

# Setting Willie Mays Straight

In his book *Putting Faith to Work*, Robert McCracken shared an interesting story about the late Leo Durocher (1905 – 1991), who was nicknamed Leo the Lip.

Durocher played in Major League Baseball as an infielder and then managed several teams during his career. He ranked fifth all-time among managers at the time of his retirement, and still ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in career wins by a manager. A controversial and outspoken character (hence the nickname), Durocher had a stormy career dogged by clashes with authority, umpires and the press.

He once was described as brash, arrogant, loud, impetuous, impatient and a merciless slave driver. His philosophy was wrapped up in his comment, “Nice guys finish last.”

He never dreamed that one day he would be a “nice guy” and finish first, and when that day arrived, he had matured enough to give the team credit. He explained that all he did was to wave them home from third base.

McCracken’s story shared another side of Durocher. It concerned the fabulous centerfielder Willie Mays, of the Giants. The “Say Hey Kid” won two National League Most Valuable Player awards, and shares the record of most All-Star Games played (24) with Hank Aaron and Stan Musial. Mays was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1979, his first year of eligibility.



*Manager Leo Durocher (left) shares a moment with his all-star centerfielder, Willie Mays.*

After joining the Giants, there was a period when Mays made only one hit in 26 times at bat. The old Durocher would have banished him, benched him, or sent him back to the minors, but he did none of these.

One day, the 20-year-old player came to his manager weeping, and begged to be benched. The new Durocher draped a fatherly arm about the strong young man’s shoulders, and said: “Don’t worry, Son. You are my centerfielder, even if you don’t get another hit all season.”

Mays strode from Durocher’s office with a buoyant step and promptly began hitting the ball. He became one of baseball’s immortals because – at a strategic moment in Mays’ life – Durocher was keen enough and understanding enough to do the right thing at the right time.

The lesson is instructive for us in Life Care and Century Park. A good leader understands his or her teammates, sees their potential, and knows how to press the right buttons at the right time.