1948, between the Giants and the Dodgers. It was a hot midsummer game in the Polo Grounds that drew a large crowd of more than fifty thousand New Yorkers basting in the afternoon sun. In the seventh inning, Jackie Robinson was on third base and Gordon was playing third. Something was shouted at Robinson from the stands that absolutely set him off. By this time, one might think Robinson had grown hard to the racial attacks. On this steamy July day, he clearly had enough and lost his cool. Angell did not hear the comments, but whatever it was, Robinson was angry and visibly upset. The third base coach and umpire came over yet were unable to settle Jackie down. The game was stopped.

Gordon himself had been the target of ballpark bigots and knew quite well the ugliness that at times was directed his way because he was a high-profile Jewish athlete. Gordon and Robinson at that point had developed a friendship that would last the rest of their lives. While never outright banned from participation, Jewish ballplayers had faced harsh discrimination

in many forms on the field. On the road Gordon had heard all types of comments and threats thrown his way and at some of his Jewish teammates. Jewish players and Black players quickly became allies in the late 1940s.

While fifty thousand fans watched in silence, Sid slowly walked over to Robinson. The two men walked off and had a quiet word. Robinson pulled himself together, and the game quickly resumed. Just another one of the taunts and insults Robinson endured during his early career and part of the cost of changing American attitudes about race. If not for the impression made on a young Roger Angell, the incident may have long faded away in history. No one knows what calming words were said by Gordon that day at the Polo Grounds. I asked Gordon's son Richard about the incident. He did not know but smiled and said, "*Dad and Jackie were close friends.*"⁸

Any discussion of Sid Gordon as a man and a ballplayer requires an appreciation of the role baseball has played in shaping American society and culture. Consider the powerful effect on the other players and thousands of fans at the game who saw Gordon, a White Jew, and Robinson, a Black man, engaged in this meaningful private moment. Sports are a reflection of who we are as a people, what we believe in, and to no small degree, where America is headed. We are confronted with issues of character on an almost daily basis. These issues of character have taken over American life, both on and off our playing fields. Issues of sportsmanship, character, playing by the rules, or winning at all costs can be found not only in professional sports like baseball but in colleges, high schools, and perhaps most concerning youth sports. These questions are not only in our sports, but they are also in our everyday lives. To truly understand these issues and know where we are heading, at times we need to pause and look back to see a clear picture of where we have been.

We also need to understand baseball in the historical context of American society. Baseball was vastly important in the 1940's and 50's. Baseball was the major sport in America in the postwar era and was critical

8 "Jackie Robinson Again," *The New Yorker*, April 12, 2013, Roger Angell.

to the development of American society. We had just fought and won a major world war. Many of our baseball heroes, including Gordon, left the relative safety of ball fields and joined the war effort. After the war, Americans were enthusiastic about the opportunities before them. There was pent-up and boundless energy to change not only their lives but the course of the nation. It was also a time when our basic American ideals were being challenged from within. The prior decades saw an influx of new immigrants. Many Americans were trying to learn who they were and where they fit in postwar America. These societal conflicts were reflected and played out in baseball fields all over America. After the war, baseball and American life were back, but the winds of societal change were also blowing. During the late 1940s and 1950s, Gordon and the baseball players of this era would help lead the way.

While baseball has produced countless heroes worthy of our praise, the game has also had flat-out cheaters and scoundrels. Those who hurt the game and have exposed the worst in American society. Some of these have been exposed in recent steroid scandals and sign stealing schemes. Baseball has always been symbolic of American values, and of course has always had its share of oddballs, spitball throwers, and colorful characters, who pushed the rules close to or beyond the limit. In the long run, the cheaters, those willing to break the rules to win, have not added to the game but have made us question at times why the game is played?

Looking at the history of baseball, it is not always easy to distinguish some of the heroes from the villains. Challenging questions are raised when we discuss some of the cheating scandals that have marred baseball. Performance-enhancing drugs seem like an easy question. They simply did not exist in Sid Gordon's era where power was developed naturally and when many of the all-time greats hit records that lasted for decades.

More complicated yet is sign stealing. This has been part of the game since the early days of baseball. Sid Gordon loved to study a pitcher to see if they might give away a small secret of what pitch was coming. Players and coaches have always used their wit and ingenuity to figure out the other

team's signs. It's a fun, traditional, and important part of the game. Some of the best players and managers in baseball were skilled at stealing their opponents' signs. The line is crossed, as George Will, the author of *Men at Work*, said, "*when mechanical devices are used to make this happen.*"⁹

The Houston Astros 2017 complex sign stealing conspiracy is perhaps the clearest recent example. The Astros elaborate scheme clearly crossed that baseball line. Houston's conduct aggravated true baseball fans, and most Americans. They cheated to win. Their actions really showed disrespect for the game and their opponents. It's one thing if the runner on second is smart enough to see what pitch is coming and relays that home. That has always been part of baseball. The Houston conspiracy flat out went too far.

Durocher we now have learned over fifty years later, devised a similar plan in 1951. It involved a military-grade telescope and an electrician running a wire to the bullpen. The signs were relayed to the bullpen using a buzzer and then flashed into the dugout or to Leo himself who often positioned himself as the third base coach. Did all of that make a difference in the Giants pennant winning season? That's hard to tell and requires some analysis and speculation all these years later. The plan seems crazy. It is hard enough to hit major league pitching, but now you are going to set up a relay involving three or four people to quickly relay a sign while the batter is getting ready to hit. Pitchers change signs, waive off signs, and often work too fast to make that work. The point of course is not whether this would work but rather a question of whether this is how we should allow the game to be played?

