

## THE 1941 BROOKLYN DODGERS: CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR

by Jack Ziegler

The NFL Brooklyn Dodgers football franchise existed from 1930 to 1943. Its most successful campaigns were in 1940 and 1941 under the coaching of Jock Sutherland. In 1940 Sutherland inherited a club with a tradition of defeat. By the end of the 1940 season Sutherland had transformed the Brooks into winners at 8-3-0, only one game behind the Eastern champion Washington Redskins. 1941 then would be the crucible which would determine whether the 1940 season had been a fluke or if the Dodgers had arrived as a football power.

The Dodger camp opened on August 16 at Hun Junior School in Princeton, New Jersey. Things got off to a rocky start when only thirty-one of an expected sixty-some players showed up. Sutherland's major concern was the lack of returning veterans. Only seventeen members of the 1940 team were in camp with mainstays like Rhoten Shetley, George Cafego, Sam Francis, Ben Kish, and Ralph Kercheval all in the service. Sutherland, however, still had three All-Pros -- tailback Clarence "Ace" Parker, end Perry Schwartz, and tackle Frank "Bruiser" Kinard -- around whom to build his 1941 club.

Although the Dodgers' training camp was of shorter duration than the crosstown Giants', it was demanding and fruitful. On September 9 the Dodgers faced the world champion Chicago Bears in a night exhibition game before 27,000 screaming fans at Ebbetts Field. Though the Bears won, 14-9, on a last second punt return touchdown by George McAfee, Brooklyn looked impressive. Brooklyn's defense played ruggedly, allowing the Bears to cross midfield only once in the second half.

The Brooks concluded their short exhibition season with a 35-0 rout of the Churchill Pros of Holyoke at Springfield, Massachusetts on September 14. Especially encouraging was Ace Parker's 70 yard touchdown run. Parker had broken his ankle playing baseball the previous May and Brooklyn fans were concerned how the injury would affect his play in 1941.

On September 17 the Army released Rhoten Shetley in time for him to join the Dodgers for their home opener victory on September 21 against the Detroit Lions, 14-7. After a scoreless first half, Brooklyn scored in the third quarter. Ace Parker threw a 35-yard pass to end Perry Schwartz who lateraled to the trailing Pug Mandes for a touchdown run. The

Dodgers added another seven in the last quarter on a Bill Leckonby pass to rookie end Ed Rucinski (Indiana).

The Lions' only sore came late into the fourth quarter when Ned Mathews picked off a Leckonby flat pass for a 42 yard touchdown return. Brooklyn's rugged line knocked out Whizzer White, Detroit's offensive sparkplug and future Supreme Court Justice, halfway through the game.

Despite the opening victory, Sutherland was not impressed by the quality of Dodger play. He drilled his charges twice a day the following week in preparation for their Saturday night game with the Eagles.

As one might expect from a Greasy Neale coached team, the Eagles proved inhospitable hosts at Shibe Park. The Dodgers outlasted the Eagles, 24-13, in a game punctuated by hard tackling and occasional fist fights. The only major casualty was referee Red Friesell who suffered a fractured left leg when Perry Schwartz accidentally crashed into him off a Frank Busch block.

Brooklyn scored first on a 64 yard drive whose major impetus was a 46-yard full spinner by fullback Pug Manders. Merl Condit racked up the touchdown on a 6-yard sweep from his tailback position. Condit scored the second touchdown on a drive helped along by 45 yards in penalties for Eagle rough play and unsportsmanlike conduct. Late in the first half Philly got on the board with a touchdown pass from Foster Watkins to Tommy Thompson. (Ed. note: This is not a misprint. T-QB Thompson actually caught two passes during the season. This was his only score.)

Fourth quarter scoring began with Dodger Dean McAdam's field goal. The Brooks then recovered a blocked kick deep in Eagle territory, George Dracum going over for the touchdown. But the Eagles didn't roll over -- Tommy Thompson hit Larry Cabelli late down the middle for a touchdown strike.

