

# NEWS RELEASE

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**Skirball Cultural Center to present**

**CHASING DREAMS**  
**Baseball and Becoming American**  
**April 7–October 30, 2016**

**Groundbreaking exhibition considers America's national pastime  
as an intersection of sport, identity, race, and ethnicity**

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center announces *Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American*, an exhibition that celebrates the sport as a unifying force in American life and the remarkable players who achieved so much more than batting averages and stolen bases. From Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax to Joe DiMaggio, Jackie Robinson, Roberto Clemente, Fernando Valenzuela, and Ichiro Suzuki, these players didn't just play the game—they changed it. For generations of American Jews and other minorities, they served as athletic, cultural, and ethical role models. Through more than 130 original objects—including game-worn uniforms, films and historic footage, awards, baseball cards, and signed memorabilia—the exhibition pays tribute to these major league game changers and, just as importantly, the community of fans they inspired. In its West Coast debut, *Chasing Dreams* will open at the Skirball on April 7, just as baseball season gets underway. It will remain on view through October 30, 2016.

*Chasing Dreams* is the first large-scale exhibition to illustrate America's national pastime as a pathway for American Jews and other immigrant and minority communities—including Italians, Asians, Latinos, and African Americans—to *become* American.

"*Chasing Dreams* weaves together baseball history with stories of immigration and integration into American life," explains Robert Kirschner, Skirball Museum Director. "It illustrates what it is about the game that has resonated so deeply with diverse immigrants and minorities since the nineteenth century—whether on the field or in the stands—helping them to navigate American culture, connect to the nation's collective values and traditions, and feel at home in American society. We hope that it will deepen our visitors' appreciation of the role that baseball has played in furthering equality and social justice."

*Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American* was organized by the National Museum of American Jewish History, in Philadelphia, PA. For its presentation at the Skirball, the exhibition will be

augmented by an array of rare Dodger memorabilia. Erin Clancey, Skirball Chief Curator, explains, “In addition to the Koufax items that will come from the original exhibition, it was important that we add even more treasured objects relating to our hometown heroes, such as the warm-up jacket of Dodger Fernando Valenzuela, the Mexican American pitcher who became a transnational sensation when he threw a 2-0 shutout against the Houston Astros on opening day 1981. His unique pitching style and charisma made him an instant celebrity.”

## Gallery Walkthrough

Visitors to the exhibition will explore baseball’s legends and myths, its heroes and flops, its struggles and its moments of triumph. In addition to its superstars, *Chasing Dreams* spotlights baseball’s extended family of vendors, team owners, minor leaguers, amateur players, scouts, broadcasters, journalists, novelists—and especially fans. Beginning with the Civil War era and continuing to the present day, the exhibition looks at how baseball has served as an arena in which values, identity, race, and ethnicity have been projected, contested, and occasionally solidified.

The exhibition is organized into four key sections:

The **Introduction** establishes the exhibition’s principal themes and immerses visitors in the early history of the game and its key figures. These include nineteenth-century player Lipman Pike; Broadway actress Helen Dauvray, after whom the championship Dauvray Cup was named; and Barney Dreyfuss, co-inventor of the World Series.

Using baseball as a lens through which to learn and understand the values of a rapidly changing nation, **Shaping Identity** profiles players such as Hank Greenberg and Joe DiMaggio, who demonstrated their mettle on the field while distinguishing themselves with their blend of patriotism and cultural pride. Also highlighted in this section are Moe Berg, who was not only a Major League Baseball (MLB) catcher, but also a spy for the United States government; and Thelma “Tiby” Eisen of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, who proved that women could play at a competitive level.

Baseball has long been intertwined with the history of racial, ethnic, and gender integration. Beginning with Jackie Robinson’s debut, **Overcoming Adversity** includes notable barrier-breakers such as Hank Aaron, Roberto Clemente, Ichiro Suzuki, and Justine Siegal, the first woman to pitch major league batting practice. Special attention is paid to Sandy Koufax, whose unparalleled athleticism yielded millions of flashbulb memories and whose decision not to pitch the first game of the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur unexpectedly made him a hero.

