



California's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O'Connell and Maury Wills at Dodger Stadium - September, 2005

# MAURY WILLS WHEN BASEBALL RULED

By Randy Perry

## *It Would Be Good to See Him in the Hall of Fame*

Between 1959 and 1966 the Los Angeles Dodgers were in four World Series, winning three of them, and proving without a doubt that West Coast baseball could match anything being produced in the East.

At the top of the Dodger line-up and in the center of their infield was a heads-up performer named Maurice Morning Wills - Maury Wills. For those who lived through those pennant races the name Maury Wills conjures as much emotion as there are visual images, the excitement that something new was happening to an old sport, and you needed to lean forward because base running was now a torture that could beat the opposition in high drama.

“Go, go, go,” became the cry of the thousands at the stadium and the murmur of those following in their living rooms. Wills was on base. Something interesting was going to happen. The game was on the line.

“Go Maury, bring us home. Steal second. Score on a cheap single and we start a rally or win this thing by a run.”

The year before his arrival, the Dodgers finished second to last, an uninspired transplant of aging Brooklynites hanging on to old New York memories and floundering in the fresh open vistas of California. Wills ended up beating out Don Zimmer – a man who would become a memorable character in his own right during his more than fifty years in baseball – to take over the shortstop position that had belonged for eighteen years to Harold “Pee Wee” Reese.

The veteran Dodgers eventually voted Wills their team captain. Fast, groomed on the cutthroat fields of the Washington DC projects, he would do everything asked to win a game. What Maury Wills did most was change the way baseball is played.

The home run which had dominated the big league offenses was not a Dodger strength; in their '62 season only one player hit thirty homeruns, on a soft-hitting team that also had only one player with a 300 batting average. Wills brought cunning and strategy to the game. The 104 bases he stole that year made him a one-man rally. The National League record of 80 stolen bases was previously held by Cincinnati's Bob Beschler. He did it in

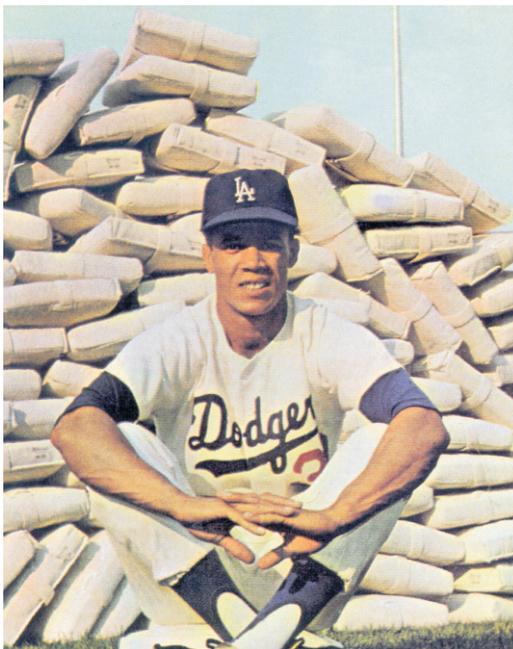
1911. Ty Cobb, the infamous Georgia Peach and considered one of the meanest men to play the game, set the Big League record when he stole 96 bases in 1915. The best since 1920 was the Yankee's Ben Chapman, who managed to steal 61 in 1931.

To watch Maury Wills play baseball was to believe that men could fly and that sports mythology was still being written in the thrilling confines of a modern ballpark. Pitchers had to think differently. Defenses were changed. Maury forced the hated Giants, also recently departed from New York for limitless opportunities in young California, to soak down their infield to keep him from stealing bases. It didn't work. The St. Louis Cardinals asked their first baseman to block Maury in the base path. It didn't work either. Ty Cobb saw Wills' last game in the minor leagues and paid the ultimate compliment, saying Wills ran the bases just like he did. Casey Stengel, the Yankee skipper and man who spent his long adult life in baseball, said grudgingly, admiringly, that Wills slid into base like a snake.

Wills became an unexpected superstar. He outpolled Willie Mays for the 1962 Most Valuable Player award and Arnold Palmer for Athlete of the Year. He played in a record 165 games in a single season, won a couple Golden Gloves, started more double

plays in a single year than any other shortstop, was so consistent at the plate that he became the first shortstop in forty years to get two hundred hits in one year, and played with such joyful aggression that little boys and their dads both imagined at their best that they were him.

Maury was not a kid when he got to the show. He spent eight years of erratic play in the minor leagues waiting for his popular predecessor to retire. He was el Fantasma during a stint in Venezuela, a season when he stole 40 bases in 41 attempts, and had to be escorted out of the stadium the one time he failed because of the heavy losses the gamblers took. He worked his way slowly through a Dodger organization that had more than 25 farm teams. The impatient Dodgers offered him to the Detroit Tigers and were turned down.



