

# BASEBALL HISTORY

by  
Terry Cullen



Member, Society For American Baseball Research

## Big Winners Getting Scarce in Majors

Most baseball fans are aware that 1968 was considered to be the Year of the Pitcher. Batting averages plummeted and pitchers throughout the land had things pretty much their way. It was the year that Hall of Famer Bob Gibson twirled his way to a phenomenal 1.12 earned run average. It was also the year that Denny McLain of the World Champion Detroit Tigers became the first man in 34 years to compile a 30-win season in the major leagues. He gathered 31 wins against only 6 losses. McLain started 41 games and needed relief in only 13 of them that season.

25-Game Winners Over the Years 1901 - 2000								
Seasons	25+ Wins	W	L	GS	CG	RA	IP	Pct
1901 – 1934	98	27.7	11.4	37.7	30.7	7.7	335.7	.708
1935 – 1967	24	26.0	9.6	37.6	25.9	4.0	314.2	.730
1968 – 2000	10	26.1	8.6	38.9	21.4	0.1	306.6	.752
<b>2001 Top 7 Winners</b>		<b>20.9</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>230.6</b>	<b>.774</b>
<b>Key:</b>	<b>25-wins</b> = total number of pitchers who won 25-or-more games in a season <b>W</b> = average number of wins among those pitchers <b>L</b> = average number of losses among those pitchers <b>GS</b> = average number of games started <b>CG</b> = average number of complete games <b>RA</b> = average number of relief appearances <b>IP</b> = average number of innings pitched <b>Pct</b> = average winning percentage							

But things weren't always so. From 1901 to 1934, the 30-win plateau was equaled or bettered twenty times. In two of these years, 1904 and 1908, the 40-win barrier was breached by Hall of Famers Jack Chesbro and Big Ed Walsh, respectively.

Yet from 1935 through 2001, there has been only one 30-game winner. In fact, not only is the 30-game winner a thing of the past, the 25-game winner is hurtling toward extinction also.

Beginning in 1901 and including the two Federal League seasons of 1914 and 1915, a season total of 25 or more victories has been achieved 132 times by 81 different pitchers. However, since 1975, only three have been able to join this select group: Ron Guidry (25 – 3 in 1978), Steve Stone (25 – 7 in 1980), and Bob

## BASEBALL HISTORY

by Terry Cullen

Welch (27 – 6 in 1990). Welch has an added distinction, having racked up 25 wins in the fewest innings (238), while completing only two games.

What are the causes for the downturn in victory totals? Simply put, today's pitchers do not have as many opportunities for victories as did pitchers from the distant past. The pitchers of today get fewer starts, fewer innings pitched, far fewer complete games, and no relief appearances. The composite chart above illustrates these distinctions, breaking down the aforementioned 132 magical 25-or-more victory seasons. As a point of contrast we also show the 2001 season's winningest pitchers – Schilling, Morris, Johnson, Mulder, Clemens, Moyer, and Lieber.

### 25-Game Winners in Major Leagues Since 1968

Year	Pitcher, Club	Wins
1968	Juan Marichal, San Francisco Giants	26
1968	Denny McLain, Detroit Tigers	31
1969	Tom Seaver, New York Mets	25
1971	Mickey Lolich, Detroit Tigers	25
1972	Steve Carlton, Philadelphia Phillies	27
1974	Catfish Hunter, Oakland Athletics	25
1974	Ferguson Jenkins, Texas Rangers	25
1978	Ron Guidry, New York Yankees	25
1980	Steve Stone, Baltimore Orioles	25
1990	Bob Welch, Oakland Athletics	27



It is not likely that any contemporary starting pitcher would ever make the 39 to 45 regular season appearances that was the norm for starting pitchers in years past.

That said, all hope is not lost. Jack Chesbro (28 – 6 in 1902), Dazzy Vance (28 – 6 in 1924), Guidry and Welch piled up the win totals in only 35 appearances. And one name lost in the tangle of baseball history – Wild Bill Donovan – had a record of 25 – 4 in 1907, while gracing the mound with his presence a mere 32 times!

*This article originally appeared in the November 2001 issue of Bleacher Creature.*

Copyright © 2001 by Terry Cullen. All Rights Reserved.