After the first two games of the season, the Dodgers were tied with the Giants for the Eastern Division lead. But then the Dodgers dropped a 3-0 game to the Redskins in Griffith Stadium before a close to capacity crowd of 32,642. The 90-degree temperature and high humidity may have affected Brooklyn's concentration.

However, the game's score was closer than perhaps warranted as the Redskins squandered several

scoring opportunities. A Sammy Baugh touchdown pass was called back because of illegal formation, Bob Masterson missed two field goals, and Frankie Filchok's out-of-bounds catch turned the ball over on fourth down at the Brooklyn 7. The only offensive score for Washington was a picture-perfect 36-yard field goal by Joe Aguirre in the third quarter.

After Aguirre's field goal, the Dodgers appeared to be in business as Bill Leckonby returned the kickoff to the 'Skins' 12. But a clipping penalty erased Leckonby's gain. In the closing minutes Brooklyn drove to the 'Skins' 17 where Merl Condit missed the tying field goal, his third missed attempt of the day.

On Columbus Day, the Brooks continued their odyssey of frustration at the Milwaukee Fair Grounds, where the Green Bay Packers embarrassed them 30-7 before 16,000 spectators.

Cecil Isbell and Don Hutson proved a torrid passing combination that the Dodgers couldn't cool down. In the first half a Hutson touchdown grab, and Andy Uram 89 yard touchdown punt return, and a Clark Hinkle field goal made it 16-0. The early third quarter saw Brooklyn's only sustained offensive drive, culminating in an Ace Parker to Perry Schwartz touchdown pass.

The Packers were taking no prisoners -- Don Hutson's 18-yard reverse scored six and Tony Canadeo's three-yard smash added the final score. Newspaper accounts took the Dodgers to task for sloppy tackling and limp blocking. The 33 forward passes attempted by Brooklyn give some idea of the frustration endured by the Dodger offense.

As if the Dodgers weren't having enough trouble grappling with opposing teams, they had to take on the baseball Dodger management as well. Larry McPhail and Company were trying to resod Ebbetts Field for the 1942 baseball season. McPhail insisted that the football Dodgers wear sneakers at practice and retire at the first sign of rain so as not to disturb the fresh sod. Dan Topping, owner of the football Dodgers, was reduced to combing the borough for a suitable high school field for practice.

Meanwhile, Brooklyn placekickers practiced off the playing field in cleats, aiming at phantom goal posts. After much protestation by Topping and Coach Sutherland, the Brooks were finally allowed to practice on the field.

Perhaps the "Sod Saga" proved distracting to the Dodgers as they dropped their third-in-a row to the Chicago Cardinals on October 19 before 12,054 dispirited fans. Not even Glenn Miller's orchestra at

halftime could dispel the gloom as the hitherto winless Cards drubbed the hometown Dodgers, 20-6.

The Cardinals struck first on the efforts of Marshall Goldberg, who caught a 50-yard Ray Mallouf pass and then bucked over for a three-yard touchdown. In the second quarter Bill Daddio stripped Ace Parker of the ball at the Dodger 49. The Cards begin a march for another touchdown, a one-yard reverse by Johnny Hall. More devastating was John Martin's kneeling of Ace Parker in the head at the Brooklyn eight. At half-time Parker was rushed to Long Island College Hospital with a possible brain concussion.

Third quarter scores occurred courtesy of the butterfingers offenses. Perry Schwartz fumbled on a reverse. The ball was recovered by Chicago's Ray Parker who lateraled to Frank Ivy who dashed 40 yards for a score. The Cards returned the favor several plays later when back Hugh McCullough bobbled the ball at the Brooklyn 30. Tackle Bruiser Kinard picked up the bouncing ball at the 40 and rumbled 60 yards for the only Dodger score.

The loss to the Cards was the low point of the 1941 Dodger season. The Sod Saga was yet to be resolved and Topping was fuming, threatening to fire any player he considered lackadaisical. At 2-3-0 the Dodgers were seemingly out of the race, trailing the league-leading Giants by three games.