*“The King of Thieves”, Dodger shortstop Maury Wills, seated in front of his record 104 stolen bases in 1962.*

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

He didn't learn to switch-hit until he was twenty-five years old and needed to conquer his fear of the curve ball. He had married young, just out of high school, a preacher's boy who would have six kids with his high school sweetheart, from whom he was separated for long periods while he struggled on summer bus rides from park to park throughout the South. At one stadium they felt sorry for him, so many kids and so little money being made as a minor leaguer that they took an offering from the fans. He was post Jackie Robinson – with whom he would barnstorm as a minor leaguer on a team Jackie put together during the off-season – and he was a loner at a time when racism was systemic. During the season he sat by himself on a bus while his teammates ate inside and brought out something for him when they were done. He was pre-civil rights, a survivor, a scrappy ballplayer stealing a spot for himself, a tough kid whose face ended up on the magazines on the coffee tables in the hotels where he wasn't allowed to go inside.

Wills was pre-expansion. He played before a man named Curt Flood gave up his own career to make free agency a reality. There were only eight teams in each league until 1961, only sixteen shortstops in the major leagues, and no one dared to question that when a team signed you, they owned you.

California Conversations met with Maury Wills. We went for a drive on the LA freeway and he called his best friend, Sandy Koufax. They talked briefly. Koufax sounded young on the speaker phone. Maury laughed. We later sat in Maury's office for hours and talked about his life, the great moments, and there were a lot of them, and the dark years when addictions created shadows and things were said that shouldn't have been, and his life now – a life in which he has made peace.

Maury has been telling stories almost all of his life. He's good at it. There are the chestnuts of him as a kid watching the semi-pro's with their mismatched uniforms and a fifth of something strong in their back pocket and wanting to be like them. They were the stars of his youth until a long-forgotten second baseman from the Washington Senators named Gerry Priddy showed up in the projects wearing a sparkling clean major league uniform with piping on the sleeves. He pulled Maury from the crowd. He complimented the little boy, all of eight, and told him he needed to get his parents to buy him some baseball shoes. The punch line becomes that Maury didn't own any shoes at all. He was one of thirteen kids. Hell, if he got home late from the playground, there was nothing to eat.

He talks reverentially of Jackie Robinson, with whom he had a falling out that was never resolved, a chasm created by Wills mocking the icon in an interview during the middle of a pennant race. Maury has the loose cockiness of an extraordinary athlete, a man who wins, but a man who made enemies and was almost eaten alive by the regrets, a still handsome man who because of his animated features looks better in person than in pictures, a personable, witty, competitive guy who has the interesting perspective of at least two worlds – the Negro journeyman who became a black superstar.



*Maury Wills, photographed on the brink of fame.*

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

**CC:** The Dodgers had a pretty good shortstop ahead of you. Was he nice to you?

**MW:** In those days, major leaguers didn't talk to minor leaguers. You stood in the outfield and shagged. I never had any interaction with Pee Wee when we were players. Without him knowing it, he was an inspiration for me. He'd come to spring training every year with 3, 4, 5 different gloves, new gloves thinking each glove was good for two years. It was enough to demoralize you. I wanted his job.

**CC:** Southerner?

**MW:** Yeah, he was from Louisville, Kentucky.

**CC:** Did you deal with racism in the minor leagues?

**MW:** Oh, yeah. I couldn't eat with my teammates. I couldn't stay where they stayed. If I took a city bus, I had to get on the back of the bus.

**CC:** Did it wear you down to deal with it?

**MW:** We felt less than. Sure it hurt, the colored thing...in Ft. Worth I was the first black guy to play on their team...tough, hard at times, but the dream to play where Jackie played overcame all of it.

**CC:** When did you go from being just a minor leaguer to being a prospect?

**MW:** When I met Bobby Bragan. History has Bobby, who is from Birmingham, Alabama, as one of the white players who refused to play with Jackie Robinson. I don't know if it's true or not. Bobby and I never talked about it. The most I've ever heard Bobby say was that he was just a rookie and he didn't have much to say about it. My point is when Bobby got fired by Cleveland in July 1958, he came to our Triple A team and put

his arm around me and said, "Maury, you can run, you can throw, and you can field. You're also afraid of the curve ball. As long as you're afraid of the curve, you're not going to hit major league pitching."

He said, "You come out tomorrow and I'm going to throw to you." His solution was to teach me to switch hit.

This was 1958. I got in the batter's box, and I put the bat on my shoulder the way Bobby taught me. I swung with my little controlled swing and hit the top half of the ball, and the ball hit home plate and went fifty feet in the air. By the time the ball came down, I'm standing on first. (laughs) BAM, fifty feet in the air. I did it so often, that some of my Dodger teammates said, "Damn, Wills, can you teach me how to do that?" I said, "Man, I don't know how to hit a ball off home plate. I'm trying to hit the ball to deep shortstop." It was the swing that did it. I had a good winter, and Detroit bought me conditionally from the Dodgers. They paid \$10,000 for a look and would have paid another \$20,000 if they wanted to keep me. I found out that Bobby was the one who went to Detroit and told them to look at me. I feel I was an avenue for Bobby to repent for refusing to play with Jackie.

