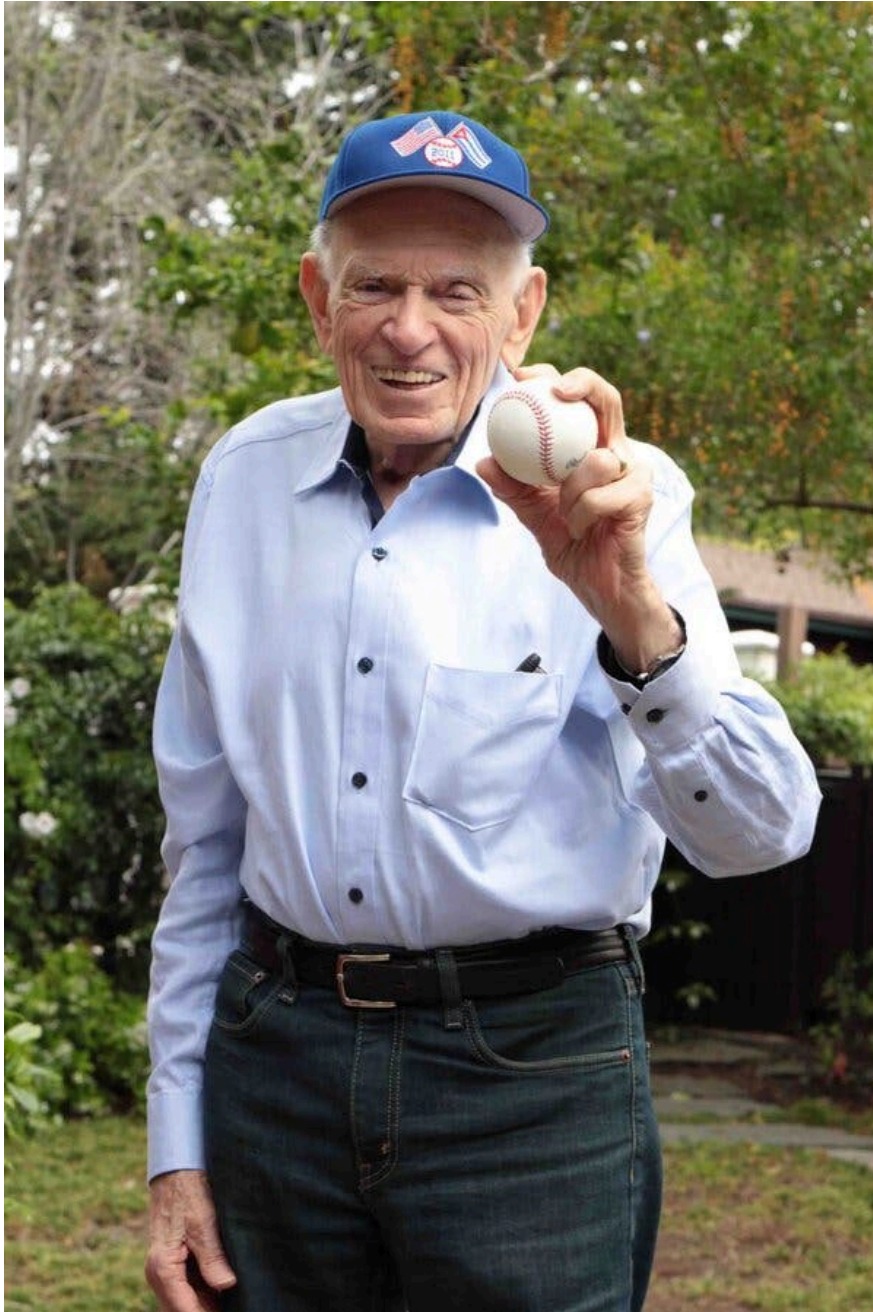


Arnold Hano, Author of a Bleachers' View Baseball Classic, Dies at 99

“A Day in the Bleachers” recalled what he saw, heard and felt at the Polo Grounds during a 1954 World Series game in which Willie Mays made “the Catch.”