The final section, **Family and Community**, underscores how baseball has impacted communities, shaped relationships within families, and established new, personal meanings for generations of fans—whether in Little League, at summer camp, or through ballpark concessions. This section features fan memorabilia and an illustrated timeline of notable events in baseball history.

The gallery also provides opportunities for interactive fun. Visitors can stare down baseball’s heaviest hitters in “Catching History,” a simulation game created specifically for the exhibition in which they “field” balls and learn facts and trivia for every play. An interactive, touchscreen database entitled “People of the Game” provides encyclopedic information on approximately 200 Jews in the major leagues—each represented by a baseball card, along with biographical and statistical data—plus the opportunity to build one’s own virtual “dream team.” Finally, a major interactive station invites visitors to don a reproduction Sandy Koufax jersey, step onto the mound, and try their hand at pitching

like the indomitable Dodgers' ace.

## Related Exhibition and Programs

*Chasing Dreams* will be complemented by the companion exhibition *The Unauthorized History of Baseball in 100-Odd Paintings: The Art of Ben Sakoguchi*, featuring the work of renowned Los Angeles artist Ben Sakoguchi (b. 1938). Through a series of colorful, captivating, and often provocative paintings, the artist portrays true stories of baseball players and communities that have been overlooked, forgotten, or misrepresented. It will be on view April 7–September 4, 2016.

During the run of the two exhibitions, the Skirball will present several related public programs, including outdoor screenings of baseball favorites from recent decades, such as *The Sandlot* and *Field of Dreams*, as well as Tuesday matinees of 1940s and 1950s baseball classics, such as *The Stratton Story* and *Take Me Out to the Ballgame*. At a special UnCabaret comedy night hosted by **Beth Lapides**, baseball and sports will be the inspiration for original works to be performed by comedic talents such as **Erin Foley** and the **Sklar Brothers** (line-up subject to change). Especially designed for families, the Family Dugout will offer children and adult museumgoers a relaxing place to spend time together and share baseball memories. At the Skirball's annual summertime museum sleepover, baseball-inspired activities and an after-hours visit to *Chasing Dreams* will keep families busy overnight. Additional related programs TBA.

Finally, more than twenty-five gallery tours have been booked this spring for local students in Grades 5–12; more field trips will be scheduled in September and October. During their visit to the gallery, the students will explore baseball as a platform for civil rights and social change.

## Companion Volume and Merchandise

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated, 256-page book, featuring more than forty essays by notable authors, sportswriters, former players, and commentators. Contributors include novelist Philip Roth, MLB Official Historian John Thorn, and Ira Berkow, former *New York Times* sports columnist and recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting. Published by the National Museum of American Jewish History, the companion volume will be available for purchase at Audrey's Museum Store at the Skirball.

Audrey's will also carry contemporary and vintage design wearables, such as MLB t-shirts and Hebrew team caps, whimsical fan novelties, and a wide range of books, from team histories and player biographies to a children's baseball-inspired Passover Haggadah.

*CHASING DREAMS: BASEBALL AND BECOMING AMERICAN* WAS ORGANIZED BY THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY (NMAJH), PHILADELPHIA, PA. IT WAS CO-CURATED BY DR. JOSH PERELMAN, CHIEF CURATOR AND DIRECTOR OF COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS AT NMAJH, AND IVY WEINGRAM, ASSOCIATE CURATOR.

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**About the Skirball**

The Skirball Cultural Center is dedicated to exploring the connections between 4,000 years of Jewish heritage and the vitality of American democratic ideals. It welcomes and seeks to inspire people of every ethnic and cultural identity. Guided by our respective memories and experiences, together we aspire to build a society in which all of us can feel at home. The Skirball Cultural Center achieves its mission through educational programs that explore visual, performing, and literary arts from around the world; through the display and interpretation of

its permanent collections and changing exhibitions; through an interactive family destination inspired by the Noah's Ark story; and through outreach to the community.

### **Visiting the Skirball**

The Skirball Cultural Center is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday 12:00–5:00 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. Admission to exhibitions beginning March 1, 2016: \$12 General; \$9 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$7 Children 2–12. Exhibitions are always FREE to Skirball Members and Children under 2. Exhibitions are FREE to all visitors on Thursdays. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit [skirball.org](http://skirball.org).