**CC:** So, you became a switch hitter at 25 years old.

**MW:** I'd turned 26. I went back to the Dodger farm system and I didn't give up. Don Zimmer broke his toe the next year, and the Dodgers were trying to trade for another shortstop. Bobby again picks up the phone. "You're looking all over for a shortstop and you've got one in your organization." They said,



*Publicity photo of a Dodgers All-Star.*

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

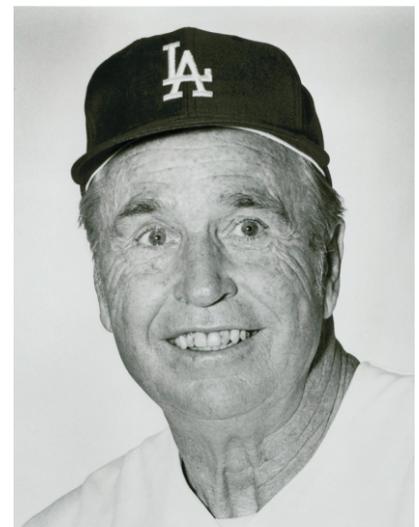
"Who? Maury Wills? He's been around forever. That guy can't play." Bobby said, "Oh, no, he's a different guy now." (laughs) They didn't jump on it right away. They continued to look.

**CC:** When the Dodgers called you, where were you?

**MW:** We were in Phoenix. On the way out of the hotel at about 7:00 in the morning, I got a newspaper. I had a good night. There was a quote from Ty Cobb. Ty Cobb saw me play my last game in the minor leagues. He said, "I like the way that kid slides." Later on, I checked and his slide and my slide are identical. The way I slide was something I learned on the playground from the old guys that played on the weekends. They played the Negro League style ball, and they always slid low like this (Wills kicks a chair to demonstrate his slide) so the baseman couldn't tag you.

*Maury remembers his first impression of being a major leaguer.*

**MW:** I had my stuff in a cardboard box with twine on it. The team had already arrived and I came from the airport and I'm sort of lost and they haven't seen me yet. I'm looking for my name on my locker. I see Snyder, Hodges, Koufax, Drysdale, Roseboro, Gilliam. Damn. I kept walking. Way down at the end I saw my name, Maurice Wills. The manager, Walter Alston, came over to me. He said, "You all right?" and he shook my hand. I said, "Yes, sir." None of the players said anything. They didn't know who I was. I'm a minor leaguer, a bush leaguer. I don't play the first day. Alston has me sit next to him and watch the game. So, anyway, Alston started me the next day, but still had me sit next to him between innings. I went out the first inning and didn't get a ground ball. Went out again, didn't get a ground ball. I sat beside Alston. He asked, "What do you think of the major leagues?" I said, "Hey, baseball's baseball. It doesn't matter if it's major leagues, Triple A, whatever." Third inning, here comes a ball to me. I slip. My knees started shaking.



*Dodger manager, Walter Alston*

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

My hands are trembling. The ball hit my glove and popped out and I picked it up and I dropped it. I picked it up again, dropped it and then picked it up and threw it into the right field stands, way over the first baseman's head. (laughs) Milwaukee Braves are running all over the place. I came in and held my head down. "Don't worry about it, kid." That's what Alston said.

**CC:** You never went back to the minor leagues?

**MW:** I never went back, no, but I didn't get a feeling of

belonging. Zimmer's toe was getting better. I'd get up the first two times each game and then I could depend on Alston calling me back for a pinch hitter. I asked one of our coaches, Pete Reiser, for help. He said, "Be out here tomorrow two hours before the team arrives." In the two hours we only hit for 35-40 minutes. The rest of the time we went to center field and talked. He was instilling in me the attitude that I could believe in myself. And we kept working, kept working, kept working. Then in a game I got a hit the first time up. I got a hit the second time up. We got a rally going. The score is close. I looked over my shoulder and Alston said okay. And I got another hit. I took the job from that time on. He never took me out again for a pinch hitter.

**CC: You were the Dodger shortstop.**

**MW:** Yes. And in the middle of September, we go to San Francisco, a three-game series, the Giants are in first place and we're in second. I got something like twelve hits. We left San Francisco in first place and we won the pennant.

**CC: Is that the first time you saw Willie Mays?**

**MW:** I'd seen him before...I became a better ballplayer watching Willie Mays, and idolizing him and wanting to emulate him.

**CC: Was Mays better than everybody else?**

**MW:** I just like the way he walks and the way he was nonchalant. He's the best. Bobby Bragan says if you take a baseball quiz, no matter what the question is, just say Willie Mays, and you'll get a passing grade.

**CC: Do you like him?**

**MW:** Yeah, I like him very much. He has a great sense of humor. He still teases me about beating him out for the MVP in '62. Amazingly, you could see when he got to home plate or when he got on base, his face would change; his whole aura would change. He wasn't a fun guy then. He meant business. He was the kind of a player who could hit four home runs and you could never knock him down because he was just a nice guy. The only reason we did throw at him was because Don Drysdale didn't like the Giants at all. We'd do anything to win against them. (laughs) There's some thought that if you're not cheating a little, you're not trying.

**CC: Legend has the Giants soaking the field to stop you from stealing?**

**MW:** (laughs) I still got a cold from that. Two minutes before the game started the Giants' ground crew is standing in one spot with these three-inch hoses, no nozzle, literally muddying the field. The Giants didn't care, because they could hit the ball out of the park. When we complained, the manager of the field said they could put some sand down. That made it even worse.

