

‘Dodger Béisbol is on the Air:’ The Dodgers and the Emergence of Spanish-Language Sportscasting

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In 1981, rookie pitcher Fernando Valenzuela of the Los Angeles Dodgers captivated the baseball world when he won eight consecutive games to open that year’s campaign. While famed broadcaster Vince Scully skilfully maneuvered his southern California audience through each contest, the “other voice of the Dodgers,” Jaime Jarrin of the Spanish-language radio affiliate, attracted an audience whose numbers far eclipsed Scully’s. This period illuminated the emergence of Spanish-language sportscasting. More than forty radio affiliates, including such regions as the southwestern sectors of the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean area, tapped into the Dodgers’ Latin feed on games in which Valenzuela pitched.

This paper chronicles the development of the Dodgers’ Spanish-speaking baseball broadcasts which began in 1958. Rene Cardenas, a young journalist from Nicaragua at that time, pioneered the idea of daily bilingual broadcasts. “The Dodgers were coming to Los Angeles. There were so many Spanish-speaking people in Los Angeles. They were going to broadcast the games in English. Why not do it in Spanish?” he remembered. Cardenas, who initially anchored the broadcasts, also trained Jaime Jarrin. Jarrin eventually developed into one of radio’s top sportscasters.

To be sure, the prominence of the Spanish-language broadcasts did not begin with the Dodgers. Elio “Buck” Canel, whose voice between the 1930s and 1960s led

one United States diplomat to refer to him as “the best known American in Latin America,” served as the true pioneer. But Cardenas and Jarrin took this aspect of the media to a different level. Their broadcasts not only promoted Major League Baseball in Latin America, but also served as a bridge between two cultures whose relationship throughout the years had, too often, been tenuous. Moreover, the Dodgers, much to their credit, continued uninterrupted support for these transmissions for over thirty-five years.