Arnold Hano in 2015 outside his home in Laguna Beach, Calif. He had a long and prolific career as a writer, but he's best remembered for his account of a famous World Series game in 1954, as told from the bleachers. Credit...Loren A. Roberts/Evzone

By Richard Goldstein in THE NEW YORK TIMES Oct. 26, 2021

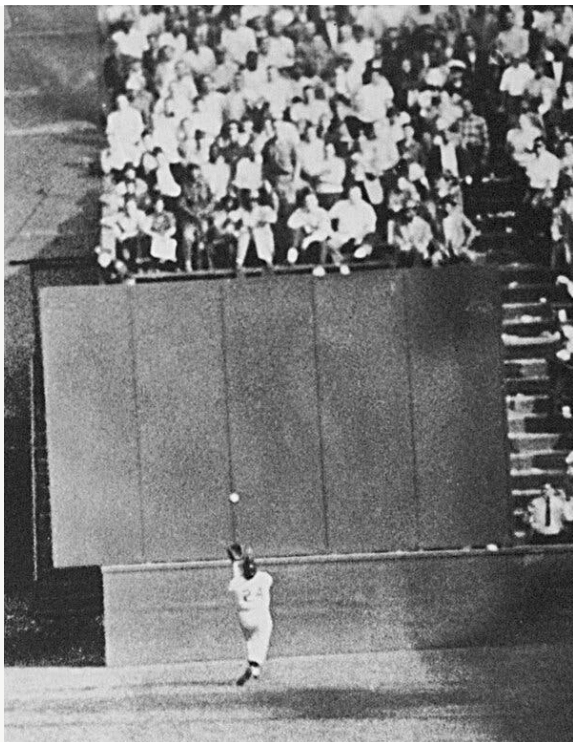
Arnold Hano was 4 years old when he became a New York Giants fan while his family was living a block from the Polo Grounds in Upper Manhattan.

It was the summer of 1926, and his grandfather Ike, a New York City police lieutenant, had given the boy his season pass for a seat in the grandstand above first base.

“It was a simple matter for my mother to get me off her hands by teaching me to cross streets by myself,” Mr. Hano (pronounced HAY-no) recalled long afterward. Unaccompanied, he attended about a half-dozen games that season.

A year later, he dispensed with the pass and, with spending money he had earned from odd jobs, bought a 50-cent ticket for a seat in the bleachers, having heard it was fun to sit there, out beyond the outfield. He began spending Saturday afternoons on those long narrow planks that passed for seats some 500 feet from home plate, growing to love the wide view of that cavernous, horseshoe-shaped ballpark that they afforded and to enjoy the characters he encountered there.

As he grew into adulthood, Mr. Hano retained his love for the Giants, and for the Polo Grounds bleachers. In 1954, while working as an editor in book publishing and living with his wife, Bonnie, in mid-Manhattan, he plunked himself down on one of those planks to watch the Giants face the Cleveland Indians in Game 1 of the World Series.



“Mays simply slowed down to avoid running into the wall, put his hands up in cup-like fashion, over his left shoulder, and caught the ball much like a football player catching leading passes in the end zone,” Mr. Hano wrote. Credit...Associated Press