**CC: When did you realize the Cobb stolen base record was in reach?**

**MW:** I stole 50 in 1960 and I knew I was getting better. I was thrilled with the way Cobb played ball. I know he was a tyrant, at least that's the way he's depicted. I only saw five minutes of his movie, and I left, because I couldn't stand what they were doing to him. He said everybody he spiked had it coming. They did

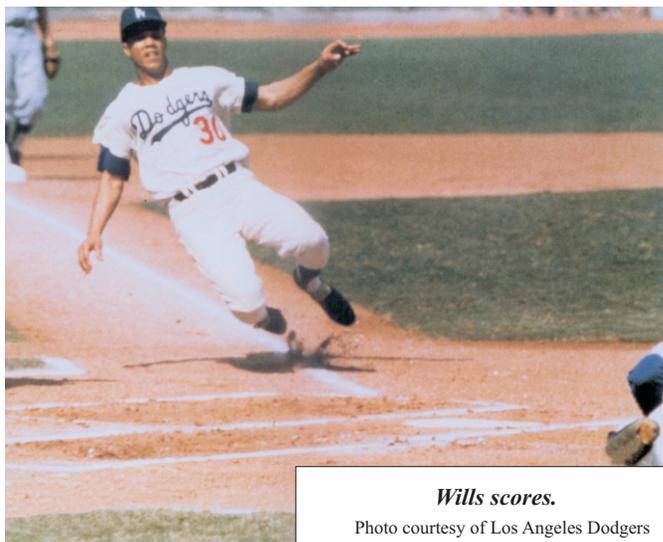
the same things to me that they did to Cobb. I sharpened my spikes, too. The baseline belongs to the runner, and they did everything they could to block you, play tricks on you, guys hit you in the thigh (Wills punches the interviewer) with a knee, you know. In Pittsburgh the umpire stopped a game and made the

field crew remove three wheelbarrow-loads of sand around first base before he went on with the game.

**CC: That made it tough to turn the bag, turn to second?**

**MW:** It's like being on the beach. Another team had the first baseman stand in front of me, between me and second base. I just stepped back and then I was gone. So, that didn't work. And then they tried putting the first baseman behind me, to distract me, and then throw the ball close to my head. That didn't work. (laughs) They tried to cheat. The baseman cannot block the base until he has possession of the ball. He can't block the base path without the ball. The only place they allow that is at home plate. Now, what the Braves did is have Joe Torre (now the manager of the Yankees) playing at first base and I'd get my lead, and he would flop down in front of the bag to not let me back in if I didn't steal. So, I took my spikes back to the hotel. I'm sitting on the end of my bed and I'm filing my spikes. I knew the spikes were glittering. I had to put some

**“Whenever a guy blocks the base, he’s saying come on with whatever you got, buddy.”**



*Wills scores.*

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

black shoe polish on them so when I was running I didn't glitter in the lights. Next day when I was walking from the clubhouse to the dugout, the spikes were piercing the floor. I got on first. Then I took a good lead, my maximum lead. Now, when the pitcher threw over, I went back like a spear, with my feet first. Torre jumped out of the way, and my spikes pierced the bag. We used old canvas bags in those days, not the hard stuff, the rubber they use now. And when I pulled the spikes out of the bag, the stuffing came out. Joe looked at me and he looked down at the bag, and he got the message. So, now we're playing cat and mouse. Am I coming feet first or head first? And he guessed wrong. I hit him in the knee, and I mean I pierced it all the way down to the shoe. Anybody else would have been going to the

hospital. Not Joe Torre. He was a big, strapping, hairy guy. Blood is all over the place. Now, I knew Joe Torre was coming back. I could hear it from the roar of the crowd. I'm waiting for him to grab me by the collar. He came back and just patted me on the butt and said, "Let's go, Maury." Ever since, I've had the greatest respect for Joe Torre. He knew he was blocking the base and as Cobb said in his book, "Whenever a guy blocks the base, he's saying come on with whatever you got, buddy."



Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

**CC:** You played your first seasons with the Dodgers in the Los Angeles Coliseum?

**MW:** You could plant potatoes in the infield. The Coliseum didn't bother me. Eight and a half years in the minor leagues, a lot of other players complained, but it was like home to me.

**CC:** Let's throw out some names. Did Bob Gibson (Cardinal ace) scare you?

**MW:** (laughs) Didn't want to hit against him. You never dug in; you're always on your heels. Gibson was a different type of guy than most pitchers. Most pitchers you can "woof" at a little bit and they'll back off, but Gibson would fight you. He didn't smile. He threw hard and wanted to fight. And the plate belonged to him.

**CC:** What's it feel like to get hit by a major league fastball?

**MW:** You don't want it to happen. (laughs) The only good thing I can say is that you know you're not going to die.

**CC:** What was Juan Marichal of the Giants like?

**MW:** I'd do anything to beat him. Juan had a grimace on his face that looked like a grin, and we took great offense to that. He'd give you one hit in six innings and it looked like he was smiling at you.

**CC:** Who was meaner, Gibson or Marichal?

**MW:** Oh, I don't know who was meaner, because Marichal had a quiet meanness, but he'd knock you down, too. But Gibson was nastier.