But Coach Steve Owen of the Giants had not written the Dodgers off. He vividly remembered his 14-6 1940 loss to the Dodgers at the Polo Grounds and had his team watching films of that game by way of preparation.

Owen needn't have bothered as the Dodgers edged the Giants 16-13 before 28,675 at Ebbetts Field on October 26. The undefeated, 4-1 favorite Giants lost in an exciting contest that saw the lead change six times. Numerous observers noted that the Dodger play improved steadily as the game wore on. By the fourth quarter, Brooklyn controlled the line of scrimmage.

Frank Reagan, playing his last game for New York before joining the Marines, opened the scoring on a four-yard run. Ace Parker then led a Dodger drive down to the New York 11, at which point he faked a run, but instead delivered a pass to Perry Schwartz between the goal posts. Just before the half the Giants took a 10-7 lead on Win Pedersen's 23-yard field goal.

The third quarter began with a Dodger drive to the Giant seven where Brooklyn had to settle for a Merl Condit field goal to tie things at 10-10. The Giants came back with a rushing drive sparked by Tuffy

Leemans and Len Eshmont that ended with a Ward Cuff field goal to make it 13-10. But the Dodgers scored last on a five-yard Pug Manders quick opener. The Giants tried to rally but Manders intercepted an Ed Danowski pass to insure a Brooklyn victory.

This stunning upset put Brooklyn back in the race at 3-3-0, behind New York's 5-1-0 and Washington's 4-2-0. Coach Sutherland, however, wasted little time in self-congratulation, putting the Dodgers hard at work to prepare for the November 2 home game against the Eagles. The Brooklyn defense practiced against the T-offense, with backfield coach Johnny Michelosen and defensive back Leo Stasica impersonating Eagles' quarterback Tommy Thompson.

Practice paid off as the Dodgers stifled the Eagles 15-6 at half-filled Ebbetts Field on November 2. The Dodgers scored first on a Merl Condit field goal, then added a safety when Frank Kristufek and Eddie Rucinski chased down Eagle back Jim Castiglia in his own end zone for a safety.

Brooklyn added another field goal by Dean McAdams and Philly closed out the first half with a Tommy Thompson to Dick Humbert touchdown pass. However, Eagle placekicker Dan DeSantis missed the extra point and Brooklyn led 8-6 at the half. In the third quarter, Philadelphia penetrated to the Dodger four where Schwartz forced a Thompson fumble. In the final quarter, the Dodgers added an insurance score in the form of an eight-yard jump touchdown pass, McAdams to Leckonby.

The Dodger victory, coupled with a New York loss to the Cardinals, made the standings even closer, the Brooks (4-3-0) trailing the Giants (5-2-0) by a game, the 'Skins (5-1-0) by a game and a half.

Despite Johnny Michelosen's warning that the '41 'Skins were even better than the awesome '40 version, Brooklyn consistently outplayed Washington in the rain at Ebbetts Field on November 9 before their largest home crowd to date, 31,713. Late in the first quarter Brooklyn got a break when Bruiser Kinard blocked a Sammy Baugh quick kick at the Washington 13.

As the second quarter began, Pug Manders went over on a line buck and Merl Condit converted to make it 7-0, Dodgers. The 'Skins riposted quickly on a 68-yard scoring drive whose main ingredient was a 54-yard pass from Baugh to Wayne Milner to Brooklyn's 12. Baugh's touchdown pass to Bob Seymour and Ki Aldrich's conversion tied the game seven all. In the third quarter the rain stopped and the sun came out though neither team scored. But in the fourth quarter Bill Leckonby returned a Baugh punt to the Dodger 49. A 30-yard touchdown pass from Dean McAdams to

seldom-used end Don Wemple added six additional points, though the placement went awry.

Near the end of the game Baugh led a desperate Washington rally that had the 'Skins on Brooklyn's 12 with forty seconds left. Eddie Rucinski saved the day for Brooklyn by dumping Baugh for a 15-yard loss. A go-for-broke Baugh pass ended up in the arms of defensive back Bill Leckonby, who stepped in front of intended receiver Al Kruger to make the interception. When the final gun sounded, the Brooks had triumphed 13-7 and at 5-3-0 were still only one game behind the division-leading Giants, who had beaten the Lions, 20-13.