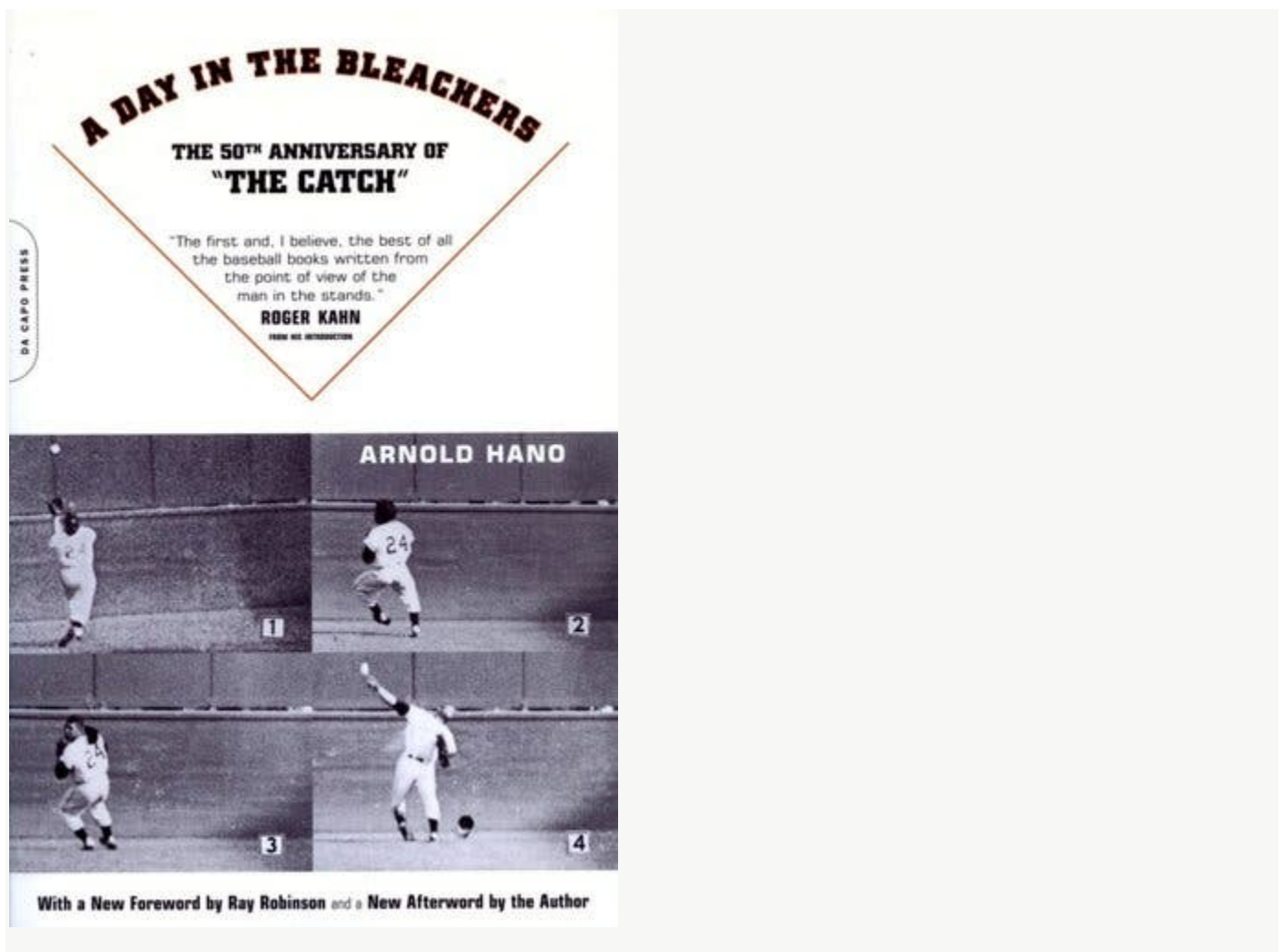
Mr. Hano had attended only one World Series game before that, the Giants’ loss to the Yankees in Game 4 of the 1936 Series. But he had long been intrigued by the aura of a Series opening game. He wanted to experience it and considered writing a magazine article about it, so he took notes in

the margins of his game program and of the pages of The New York Times that he had brought along to read while waiting for the game to start.

He jotted down impressions of his fellow bleacher denizens. There was the man who pleaded for contributions to his campaign to buy watches for the Giants players and coaches as a thank you for their surprising pennant victory. Another bleacher fan spent the afternoon trying to chat up the pitchers in the bullpens, which were on the playing field, just over the bleacher walls.

After the game, Mr. Hano expanded on his notes to write a 10,000-word account, weaving what he saw in the bleacher world with the action on the field while offering observations on the ballplayers' personas, the managers' strategies and his recollections of the baseball greats of years past. But seeking to sell the article to The New Yorker, he was turned down.

Undeterred, and galvanized by an extraordinary play by the Giants' Willie Mays in center field, Mr. Hano spent the next few weeks turning his musings into a book, "A Day in the Bleachers." Published in 1955, it would become a classic, hailed as a forerunner of the subjective New Journalism that flowered a decade later.



Mr. Hano's best known book was re-released in an anniversary edition in 2004.

Mr. Hano went on to become a prolific writer. But when he died at 99 on Sunday at his home in Laguna Beach, Calif., it was for that book that he was mostly remembered, with its riveting account of Mays' heroics that afternoon, on Sept. 29, 1954 — the play that came to be known as "the catch."

It was the top of the eighth inning, the Giants and the Indians were tied at 2-2.