**CC:** Who was a better pitcher?

**MW:** (laughs) Gibson was a little more intimidating. Marichal was the best right-hander in the league.

*On August 22, 1965, Juan Marichal was at the plate against Sandy Koufax. In one of the most infamous moments in major league baseball history, and perhaps the ugliest moment in the Dodger-Giant rivalry, Marichal turned and hit the catcher, Johnny Roseboro, over the head with his bat.*

**CC:** Where were you during the Roseboro/Marichal episode?

**MW:** I was in the middle of it. Roseboro said I started it. The night before Gaylord Perry (Hall of Famer with the Giants) had his spitter going and the ball was sinking. I had to devise a way to get on base, and I came up with a plan. I know that when a batter goes around to bunt, the catcher intuitively goes forward, because he goes out to field the bunt. Knowing this, I came around early to make sure Tom Haller (Giant's catcher) would come forward. I hit him in the mask with the bat as I'm bringing the bat back and that's obstruction, interference. I'm on first base. That was my plan, and it worked. I mean, all hell broke loose in Candlestick Park. For twenty minutes, fans were rioting. They didn't come on the field, but they were throwing stuff out there. The Giant dugout and the Dodger dugout are pointing fingers and calling names and the poor umpire is fighting for his life. And I was on first

base. I scored the run. And now, we've got a tie ballgame. What happens next is the Giants come up and Matty Alou is the lead-off hitter. He is going to try the same thing with our catcher, John Roseboro. He made out like he was going to bunt. Roseboro didn't go for it. Matty pulled the bat back and Roseboro's not there. So, he tries finding Roseboro with the bat. He goes all the way back to him and hits him in the mask with it, and Roseboro picks him up off the ground with one hand - Matty's just a little guy, about 5'5" - and then both dugouts empty.

The next day, Marichal was pitching. It's a Sunday afternoon game. The first three Dodgers to bat are me, Jim Gilliam and Ron Fairly. All of us are hit. We went down fast; you

know you go down so fast, the helmet comes down later. The body goes boom, and then here comes the helmet or the hat. So, I said okay, if that's how you want to play.

**CC:** **Didn't the umpire warn him?**

**MW:** (laughs) No, the umpire didn't warn in those days. That's present day stuff. So, then Marichal came up to hit and we wanted to get even. I guess he thought Roseboro was throwing the ball back a little close to his head.

**CC:** **He actually turned...was it a full swing at Roseboro?**

**MW:** He had the bat straight up in front of him and hit John over the head.

**CC:** **Were you guys stunned?**

**MW:** Oh, yeah. We never suspected anything like that was going to happen. He hit him twice. Everything happened so fast, you had to see it on film to know that he hit him twice.

**CC:** **Was Marichal suspended for the rest of the season?**

**MW:** No. Marichal got 8 days or 10 days. He only missed one start, and something like a \$5,000 fine that the ball club paid.

**CC:** **Unbelievable...what was your teammate, Jim Gilliam like?**

**MW:** Jim was from the old school, from Brooklyn days. I don't think he ever initiated a conversation. He was a real gentleman. He was almost a perfect player, didn't make mistakes, fundamentally sound. I never would have stolen 104 bases without him hitting behind me. He was very unselfish. Jim would take two strikes just to give me time to get over there.

**CC:** **Talk about Drysdale.**

**MW:** Don Drysdale was a real team guy. Every time somebody fouled me, which they did often, because they didn't like the fact that I was stealing bases, Drysdale would say, "Do you think he meant to do that?" I'd say, "Yeah, I know he did."

He'd say, "Okay, I'll get him for you." I'd say, "No, Don, we only got a one run lead. Don't mess the game up." He'd say, "Okay, I owe you." Sometimes he'd owe me four and I could put a finger on a guy any time I wanted to.

**CC:** **D u k e Snyder.**

**MW:** Duke was from the Brooklyn old school. He didn't talk much. That's the way it was with most players when they are on the way out, they'd become a little anti-social.