With the Dodgers playing at the peak of their 1941 form, cellar-dwelling Pittsburgh should have presented little threat. The Steelers were 0-7-1 and outscored by opponents 180 to 75. Their already incompetent squad was further riddled by injuries, forcing a quarterback to play at center and a three fullback backfield. Yet before their largest home crowd of 20,843 at Forbes Field on November 16, the Steelers played like champions, edging out the Dodgers 14-7.

Steeler tackle Jon Woudenberg and end George Platukis played especially well on the line. Brooklyn's line play, solid all year, seemed flat and sloppy. The Dodgers looked good only on their first series, a six-play drive of 74 yards with Pug Manders plowing over for the score.

In the second quarter, a collective mental error by the Brooks' defense let the Steelers back in the game. As Steeler back Joe Hoague burst through the Dodger line, the umpire blew his horn, indicating a penalty. The Dodgers, ignoring an age-old coaching dictum, relaxed momentarily, while Hoague kept running, Leo Stasica dragging him down on the Dodger one. The penalty was on Brooklyn, Pittsburgh declined, and Dick Riffle scored a quick Steeler touchdown.

At the end of the third quarter with the score still deadlocked at seven apiece, Steeler John Patrick returned an Ace Parker interception to the Brooklyn 30. After a five-yard pickup by Riffle, Art Jones, a rookie back from Richmand, scampered 25 yards on a naked reverse early in the last quarter. Typical of Dodger listlessness, the usually reliable Eddie Rucinski missed an easy open-field tackle of Jones, who went into the end zone standing up.

The Dodgers pulled out all the stops late, going 55 yards on a Parker to McAdams to Manders hook-and-ladder. But the Dodgers' efforts only carried them to the Steeler 19 when time expired. Especially galling to Brooklyn was that Pittsburgh had done all its damage on the ground, not throwing a single pass all day.

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Another embarrassment was that seven Dodgers had played their college football at Pittsburgh schools, either Pitt or Carnegie Tech. And, of course, Coach Sutherland had achieved his greatest success at Pitt. All things considered, it was a most unhappy homecoming. The loss left Brooklyn at 5-4-0, two games behind the first place Giants. With two games left in the regular season, the best Brooklyn could hope for was a tie.

The next Sunday, November 23, saw the Dodgers' title hopes dissolve in the rain. The Giants clinched the Eastern Division championship by beating the 1940 champions, the Redskins, in a seesaw game at a wet Polo Grounds. Meanwhile, the Dodger eleven found meager consolation edging out the Long Island Indians of the American Association 6-3 in an exhibition game at Valley Stream.

Though the Dodgers were out of the pennant race, there was still second place money at stake, and perhaps more importantly for Sutherland, pride. Beginning Tuesday November 25, Sutherland drove the Dodgers hard in practice, readying them for the home closer against the Steelers.

The Dodgers gained some measure of revenge before a small crowd of 12,336 at Ebbetts Field by pasting a passive Steeler team 35-7 on November 30. The Steelers (wearing green jerseys, not black) endured a horrible passing day, going 2 for 17 for 25 yards and 6 interceptions.

Art Jones scored on a reverse for Pittsburgh; otherwise, it was all Brooklyn -- Merl Condit on two touchdown runs, George Kracum on a touchdown plunge after a fumbled Pittsburgh punt attempt, Kracum again on an end run, and an Ace Parker to Perry Schwartz to Rhoten Shotley touchdown hook-and-ladder.

At this point Brooklyn had only one game left in its 1941 schedule -- an away contest on December 7 with the Eastern champion New York Giants. Though the Giants had locked up the Eastern Division crown, they were not just playing out the string. Interborough rivalry ran fierce in New York no matter what the sport. Steve Owen had his men practicing in heavy pads while Sutherland drilled the Dodgers ruthlessly, taking time out only on December 4 to be honored at a Knights of Columbus dinner as part of Brooklyn Dodgers Football Day.