With one out and runners on first and second, Cleveland's first baseman, [Vic Wertz](#), sent a drive to the farthest reaches of the Polo Grounds. Mays turned his back toward home plate, raced to the green barrier in right-center field and made a spectacular over-the-shoulder catch.

Then he uncorked an equally spectacular throw to the infield.

"Mays simply slowed down to avoid running into the wall, put his hands up in cup-like fashion, over his left shoulder, and caught the ball much like a football player catching leading passes in the end zone," Mr. Hano wrote.

"He had turned so quickly and run so fast and truly that he made this impossible catch look — to us in the bleachers — quite ordinary.

"Mays caught the ball, and then turned and threw like some olden statue of a Greek javelin hurler, his head twisted away to the left as his right arm swept out and around.

"Off came the cap, and then Mays continued to spin around after the gigantic effort of returning the ball whence it came, and he went down flat on his belly, and out of sight. This was the throw of a giant, the throw of a howitzer made human, arriving at second base."

The Giants won the game, 5-2, in the 10th on a three-run pinch-hit homer by the unheralded outfielder [Dusty Rhodes](#). They went on to sweep the favored Indians in four games.

Writing in [The New York Times](#) Book Review in August 1955, the novelist and longtime baseball fan [James T. Farrell](#) told how Mr. Hano, in his book, provided "vignettes of other bleacher denizens and writes us a dramatic account of the game itself — and, although we know its outcome, our interest is held here as it might in a novel."

And [Roger Kahn](#), author of another baseball classic, "The Boys of Summer" (1972), wrote in The Times in 1985, "Mr. Hano's writing style was informed and unpretentious, and you could feel those splintery old Polo Grounds bleachers beneath you and smell the mustard on the hot dogs, which were usually served up cold."

Mr. Hano went on to write more than 20 books, including biographies of Mays and other celebrated sports figures as well as novels, and he contributed articles to major national magazines, touching not only on sports but conservation, racial issues and the plight of migrant workers.

Arnold Philip Hano was born on March 2, 1922, in Manhattan. His father, Alfred, was a lawyer who worked as a salesman during the Depression; his mother, Clara (Millhauser) Hano, was a homemaker.

Mr. Hano graduated from Long Island University in Queens in 1941 with a major in English and saw combat in the Pacific with an Army artillery unit in World War II. He was managing editor of Bantam Books in the late 1940s, then editor in chief of the paperback line Lion Books before turning to freelance writing full time.

He received a 1964 Sidney Hillman Foundation award, named for the late clothing workers' union leader, for "The Burned Out Americans," an article in the men's magazine *Saga* telling of the plight of migrant workers.

Mr. Hano married Bonnie Abraham, his second wife, in 1951, when she was doing production work for Atlas Comics and he was with Lion Books, an allied company. She joined with him as Peace Corps volunteers for two years in the early 1990s in Costa Rica.

She survives him, together with their daughter, Laurel Inghram; his son, Stephen, and daughter Susan Hano, both from his first marriage, to Marjorie Mosheim, which ended in divorce; and a granddaughter. Stephen Hano confirmed the death. Mr. Hano's brother, Alfred, was killed in action during World War II on an Army Air Forces mission over Europe.

In an afterword to a 2004 paperback edition of "A Day in the Bleachers" commemorating the 50th anniversary of "the Catch," Mr. Hano told of the summer day in 1955 when [Don Liddle](#), the Giants' reliever who threw the pitch that wound up in Mays's glove, introduced his young son Craig to Mays. Mays gave the glove to the boy, since Mays was breaking in a new one. Craig Liddle went on to wear it in Little League games and later [lent it to the Baseball Hall of Fame](#), which put it on display.

For all its modern travails, baseball "still remains our greatest game," Mr. Hano wrote.

"It is also the simplest," he added. "It often comes down to a boy, his baseball glove and a hero."

Alex Traub contributed reporting.

Correction: Oct. 26, 2021

An earlier version of this obituary misstated the date of Game 1 of the 1954 World Series, in which Willie Mays made what became known as "the Catch." It was Sept. 29, not Sept. 19.

A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 28, 2021, Section A, Page 20 of the New York edition with the headline: Arnold Hano, Author Who Took You Out With the Crowd, Dies at 99. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) |