**CC:** **What was it like negotiating a contract?**



*The Great Koufax.*

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

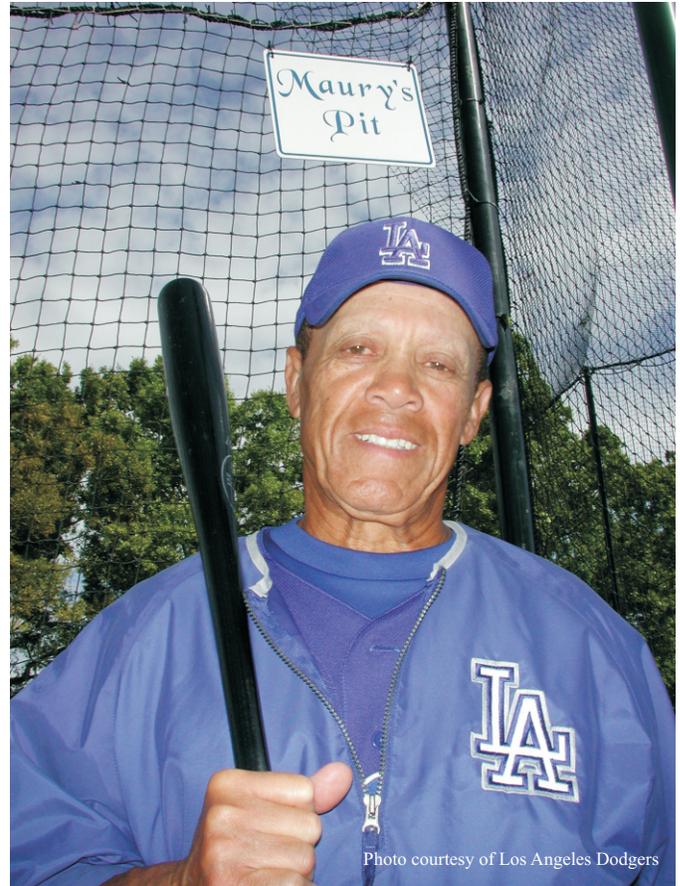


Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Dodgers

**MW:** I signed when I was seventeen, when I was in the projects in Washington, D.C. (for \$500), and I played until I was forty and I never had a word to say about where I played or how much I made.

**CC:** **What was the most you ever made in a season?**

**MW:** I wanted to make \$100,000 a year. That's the number that made you a superstar – the most I got was \$97,000. (laughs) I'd have a great season and after sitting down to negotiate a contract I would walk out of the room feeling lucky I had a job.

**CC:** **Who was your closest friend on the Dodgers?**

**MW:** Sandy Koufax and John Roseboro. Roseboro was my roommate. Sandy, because after the game, he'd be icing his arms and I'd be icing my legs. The rest of the team was gone. We got a chance to talk and become buddies.

**CC:** **Is Koufax still one of your favorite people?**

**MW:** Yeah. He was so much a favorite that if Sandy had a 10-0 shut-out going and there was a man on second base and two outs, and the ball was hit down my way, and I couldn't field it normally, I would dive and knock it down. Maybe I couldn't get the batter, but I could keep the guy from scoring. I wanted Sandy to get the shut-out. He pitched his heart out the whole game.

**CC:** **Where does he rank as great pitchers?**

**MW:** He's the best ever...ever.

**CC:** **Did you ever just fool around, and get into the batter's box and say "Sandy, give me your best?"**

**MW:** At spring training, I had to face him. I knew I wasn't going to be able to hit him so I said I'm going to stand here and do

nothing. He's either going to walk me or strike me out.

**CC: Did he walk you?**

**MW:** He walked me. Now, I'm getting ready to run down to first base and Walter Alston said, "Time. No walking." What? (laughs) I went into the batter's box and said, "Go ahead. Strike me out." That's what he did.

**CC: What did Koufax do with a baseball that other pitchers couldn't do?**

**MW:** I don't think anybody had any better curve. They say if you can quarter the strike zone, you can win. He was a guy throwing the ball close to a hundred mph and he can quarter the quarters.

**CC: Did the Dodgers socialize when you guys were on the road?**

**MW:** No. I was a loner. I liked to play the banjo and every major city in the league had a banjo house and they always had an extra banjo there for me to play.

**CC: Where did the banjo playing come from?**

**MW:** We had a guy (in the minor leagues) who played a Martin ukulele, four-string, and I traded a transistor radio for it. I went up to the Dodgers, took my ukulele, strumming every night, playing. One night I went to a Shakey's Pizza Parlor and a guy was playing the banjo. I said, "That's what I want to play." I went eight years without missing a day touching the banjo. I played five times on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. I played on the Today Show. I played Milton Berle. I played in Las Vegas. I became pretty good.

### *In 1967, the Dodgers traded Maury.*

**MW:** My leg was torn up again from the regular season. Remember, in '65, I had more than eighty stolen bases in August, thirty games ahead of the record, and my leg swelled up. It was hurting again in the '66 season, but I taped up and we won the Pennant. After the season, the Dodgers set up a barnstorming trip in Japan. Koufax and Drysdale didn't go because they had previous business commitments. When the promoter in Japan found out that the three of us were not on the tour, they were going to cancel, so the Dodgers promised me I wouldn't have to play with my bad leg, but just sign autographs and wave to the fans. I said okay. Then they started playing me and I hurt my leg again. I asked if I could come home. They said no. I got my own ticket and came back. (laughs) Somehow, they didn't like that.

**CC: You were exiled to Pittsburgh.**

**MW:** I had two good years in Pittsburgh. I worked with the neighborhood kids. I told the kids, when they saw me around, to come over and say hi and introduce themselves...(laughs)...I said you might even give me a few dollars because I'll need it then...I still have grown men walk up to me and say 'hey Maury' and pull out a few bucks like they're going to give it to me. I always know they're from Pittsburgh...I try to be to kids like Gerry Priddy was to me...I was in the top ten hitters my first year in Pittsburgh and the next year I stole fifty bases. I enjoyed it. I was happy to come home to the Dodgers, though. I got home by way of Montreal in the '69 expansion draft. It was too cold there

for me to play. So, I quit baseball. They said we'll send you back to the Dodgers. They'll trade for you. So, I came back here.

**CC: And you started for the Dodgers until 1972?**

**MW:** Yeah.

**CC: Was baseball a happy time for you?**

**MW:** It was happy, as far as I knew. How do you define happy when you're talking about an athlete who's on the road traveling all the time trying to build a career?