55,051 fans showed up in cold weather on December 7 to watch the Dodgers ruin Tuffy Leemans Day and humiliate their crosstown rivals, 21-7. A rough, tough Dodger line consistently outplayed the New Yorkers,

sending Giants Mel Hein, George Franck, and Nello Falaschi to city hospitals for post-game care.

Pug Manders scored all three touchdowns, two plunges and a 65- yard interception return of a Leemans' pass that bounced off Len Eshmost's frozen fingers. The Giants managed their so-what touchdown late in the final quarter when Kay Eakin caught a 38-yard touchdown pass from Hank Soar, who also kicked the extra point. Manders' rushing efforts in this game gave him a total of 486 yards, good enough for the 1941 rushing crown.

Throughout the game there had been a great deal of paging over the PA system of prominent military and civil officials. At the game's conclusion, and announcement came for all servicemen to report immediately to their duty stations. At 7:53 A.M. Honolulu time, Japanese carrier-borne aircraft had attacked Pearl Harbor. For America, World War II had begun.

The Zeros over Hickam Field heralded the decline and dissolution of the Dodger franchise. Owner Dan Topping, Coach Jock Sutherland and playmaker Ace Parker soon found themselves in the military. End Don Wemple was killed in action in 1943; Waddy Young from the 1940 team also died in combat. Under coach Mike Getto the Brooks fell to 3-8-0 in 1942. Pete Cawthorne coached the last Dodger squad to a 2-8-0 record in 1943. Dean McAdams, Bruiser Kinard, Pug Manders, and Merl Condit were the only familiar names still left from the 1941 team.

In 1944 the Dodgers were renamed the Brooklyn Tigers and staggered to an 0-10-0 record under three coaches. The following year the Tigers merged with the year-old NFL Boston Yanks. After 1944 Brooklyn never saw NFL football again, though an AAFC Brooklyn Dodgers club played in Flatbush from 1946 to 1948.

### 1941 BROOKLYN DODGERS RECORD

DATE	AT	OPPONENT	BK-OP	R
S-21	H	Detroit	14- 7	W
S-27	A	Philadelphia	24-13	W
O- 5	A	Washington	0- 3	L
O-12	A	Green Bay	7-30	L
O-19	H	Chicago Cardinals	6-20	L
O-26	H	New York	16-13	W
N- 2	H	Philadelphia	15- 6	W
N- 9	H	Washington	13- 7	W
N-16	A	Pittsburgh	7-14	L
N-30	H	Pittsburgh	35- 7	W
D- 7	A	New York	21- 7	W