Would Mel Ott's nice guys of '46, including Gordon, if he had been on the Giants in '51, have been involved in such an insidious plot? Although there were rumors and accusations, Durocher's espionage remained a secret for over five decades. In 1951 Leo Durocher was named Major League Baseball's manager of the year. Bobby Thompson hit the iconic *shot heard around the world*, and the Giants went to the World Series. What would have happened to the Giants and Durocher if the scheme had been exposed at the time?

9 "Will at Bat," *The National Review*, June 9, 2022, Jay Nordlinger.

Do nice guys finish last? That of course depends entirely on how we define the question. America and baseball clearly need nice guys to finish first if our institutions, including baseball, are to continue to have meaning. Sid Gordon never won a championship, at least on the ball field. He played baseball in perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most socially relevant time in the long history of the great American pastime. The postwar era was a time of great social change in America, and in baseball. This is not to say that looking back on history Gordon was a hero and Durocher a villain. It is not that simple and certainly not that clear. People and ballplayers are way too complicated for such a straightforward analysis. Gordon's approach to the game always included deep respect for baseball and those who played the game. Durocher has been the subject of lots of criticism. Most of this he earned. He was a complicated man. He was extremely controversial in his approach to the game. He did win but not always, and he came with a lot of headaches and baggage. He was, however, loyal to his players and a hell of a damn good baseball manager. While this book is about Sid Gordon, it is also the story of baseball in American society. To fully appreciate that story, we must understand the men with whom he played as well as the events of the day. This is a story about baseball, but Sid Gordon's story is truly the American story.

While we play and love other sports, baseball today remains a symbol of America. Baseball is deeply rooted in American life and has historically played a critical role as America's game. Baseball was born here in the earliest days of our republic. Since the postwar era, baseball has been the most ethnically diverse of all our professional sports. Understanding this history and the players who contributed to the development of the game, as well as the social changes baseball helped advance, enhances our ability to look to the great American pastime once again for leadership on a variety of important issues.

Why are players like Sid Gordon and these events still important in baseball and American culture? Roger Kahn, perhaps the finest writer of baseball history, argues the postwar era was "*the most important and exciting*

years in the history of the sport." Kahn and others argue baseball in the postwar era shaped America so profoundly that we are still influenced by those events today. Many, including George Will in *Men at Work*, disagree and believe that baseball and the players of today represent the best of our great American pastime.¹⁰

They of course are both right. In addition to the players today having more size, speed, and, arguably, abilities, the game remains popular and socially relevant. Today there are thirty major league teams in cities all around the country as opposed to Sid Gordon's time, when there were only sixteen teams, and the major league game was confined primarily to the northeastern United States. Today baseball has been exported around the world and modern technology allows fans all over the world to follow American baseball. Baseball, therefore, has a much more of an opportunity for social impact. We again live in times of great turmoil, division, and challenges to our American institutions. The question is whether baseball will be able to play a positive role in a similar manner as it did in the era when Gordon played baseball. While we can't answer these weighty questions here, baseball and the career of Sid Gordon presents an opportunity look at baseball through the interesting career of a man who played during this significant period in both baseball and American history, and at least approach an understanding of the issue of character in sports.

As a Jewish ballplayer in the 1940s and early '50s, Sid Gordon played a pivotal role in baseball and American society in the years following World War II. In 1949 he teamed up with Robinson, Bob Feller, and Joe DiMaggio in an anti-discrimination campaign. He was involved along with other major league stars of the day in various social causes and programs and played an important role in the initial integration of three teams. He was on the Giants in 1949, the Braves in 1950, and the Pirates in 1954 when these teams first introduced Black players to their roster. Gordon's experience and mature leadership were important components of these events.

10 *The Era*, Roger Kahn, p. 282; *Men at Work*, George Will p. 316.

Gordon had a superb thirteen-year major league career with the Giants, the Braves, and the Pirates. Like so many of the players of his generation, he may very well have had Hall of Fame numbers if not for the years he lost during World War II. Behind Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax, he is arguably the most popular and influential Jewish ballplayer of his time. He is still to this day almost unanimously selected on every all-time Jewish baseball team. His legacy and contributions live on. Sid Gordon has not played a major league baseball game since 1955. Despite no plate appearances in over sixty-five years, he remains fourth on the all-time Jewish home run leaders lists with 202, second in career on-base percentage at .377, and tenth among Jewish major leaguers in career batting average at .283. Sid Gordon has been inducted into both the National and the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame. In 1948 he was fourth in the National League MVP voting and was the New York City Athlete of the year. His offensive production as demonstrated by the WAR statistics was in the top ten in the league every year from 1948 through 1952.¹¹ His career on-base percentage is higher than Pete Rose and George Brett. He was a two-time all-star, and in 1952, before there was a Golden Glove Award, he had the highest fielding percentage of any outfielder in baseball, making only one error the entire season. As a Jewish ballplayer in the late '40s and early '50s, he was at the center of all that was unfolding on and off the baseball fields of America. His career and the way he played the game are important lessons and remain relevant today. This is his story and is a story of baseball.

11 www.Baseball-Reference.com