

## *LIKE FRED AND GINGER, WE WERE CHEEK TO CHEEK...*

When I was a kid, growing up in the shank of the 1950s, there were two great debates that filled miles of column inches in New York City's *Daily Mirror*, a tabloid that The Old Man, a Brooklyn native, favored reading. After he discarded it my brother and I pawed through the 17 by 11 inch paper looking for sensational grisly crime photos and lurid cheesecake photos that were the hallmark of the genre. But let me get to the point.

The first was the ongoing debate between the inhabitants of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn as to who was New York's superior centerfielder, Willie, Mickey, or The Duke: The Giants' Willie Mays, Yankee Mickey Mantle, or Duke Snider of the Dodgers. All three were All Stars, won the World Series, and eventually entered Baseball's Elysian Field, Cooperstown.

It was the Big Apple's golden age of baseball with one of the three New York teams reigning as World Champions from 1949 through 1956. In its final three years as a three team town the Giants won in 1954, the Dodgers in 1955, and the Yankees in 1956. It would never happen again for in 1957 the Dodgers and Giants decamped for the West Coast.

That being said, even as the generations that watched the trio grace the greensward of the Polo Grounds, Old Yankee Stadium, and Ebbets Field ages and now fills seats in the Great Grandstand in the Sky, the debate over the better centerfielder will, unlike them, never die

The argument has even entered popular culture. Terry Cashman's song *Talkin' Baseball (Willie, Mickey and The Duke)* spins the tale of Major League Baseball ending each verse with the refrain, "Willie, Mickey and The Duke." I unquestioningly supported The Duke as a young Dodge fan but, in the fullness of my years, I have come to believe that it was Willie who reigned supreme.

The second debate held no interest for a ten year old kid but was close to the heart of my mother, an avid movie goer and a high society/fashion aficionado. This discussion centered about who was the most intriguing, stylish, fashionable, and well-dressed man of her generation. The major players in this sartorial debate were the Duke of Windsor, Cary Grant, and Fred Astaire.

When the Duke of Windsor was the Prince of Wales he was the most dashing, handsome, and eligible bachelor in the world. His very presence gave young ladies the vapors, set

their hearts flutter, made them light headed, and weak in the knees. So wildly popular was he that there was even a song entitled *I've danced with a man, who's danced with a girl, who's danced with the Prince of Wales* that reflected and affirmed his cult status.

But, as King Edward VIII of England, he felt that he could not do his job as he would have wished without the support of the woman he loved and so abdicated, giving up the title of King of the United Kingdom and the Dominions of the British Empire and Emperor of India for that of the Duke of Windsor. He also was reduced from being an Admiral of the Fleet to, in Merchant Marine terms, the third mate on an American tramp as the woman he loved was twice divorced American socialite Bessie Wallis Warfield Spencer Simpson.

The elegant and suave actor Cary Grant, with never a hair out of place and immaculate manicured nails, had an ivory smile. He was tall, trim, tanned, impeccably tailored, and handsome. Hands down Grant was simply one of the best dressed men of the era.

Then there was Fred Astaire, the most stylish, graceful, and athletic man ever to dance in top hat and tails. He was debonair, sophisticated, and could dance like no one else. In the movie *Top Hat*, he dances his signature number with Ginger Rogers while singing an Irving Berlin tune, *Cheek to Cheek*.

The song popped into my mind at the Great Pumpkin Match because of, oddly enough, Len Realty's forgetfulness. It seems that Len, believing that cleanliness is next to godliness, pulled off his rifle's cheek piece, inserted a bore guide, and scrubbed it out when he got home after the first day of shooting. When done he carefully packed it away for the return trip. Upon opening his rifle case at the range, he was shocked to find that cleanliness and forgetfulness also occasionally go hand in hand. While he packed his rifle, he forgot to pack his cheek piece.

Len, a gray haired shooter of the old school, uses a hoary old wooden rifle in an age of shiny aluminum stocks and was faced with having to withdraw from the match. I, another elder statesman of the sport, use a similar carbon based prehistoric stock, suggested that we share my cheek piece. I am a fast shooter and for the rest of the day I shot my string, rolled over, pulled out the cheek piece and handed it to the hovering Remaly who rushed to his point, slid the cheek piece into his rifle, shot his string, and returned it to me so we could repeat the cycle.

Len and I were in a tight race for second after iron sight day with me in the lead by a slim four points, but nothing is vouched safe in a metric match. It would have been a great story line if Len had been able to make up the difference and forge ahead to beat me with my cheek piece. While Len made a valiant effort to close the gap it was, alas, not to be.

After 82 years *Top Hat* and *Cheek to Cheek* remain Astaire and Rogers' best-known collaboration. One must wonder if the same might be said 82 years hence of the 2017 Great Pumpkin match when Remaly and Rocketto went cheek to cheek.