

FORT WORTH JANUARY 6, 2017 2:43 PM

# From Jackie to Jews, exhibit shows baseball's melting pot



BY JEFF CAPLAN  
[jeffcaplan@star-telegram.com](mailto:jeffcaplan@star-telegram.com)

FORT WORTH — Being a young, sports-obsessed Jewish boy in America in the 1950s meant one thing.

You dreamed of being Sandy Koufax.

“If you were a Jewish kid, then you lived and breathed every time Sandy pitched,” said Rich Hollander, 68, who was born in Manhattan in 1948, lived much of his childhood in the San Francisco area and in 1981 made his final move with Tandy Corp. to Fort Worth. “For my bar mitzvah, I sent him a letter, and he sent me a signed photograph.”

Koufax was born in Brooklyn, and pitched for the Brooklyn Dodgers for three seasons before the franchise moved west to Los Angeles. The legendary southpaw became just as renowned for his stance not to pitch on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur as he was for mesmerizing performances that made him one of two Jewish ballplayers inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

“Sandy was one of us,” Hollander said. “We could be more than doctors, teachers and lawyers ...we could be ballplayers.”

Hollander currently serves as president of the Tarrant County chapter of B’nai B’rith, the oldest Jewish service organization in the world. He also remains a huge baseball fan. When he saw a segment on NBC’s *Today* show about a baseball exhibition in Milwaukee called “Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American,” he knew he wanted to bring the traveling exhibit to Fort Worth.

“

**HE DID A WHOLE YEAR'S WORTH OF SERVICE IN THE PEACETIME DRAFT, GOT OUT A WEEK BEFORE PEARL HARBOR AND THEN RE-UPPED RIGHT AS SOON AS PEARL HARBOR OCCURRED. HE WAS A REAL PATRIOT AND A TERRIFIC GUY.**

Dr. Bobby Brown on Hank Greenberg

Every 8 minutes, we respond to a disaster.



**HELP NOW** >





Aided by financial support from 15 members of Fort Worth’s Jewish community, a pop-up version of the “Chasing Dreams” exhibit will kick off a two-month run Sunday at Congregation Ahavath Sholom. Saturday evening, three local baseball titans will speak at the opening gala — former Texas Rangers President Tom Schieffer, longtime Fort Worth cardiologist and former New York Yankees great and American League President Bobby Brown and U.S. Rep. Roger Williams (R-Texas), a former TCU baseball standout who in 2015, along with Brown, was awarded the College Baseball Hall of Fame’s Distinguished Alumnus Award.

The exhibition celebrates the role baseball has played in the lives of minority communities as they sought to assimilate into American culture. For many in these communities — whether Jews, African-Americans, European immigrants in the earlier days or Dominicans, Puerto Ricans or Japanese more recently — baseball, as the exhibition explains, “represents a shared American identity, melding immigrants and natives. Yet it also sometimes highlights our differences. It is, in short, a mirror of America.”

The nationally acclaimed exhibit, organized by the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, features historical films and photographs, and interactive experiences celebrating such well-known baseball heroes as Hank Greenberg, the original Jewish baseball hero, Koufax, Jackie Robinson and Joe DiMaggio.

### Remembering Robinson

One iconic photograph among the many gloriously presented on 8-foot-by-16-foot displays is an overhead shot from the 1949 World Series featuring the New York Yankees against the Brooklyn Dodgers at Ebbets Field. Brown had just smacked a shot that would wind up being a triple. The photograph captures Brown sprinting to first base, with the Dodgers’ Robinson positioned between first and second base and Dodgers shortstop Pee Wee Reese.

Brown, the last living member of the Yankees’ 1947 championship team — he also won World Series titles with the Yankees in 1949, 1950 and 1951 before being called to service as a doctor in the Korean War — said what he remembers most about Robinson’s presence as Major League Baseball’s first black player wasn’t the discrimination Robinson faced in big-league cities across America or the epithets fans spewed toward him at ballparks.

“What I did notice was the tremendous black population that came to the ballgames,” Brown said. “The first thing that happened that we all noted was finally Brooklyn said there’s no reason Jackie should be living with some guy in the neighborhood when they went on the road, and they insisted he stay at the hotel with them.”

Just as blacks rallied around Robinson during the repressive Jim Crow era, Jews, many of whom desperately arrived in the United States as refugees during and following World War II, clung to players like Greenberg and later Koufax as a means to feel connected to America.

### A ‘sense of pride’

In 1984 when Brown, who is not Jewish, took over as president of the American League, a post that no longer exists, he selected Greenberg, who played from 1930-47 with a three-year interruption to serve in World War II, to be the honorary captain of the American League All-Star team.



**IF YOU WERE A JEWISH KID THEN YOU LIVED AND BREATHED EVERY TIME SANDY PITCHED.**

Rich Hollander, president Tarrant County B'nai B'rith

“I knew all about him. I knew he played in the Series in the ’30s against Dizzy and Paul Dean, and I knew that — once I got into professional baseball — he had a tremendous war record,” Brown said. “He was in the peacetime draft. Pearl Harbor was Dec. 7, 1941, and I think he was drafted in ’40. He did a whole year’s worth of service in the peacetime draft, got out a week before Pearl Harbor and then re-upped right as soon as Pearl Harbor occurred. He was a real patriot and a terrific guy.”

For generations, Jews have passed down baseball tradition and take particular pride in following Jewish ballplayers throughout the last century, from Harry “The Horse” Danning, Greenberg, Sid Gordon, Ken Holtzman and Al Rosen to Steve Stone, Kevin Youkilis, Shawn Green, Gabe Kapler and Brad Ausmus, the current manager of the Tigers.

These days, there are a number of Jews playing in the big leagues, including former Texas Rangers Ian Kinsler and Scott Feldman, Milwaukee Brewers slugger Ryan Braun, Houston Astros rising star Alex Bregman, Los Angeles Dodgers center fielder Joc Pederson and Toronto Blue Jays center fielder Kevin Pillar.

“Part of the idea [of the exhibit] is to have parents take their kids,” Hollander said, as he reflected back on his memories following Koufax as a kid. “I was very aware that he w

“The sense of pride it gav  
Jeff Caplan: 817-390-77

Every 8 minutes, we respond to a disaster.



American Red Cross

HELP NOW



**IF YOU GO**

**Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American**

**When:** Sunday through March 5 at Congregation Ahavath Sholom, 4050 S. Hulen St., Fort Worth.

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday; noon - 6 p.m. Sunday. Not open Saturday.

**Tickets:** \$5 (Children under 12 are free)

**Information:** 817-909-4354




**MORE FORT WORTH**

**SUGGESTED FOR YOU**

Report: Megyn Kelly Moving To NBC  
PoliticsChatter

Every 8 minutes, we respond to a disaster.



**American Red Cross**

[HELP NOW](#)

