

WILLIE MAYS DRIVE

Street Co-Naming Resolution

Willie Mays: Date of birth: May 6, 1931 - *"I don't make history. I catch fly balls."*

Whereas: Considered by many the greatest player of all time, Mays was the prototype of the complete player; he hit for average and power, ran the bases with intelligence and speed, played a spectacular centerfield, and possessed a great arm. His World Series debut saw him play opposite future cross-river rival Mickey Mantle, who was also a rookie. The meeting foreshadowed the debate of nearly a decade about who among Mays, Mantle, and Brooklyn's Duke Snider was the greatest New York centerfielder of the 1950s.

Whereas: Mays served in the army in 1952 and 1953, and the Giants finished second and fifth, respectively. He returned to the Polo Grounds in 1954, leading the NL with a .345 batting average with 41 homers and 110 RBI to help the Giants to the NL flag. The 1954 World Series is most often remembered for a marvelous outfield play, **(The Catch)** by Mays in the first game. With the score tied late in the game, Indians first baseman Vic Wertz clubbed a long drive to deep centerfield at the Polo Grounds. At the crack of the bat, Mays turned his back to the plate, raced for the outfield wall, glanced up at the last minute, and pulled the ball in over his shoulder. Nearly 430 feet from the plate, he whirled and threw on a line to the infield. The play killed the Indians' threat, and the Giants won the game and swept the Series.

Whereas: In 1955, his last season under manager Durocher, Mays led the league with 13 triples, 51 home runs, and a .659 slugging average. He won four consecutive stolen-base titles from 1956 through 1959. He stole 338 bases in his career and might have had more had he and the Giants not elected to minimize his chance of injury on the basepaths. His unique 1957 performance of 20 or more doubles, triples, homers, and stolen bases established his claim as one of the game's greatest all-around offensive threats.

Whereas: Mays had a habit of addressing his fellow players with a high-spirited *"Say Hey"* salutation, prompting New Yorkers to call him the *Say Hey Kid*. ***An exuberant figure during his earlier days in New York, he became a folk hero by playing stickball with children in Harlem streets bordering the Polo Grounds.*** He was embraced lovingly by New Yorkers, who were heartbroken when the Giants moved to San Francisco following the 1957 season, where he cracked 49 home runs in 1962 as the Giants tied the Dodgers for first place on the last day of the season and captured the pennant in a three-game playoff before losing the World Series to the Yankees in a seventh-game 1-0 squeaker.

Whereas: Along with Mantle and Aaron, Mays was the dominant slugger of the 1950s and 1960s. From 1958 through 1966, he produced eight consecutive seasons of over 100 runs and RBI. He collected four home runs in a game in Milwaukee on April 30, 1961, and he hit three homers in a game on two other occasions. He hammered 52 homers in 1965 to join Ruth, Foxx, Kiner, and Mantle as the only players with more than one 50-home run season. He hit 30 or more homers in each of 11 seasons. On May 4, 1966, Mays passed Mel Ott's 19-year-old record of 511 National League home runs and finished his career with a total of 660, ranking him third at that time on the all-time list.

Whereas: Mays's preeminence as a centerfielder is supported statistically by his career total of 7,095 putouts, the most in major league history. He used his patented basket catch on routine fly balls, and he regularly dumbfounded onlookers by making seemingly impossible plays. After a particularly astonishing display in which Mays raced to his left, speared a fly ball, spun 360 degrees counterclockwise, and threw the ball on a 325-foot line to nail a tagging Dodger baserunner at the plate, Brooklyn manager Charlie Dressen commented, *"I won't believe that play until I see him do it again."*

Before Willie Mays, the typical baseball scout's report on a talented black player would mention the player's color first, his ability second. . When Willie Mays joined the New York Giants in 1951, black

players were still a rarity in the major leagues. When scouts described young Willie Mays, they mentioned his remarkable skills first.

Whereas: After Willie stopped playing baseball, he remained an active person. Just as he had during his playing days, Mays continued to appear on various TV shows, in films, and in other forms of non-sports related media. **On January 23, 1979, he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.** It was his first year of eligibility and he had appeared on 409 of the 432 ballots cast (roughly 95 percent) [6]. Shortly after, he took a job at the Park Place (now Bally's Atlantic City) casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey. While there, he served as a Special Assistant to the President and as a greeter. Hall of Famer Mickey Mantle was also a greeter during that time. When he heard of this, Bowie Kuhn, Baseball Commissioner, suspended both men from involvement in organized baseball. Peter Ueberroth, Kuhn's successor, lifted the suspension in 1985.

Whereas: For 22 seasons, Mays astonished fans and fellow players with his hitting, his running and his unsurpassed fielding. As sportswriter Arthur Daley put it, he "**could do everything and do it better than anyone else, (and) with a joyous grace.**" In the 1950s and '60s, fans couldn't get enough of Willie Mays. **In the first flush of his fame and popularity, he would get up early to play stickball in the street with the worshipful children who gathered in front of his Harlem boarding house.** Fans argue to this day about which was the greatest of his many spectacular catches. One thing all baseball lovers agree on: Willie Mays was one of the most versatile, virtuoso players of all time.

Whereas: Mays is the only Major Leaguer to have both a 3 triple game and a 4 home run game. He is legendary, inspiring several well known songs; being mentioned for example, along with Ty Cobb and Joe DiMaggio, in John Fogerty's popular song "**Centerfield.**" Also in Widespread Panic's song "**One Arm Steve**", as well as in the Wu-Tang Clan song "**For Heaven's Sake.**" He also graces us in Bob Dylan's 1963 song, "**I Shall Be Free**", from the album The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan.

Resolved: *A beloved, virtuoso gentleman and shining star whose example has lifted and thrilled our lives, he was also a fine neighbor and member of our Community as well as a Great Harlemit. Therefore we wish to honor his iconic Legacy, and the locations where he lived and worked for years, (The Polo Grounds) by resolving to Co-naming the Harlem River Drive / Polo Grounds Service Road between 155 & 163rd Streets -*

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