**CC: When did you become a manager?**

**MW:** In Seattle in 1980. Between 1972 and 1980 I was an analyst for the NBC Game of the Week. I also had an in-studio show with HBO, a sports show. I flew back to New York every Tuesday. I gave it up to manage...(laughs, sort of)...didn't work out.

**CC: One of the reasons attributed to you leaving as manager was personality issues with the players?**

**MW:** That could be. They lost 103 games the year before I got there...(long pause) ...we started off slow...never caught up.

**CC: Someone said successful athletes have a difficult time coaching.**

**MW:** That's an old wife's tale from somebody who hasn't even been there. Frank Robinson is doing a great job with the Nationals. Nobody was more intense than Frank Robinson. Joe Torre was a good ball player. Dusty Baker.

**CC: Was that the toughest time of your professional life?**

**MW:** I was totally embarrassed when I got fired from Seattle because when I went in there I was the only black manager in baseball at the time, and people were saying, "Well, they've got a manager, now. I've seen Maury Wills play and I heard him on the Game of the Week. He knows his baseball." And I really believed that, you know. I got fired. I was so ashamed I drove home and I shut myself in my house.

**CC: How long did the dark years last?**

**MW:** Seven or eight years. I got sober on August 13, 1989.

**CC: Sixteen years sober?**

**MW:** Yes, sixteen years, August 13. Fourteen years without smoking.

**CC: Were you a smoker while playing the game?**

**MW:** I smoked. A lot of players smoked. (laughs) I remember in the minor leagues, the manager said no smoking on the bench, or you're going to get a \$50 fine. That was a lot of money in the minor leagues. And I'm sitting right beside him smoking and he doesn't even know it. He said, "Goddamn, I smell cigarette smoke. These guys will never learn." (laughing) I said, "Yeah, I know what you mean, Skipper."

**CC: What did you smoke?**

**MW:** Marlboro Reds.

**CC: Do you have to commit yourself to sobriety everyday?**

**MW:** It's an everyday deal.

**CC: Are you still tempted?**

**MW:** No. I feel like I never smoked, I never drank, I never used. My life today is not about drinking, using or anything like

that to survive. I spend time tutoring young men with addictions. I don't have any grievance with any person, place or thing, no hang-ups. I'm free today.

**CC:** That must feel good.

**MW:** It does.

### A Thought on Cooperstown

Maurice Morning Wills was born in poverty and grew to manhood traveling the bus leagues of the corrosive old South. Small for a professional athlete, he was the 'Mouse' that roared. He made a living perfecting the difficult art of stealing bases off major league pitchers, hitting effectively from both sides of the plate, always looking for some way to start a rally, and running the Dodger defense as the team leader. The years he spent battling drugs resulted in stories that are common to anyone, rich and famous or completely unknown, who gets caught up in

addiction. In comparison to his accomplishments, which include helping others who are in the trouble he once found himself, his failings should be both forgettable and forgivable. Maury Wills is now 72 years old. He is elegant, an accommodating, generous man who acknowledges that years and perspective have brought a grace to his life.

Whatever mistakes he might have made in his personal life, he had a career of making his teams better, of winning championships, of fundamentally altering the way the game is played, and putting together unforgettable moments that add to the lore of the sport. He also has the numbers that are comparable to other shortstops who are enshrined in Cooperstown.

In California, if you say the name Maury Wills you think of baseball. He made our national pastime exciting, and it would be deserving if he was in the Hall of Fame.

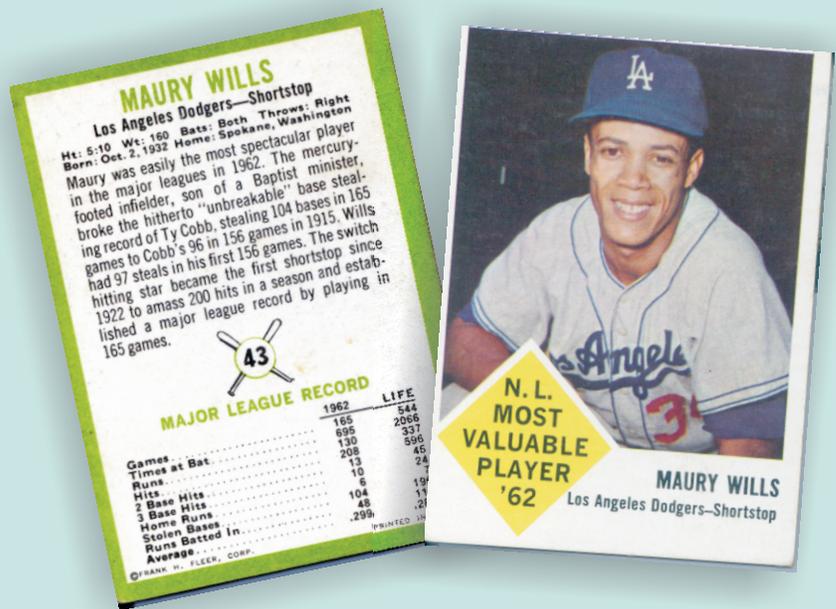
*This is some of what the ballplayer, Maury Wills, did on the diamond.*

