

THEIR ONE SHOT

Lee Pfund, 1945 BY CARY OSBORNE

Memories don't fade for 95-year-old former Dodger Lee Pfund. He still remembers warming up in New York's Polo Grounds on a cold day, April 21, 1945. Pfund was summoned into the game in the seventh inning and sprinted to the mound to make his Major League debut.

The guys in the Dodger dugout weren't happy because they thought the 25-year-old rookie was putting on a show. What they didn't realize was that he was cold and wanted to get his legs going.

The first batter he faced was Steve Filipowicz. "I hit him in the back with my first pitch," Pfund recalled. "My very first pitch. You have to understand, I was not in the habit of doing that. I was not trying to knock somebody down with my first pitch. I was nervous, probably wasn't warmed enough."

The second hitter was Hall of Fame catcher Ernie Lombardi.

"He was a very slow runner, so when they played defense against him, infielders would play in short left, center and right field and would still be able to throw him out on a ground ball," Pfund said. "Mickey Owen was our catcher, and he came out and told me, 'You have to keep the ball low on him.'"

"The first pitch I threw to him, he hit out of the ballpark against me — foul. I threw another one lower, he hit another one out of the ballpark — foul. I pitched him low and outside, and he hit the next one deep to center field and a guy named (Goody) Rosen caught it easily. ... So that was my first inning in the big leagues."

Pfund is one of the oldest living former Major Leaguers. He resides just outside of Chicago, near where he grew up and close to Wheaton College — a school that considers him a legend. Pfund's son, Randy, was the head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers from 1992 to 1994 and later the general manager of the Miami Heat.

That 1945 season was Pfund's only stint in the Majors. He pitched in 15 games for the Dodgers, starting 10. He went 3-2 with a 5.20 ERA in 62 1/3 innings, but he walked more batters (35) than he struck out (27).

His first career start was one of his better games. On May 14, 1945, he pitched a complete game at Ebbets Field, allowing one



Lee Pfund, who pitched for the Dodgers in 1945, is greeted by Dodger great Maury Wills on August 3, 2012.

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earned run, seven hits and four walks while striking out four. The Dodgers beat Preacher Roe and the Pittsburgh Pirates, 4-1.

"I went in the dugout (the day of the game), and Leo Durocher was in street clothes and he said to me, 'Have you thrown?' And I said, 'No, I haven't.' And he said, 'You're pitching today,'" Pfund recalled. "It was the first chance I had to pitch in the big leagues as a starter.

"I walked a few men. I could see action in the bullpen and saw Leo come out of the dugout. I walked around the mound and wondered if this would be my last chance to finish a game. Before he got to the mound, Mickey beat him and he said, 'We'll get this guy out with curveballs.' Leo asked what Mickey said to me and I told him. We threw the curveballs, got out of the inning and won 4-1."

Pfund's Major League life was short-lived for one particular reason, which was also the reason why he eventually left the game in 1950. In 1945, Pfund recalls playing a midseason exhibition game against the Washington Senators to benefit the military. In the game, a slow grounder was hit to the third-base side, and Pfund went after it. When he went to field the



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ball, his left knee, which had a chipped bone and bothered him throughout his career, locked up. His right knee gave out. His season ended.

The knee issues followed him the rest of his playing career. Pfund's last season in pro ball was 1950.

In 1948, Pfund began coaching baseball at Wheaton College. He graduated from the school in 1949. He became an institution there as both its head baseball and head basketball coach. He coached baseball for 26 years, and the Thunder's home stadium is today named after him. He coached basketball for 26 seasons and guided his sons John, Kerry and Randy.

Prior to Randy becoming the head coach of the Lakers, he was an assistant under Pat Riley on the Showtime teams of the '80s. In 1988, Randy was able to get some tickets for his father for Game 1 of the 1988 World Series.

"We were sitting behind third base, down the left-field line, a little more up one level, but great seats," Pfund said. "I remember the occasion of the (Kirk Gibson) home run. God, it was a great experience."

Pfund last attended a game at Dodger Stadium on August 3, 2012 and was accompanied by Randy. And it's now been 70 years since he was a big leaguer. Pfund said he was stubborn toward the end of his career. He didn't want to give the game up. However, he still has the memories. ■

Pfund's son Randy, seen here behind his father, was the head coach of the Lakers from 1992 to 1994.

DODGER BLUE AT COOPERSTOWN

Sandy's 1965 Season

Craig Mulder, director of communications for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, writes about an item on exhibit in Cooperstown, New York.

Sandy Koufax dominated baseball during the mid-1960s, but his 1965 season stands out as possibly his best. He posted a 26-8 record that year with a league-low 2.04 earned-run average, striking out a then-record 382 batters. In the World Series that fall against the Twins, Koufax went 2-1 while allowing only one earned run in 24 innings, leading the Dodgers to the Fall Classic title. His Cy Young Award from the 1965 season is on display in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum's "One for the Books" exhibit, which celebrates baseball records and the stories behind them.



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