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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

NY SPORTS | October 2, 2012, 10:24 p.m. ET

Nets Calling on Brooklyn Dodgers

By SCOTT CACCIOLA

Everything about the Brooklyn Nets seems brand new this season: new roster; new logo; new arena.

But the Nets also have been doing some digging into the past. Team officials have been reaching out to former members of the Brooklyn Dodgers to invite them to the Nets' season opener against the Knicks on Nov. 1 at Barclays Center.



Associated Press

A mural recalling the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team shown last month in Brooklyn.

Ralph Branca, who pitched for the Dodgers over 11 seasons, winning 21 games for the team in 1947, said he recently received a phone call from Barry Baum, the Nets' senior vice president of communications.

Branca said Baum told him the team would send a car service to chauffeur him to the game from his home in Westchester County. Baum declined to comment.

"I have no idea what's planned," Branca said. "I think they'll probably just introduce us before the start of the game."

It would be a symbolic gesture on the part of the Nets, who are filling the void as Brooklyn's first major-league sports team since the Dodgers vacated the borough for Los Angeles in 1957. At last week's Barclays Center ribbon-cutting ceremony, officials made repeated references to the Dodgers as a sort of homage to Brooklyn's proud sports heritage—one that the Nets, late of New Jersey, are hoping to revive.

Earlier

[In Brooklyn, Losing Is Unacceptable](#)

comment.

Branca, 86, said former teammate Joe Pignatano, a native Brooklynite, also plans to attend the season opener. Pignatano, a catcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1957, did not immediately return a call seeking

Branca said Baum asked him about the likelihood of former teammate Sandy Koufax coming to Brooklyn for the game. Koufax, the most iconic figure in Brooklyn sports, has been famously reclusive in retirement.

"And I said to him, 'Why don't you just go out on the street and look for wallets?'" Branca said.

Koufax, who grew up in Brooklyn and was a two-sport star at Lafayette High School, became a transcendent figure with the Dodgers, though he spent the bulk of his career with the team in Los Angeles.

A ceremony featuring the former pitcher would be a big deal—arguably a bigger deal than the rap impresario Jay-Z sitting courtside.

Jay-Z, who owns a small minority stake in the Nets, opened the arena last Friday with the first of eight concerts. During the performance, he brought a Jackie Robinson jersey to the stage. Robinson broke baseball's color barrier while playing for the Dodgers in 1947.

Branca did not describe himself as a fan of Jay-Z's music. "It's not music," he said. "It's just noise!"

Write to Scott Cacciola at scott.cacciola@wsj.com

A version of this article appeared October 3, 2012, on page A19 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Nets Calling on Brooklyn Dodgers.

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