G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	HR%	R	RBI	BB	SO	SB	BA	SA	AB	H	G by POS
1959 LA N 83	242	63	5	2	0	0.0	27	7	13	27	7	.260	.298	0	0	SS-82
1960	148	516	152	15	2	0	0.0	75	27	35	47	.295	.331	0	0	SS-145
1961	148	613	173	12	10	0	0.2	105	31	59	50	.282	.339	1	0	SS-148
1962	165	695	208	13	10	6	0.9	130	48	51	57	.299	.373	0	0	SS-165
1963	134	527	159	19	3	0	0.0	83	34	44	48	.302	.349	0	0	SS-109,3B-33
1964	158	630	173	15	5	2	0.3	81	34	41	73	.275	.324	4	0	SS-149,3B-6
1965	158	650	186	14	7	0	0.0	92	33	40	64	.286	.329	2	0	SS-155
1966	143	594	162	14	2	1	0.2	60	39	34	60	.273	.308	1	0	SS-139,3B-4
1967 PIT N 149	616	186	12	9	3	0.5	92	45	31	44	29	.302	.365	3	1	3B-144,SS-2
1968	153	627	174	12	6	0	0.0	76	31	45	57	.278	.316	3	0	3B-141,SS-10
1969 2 teams MON N (47G - .222) LA N (104G - .297)																
1969 Total	151	623	171	10	8	4	0.6	80	47	59	61	.274	.335	1	1	SS-150,2B-1
1970 LA N 132	522	141	19	3	0	0.0	77	34	50	34	28	.270	.318	5	1	SS-126,3B-4
1971	149	601	169	14	3	3	0.5	73	44	40	44	.281	.329	6	1	SS-144,3B-4
1972	71	132	17	3	1	0	0.0	16	4	10	18	.129	.167	5	1	SS-31,3B-6
14 Years 1942	7588	2134	177	71	20	0.3	1067	458	552	684	586	.281	.331	31	5	SS-1555 3B-362, 2B-1
<b>WORLD SERIES</b>																
4 Years 21	78	19	3	0	0	0.0	6	4	5	12	6	.244	.282	0	0	SS-21

#### SIDE STORY

#### The Baseball Card

In 1958 the photographer for Topps baseball cards had a back pocket full of five dollar contracts (yes, five dollars) to give to players to take the picture for their baseball card. Wills was trying to make the team in Detroit. One of the coaches told the photographer that Wills didn't have a chance to stay with the big team. The photographer decided not to pay Wills the five dollars. The next year, when Wills was leading the Dodgers to a World Series, a new company, Fleer, was trying to break into the baseball card business and signed Wills for \$200. They never signed enough players to produce the cards, but they did not release their players until 1963. Four years after becoming a star in the National League, Maury had his first card.



*On August 22, 2005, the California State Assembly and the State Senate passed a joint agreement asking the Baseball Hall of Fame to consider inducting the Dodger great into Cooperstown.*

## CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE & ASSEMBLY

### *Joint Resolution for Maurice Morning Wills*

**WHEREAS**, Maurice Morning Wills was born into poverty in Washington D.C., in the year 1932 as one of 13 children; and

**WHEREAS**, as a boy Maury Wills played baseball in abandoned lots, shoeless yet with aspirations of becoming a major league baseball player; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills found his future by signing a \$500 contract with the then Brooklyn Dodgers; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills spent more than eight seasons in the minor leagues, finally becoming a major league prospect when he learned how to switch hit at the age of 25; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills can be considered one of the first Los Angeles Dodgers, joining the Brooklyn transplants in Los Angeles the year after they finished second to last, helping to lead them to a National League Pennant and World Series his first year on the team; and

**WHEREAS**, on September 23, 1962, Maury Wills broke Ty Cobb's record of 97 stolen bases by setting a new major league record of 104 stolen bases in a single year, continuing on to lead the National League in stolen bases for 6 straight seasons; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills became a major force on a winning L. A. Dodger team for 12 years and helped lead the Dodgers to 3 world series victories in 1959, 1963 and 1965, and guided the Dodgers to a National League Pennant victory in 1966; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills was voted the National League's most valuable player, received a Gold Glove award for fielding, was voted Sport Magazine's Man of the Year, and received the S. Rae Hickok Pro Athlete of the Year Award; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills was voted by his peers to be Captain of the Los Angeles Dodgers, and played a critical role as their lead off hitter and the center of their infield with more than 2,000 hits, nearly 600 stolen bases, over 1,000 runs, a career batting average of .281; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills became the third black manager in baseball history and was the spokesman for HBO and Baseball's Game of the Week, adding to the lore of the sport by sharing the stories of the great game of baseball and providing insight to fans wanting to learn more; and

**WHEREAS**, Maury Wills overcame his personal demons of addiction to become a mentor to young people who fall prey to the ugliness of alcohol and drugs; and

**WHEREAS**, in California if you say the name of Maury Wills, you immediately think of the magic of America's game; so therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, *by this joint resolution of the California State Senate and the California State Assembly, that the Veterans Committee of the Baseball Hall of Fame be advised that the People of California respectfully request that Maury Wills be considered for induction into Cooperstown, and become a deserving member of Baseball's Hall of Fame.*

4.452