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*Our Bums: The Brooklyn Dodgers in History, Memory and Popular Culture* by David Krell (review)

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**David Krell. *Our Bums: The Brooklyn Dodgers in History, Memory and Popular Culture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 228 pp. Paper, \$29.95.**

*Rob Edelman*

One need not be a New Yorker of a certain age or a Brooklyn Dodgers aficionado to thoroughly enjoy *Our Bums: The Brooklyn Dodgers in History, Memory and Popular Culture*. However, given that author David Krell pays a respectful and at times adoring homage to the late, lamented Dodgers of the Borough of Churches, a love of Brooklyn and its MLB ball club certainly helps. As Krell observes: “The address 215 Montague Street was more important to Dodgers fans than 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue to Washington, D.C., politicians. It was, of course, the address for the headquarters of the Dodgers” (66). And he succinctly describes the unifying nature of the Dodgers within the confines of its home borough by observing: “Baseball provided a common language as the Dodgers united the borough from high society millionaires in Brooklyn Heights to working class families in Greenpoint, from beachgoers at Coney Island to Italian and Jewish immigrants settling in Bensonhurst. Brooklynites fused behind the Dodgers, building a collective identity through the emperors of Ebbets Field” (17).

Still, anyone with even a passing fascination with baseball history and the evolution of any specific nine just may pick up *Our Bums* and find it impossible to stop reading—and savoring. In this regard, Krell does not only emphasize the team’s appeal to Brooklynites. “Across the country, even people with a tangential interest in baseball knew the names of Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, and Leo Durocher,” he observes. “The Brooklyn Dodgers were a brand, indeed” (164).

Happily, *Our Bums* is not merely a blow-by-blow, by-the-numbers chronology of the team prior to its abandonment of Brooklyn for Southern California. In his Preface, Krell personalizes the sport and what it means to a young fan by recalling his own early baseball memories, which include everything from playing ball with a paternal grandmother to perusing baseball-related children’s books. Here, Krell becomes a sort of universal fan; he is the equivalent of any young person from any corner of the United States who obsessively embraces the sport. Then in his Prologue, he links the 1953 World Series to his then seventeen-year-old father’s presence in the Ebbets Field stands during Game 5. (The opponent, of course, was the New York Yankees, and the date is October 3.) By doing so, Krell connects “baseball, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and fathers and sons” (12) in a manner reminiscent of the link between Ray Kinsella and his own dad in *Field of Dreams*. This account is bookended in Krell’s Epilogue, in which he and his dad attend Game 5 of the 1978 Fall Classic pitting

the Yankees and now *Los Angeles* Dodgers. (The date is October 15.) “Game 5 is an experience that lasts with the permanence of granite,” Krell writes, “conquering the inferno of sadness ignited by my father’s passing in 1999. Though memories cannot fill his absence entirely, their endurance makes the pain of loss tolerable” (191).

In between his Prologue and Epilogue, Krell divides *Our Bums* into nine chapters which spotlight eras, incidents, and famous names in Dodgers lore. Among his subjects: the team’s origins; how Ebbets Field came into being; the behind-the-scenes politics involving the Dodgers’ financing and operations; the Dodgers-New York Giants rivalry (which dates from 1845); the Dodgers as depicted in American culture, from movies and TV shows to literature, popular music, and classical music; and the baseball personalities associated with the team (including Charles Ebbets; Wilbert “Uncle Robbie” Robinson; Casey Stengel; Leo Durocher; Branch Rickey; Walter O’Malley; and, of course, Jackie Robinson). Krell devotes perhaps too much space to the more celebrated Dodger-related happenings, including Robinson’s and Rickey’s integrating major league baseball, Bobby Thomson’s “Shot Heard Round the World,” the 1955 World Series triumph, and the team’s abandoning the borough and its fans. But this is a quibble. The book resonates when Krell captures the team’s special appeal by quoting a range of individuals, from famous names (Fred Wilpon, Carl Erskine, Connie Mack III, Branch Rickey III) to a rainbow of fans: teachers; lawyers; restaurant owners; supply company CEOs; television producers; sales executives. Here, a plethora of themes emerge, the most telling of which involves the profound meaning of being a baseball fan in general and a Brooklyn Dodgers fanatic in particular. Plus, there is a wonderful anecdote involving Paul Newman; *I’ve Got a Secret*; Henry Morgan, a panelist on the popular TV quiz show; and Game 1 of the 1956 World Series.

And at its best, Krell’s writing is poetic. One of countless examples: “To be a Brooklyn Dodgers fan in the 1950s was to bathe in glory’s warmth and prostrate oneself from heartbreak’s chill” (15). A couple of his more expressive observations link the Dodgers and Giants to an English poet and playwright of note: “Macy’s had Gimbel’s. Hatfields had McCoys. Montagues had Capulets. And the Brooklyn Dodgers had the New York Giants” (102); and, “If Shakespeare could return from the grave to document an event, the Dodgers-Giants game on October 3, 1951, might likely be the topic of his 38th play—it reflected the autumn of Brooklyn’s discontent” (106).