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## 1941 BROOKLYN ROSTER

PLAYER (34)	Pos	Yr	Ht	Wt	Ag	School	Gm/Gs
Alfson, Warren	G	1	6-0	198	26	Nebraska	11/11
Bailey, Bill	E	2	6-3	220	25	Duke	6/0
Butcher, Wendell	B	4	6-1	180	27	Gus-Adolphus	10/1
Condit, Merle	H	2	5-11	185	23	Carnegie Tech	11/11
Cotton, Russ	B	1	6-2	197	26	Texas Mines	1/0
Dobrus, Pete	T	1	6-0	215	24	Carnegie Tech	1/0
Frick, Ray	C	1	6-1	205	22	Penn	3/0
Fronczek, Andy	T	1	6-0	200	24	Richmond	11/0
Hodge, Herman	E	3	6-1	200	26	Samford	11/2
Jones, Thurman	F	1	5-10	195	23	Abilene Christ.	1/0
Jurich, Mike	T	1	6-1	225	22	Denver	4/0
Kinard, Bruiser	T	4	6-1	218	26	Mississippi	11/11
Kinard, George	G	1	6-1	195	24	Mississippi	11/0
Kish, Ben	B	2	6-0	200	24	Pitt	7/0
Koons, Joe	C	1	6-2	195	24	Scranton	6/0
Kracum, George	F	1	6-1	212	23	Pitt	11/0
Kristufek, Frank	T	2	6-0	208	25	Pitt	11/5
Leckonby, Bill	Tb	3	6-1	185	23	St.Lawrence	10/2
Manders, Pug	F	3	6-0	200	28	Drake	11/11
McAdams, Dean	TbH	1	6-1	195	23	Washington	11/0
Merrill, Walt	T	2	6-2	215	24	Alabama	6/6
Parker, Ace	Tb	5	6-0	180	29	Duke	11/9
Parker, Dave	E	1	6-3	200	23	Hard.-Sim.	6/0
Peace, Larry	H	1	5-11	185	24	Pitt	7/0
Petro, Steve	G	2	5-10	190	26	Pitt	6/0
Robertson, Tom	C	1	6-0	215	24	Tulsa	11/0
Rucinski, Eddie	E	1	6-2	196	25	Indiana	11/9
Schwartz, Perry	E	4	6-2	195	26	California	11/11
Shetley, Rhoten	B	2	5-11	210	23	Furman	11/10
Sivell, Jim	G	4	5-9	210	27	Auburn	11/11
Stasica, Leo	Tb	1	5-11	185	25	Colorado	5/0
Svendsen, Bud	C	4	6-1	195	26	Minnesota	11/11
Titus, Si	CE	2	6-0	195	22	Holy Cross	7/0
Wemple, Don	E	1	6-2	195	23	Colgate	11/0

	RUSHING				RECEIVING				
	Att	Yds	Avg	TD	No	Yds	Avg	TD	
Manders	111	486*	4.4	6	Schwartz	24	343	14.3	2
Condit	91	357	3.9	4	Rucinski	17	204	12.0	1
Parker, A.	85	301	3.5	0	Hodge	12	128	10.7	0
Leckonby	54	202	3.7	0	McAdams	7	94	13.4	0
Kracum	52	169	3.3	3	Manders	6	67	11.2	0
McAdams	38	99	2.6	0	Shetley	5	63	12.6	0
Stasica	3	17	5.7	0	Condit	5	32	6.4	0
Rucinski	2	13	6.5	0	Kish	4	50	12.5	0
Schwartz	1	7	7.0	0	Parker, A.	3	66	22.0	0
Shetley	1	7	7.0	1	Wemple	2	37	18.5	1
Jones	1	3	3.0	0	Kracum	2	17	8.5	0
Butcher	1	2	2.0	0	Bailey	1	14	14.0	0
Peace	4	2	0.5	0	Parker, D.	1	10	10.0	0
					Leckonby	1	9	9.0	0

Brooklyn 444 1665 3.7 14

Opponents 376 1210 3.2 6

\* - Led NFL

	ATT	COM	PCT	YDS	AvG	TD	IN
Parker, A.	102	51	50.0	642	6.29	2	8
Leckonby	64	25	39.1	299	4.67	1	5
McAdams	27	12	44.4	176	6.52	2	3
Stasica	2	1	50.0	14	7.00	0	0
Condit	6	1	16.7	3	0.50	0	1
Shetley	1	0	0.0	0	0.00	0	0

Brooklyn 202 90 44.6 1134 5.61 5 18

Opponents 189 86 45.5 1169 6.19 6 20

\*\*\* Courtesy David Neft \*\*\*

## TEAM STATISTICS

SCORING	TR	TP	TB	TT	XP	XA	FG	FA	PTS
Manders	6	-	1	7	-	-	-	-	42
Condit	4	-	-	4	11	12	2	11	41
Kracum	3	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	18
Schwartz	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	12
Kinard, B.	-	-	1	1	3	5	-	-	9
McAdams	-	-	-	-	3	3	2	3	9
Leckonby	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	6
Rucinski	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	6
Shetley	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	6
Wemple	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	6
Peace	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1

Brooklyn 14 5 2 21 18 21 4 14 158s

Opponents 6 6 5 17 13 17 4 10 127

s-includes one safety