

BASEBALL HISTORY

by
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Bob Feller ***Baseball Legend, American Hero***

A baseball wag once said, "There are only two seasons: there's baseball season and then there's the void."

For millions of grateful baseball lovers everywhere, the 2001 season has begun, and the void will not reappear until next October. And, as usual, Opening Day brings great anticipation, high expectations for the upcoming season and nostalgic remembrances of seasons past.



One such memory concerns perhaps the most outstanding Opening Day accomplishment of all time. On April 16, 1940, at Chicago's Comiskey Park, 21-year old Bob Feller of the Cleveland Indians pitched the only Opening Day no-hitter in major league history. At this stage of his career, Feller possessed an exceptional fastball, usually hurled in the high 90's with a lot of movement, a knee-buckling curveball tossed at varying speeds, and frequent control problems. This combination generally spelled trouble for opposing batsmen.

The victims of Feller's first gem were the Chicago White Sox, who were led by future Hall of Famer Luke Appling, Taffy Wright, and Moose Solters, who went on to bat .348, .337, and .308 respectively in the 1940 season. The eight White Sox position players on Opening Day would proceed to collectively hit a nifty .292 for the season. However, on this day all they could manage was a total of six-baserunners – one on an error and five via bases on balls. Eight Pale Hose batters went down on strikes as Rapid Robert completed his 1 – 0, no-hit victory in 2 hours and 24 minutes before a mere 14,000 attendees.

By Opening Day 1940, baseball fans had grown accustomed to phenomenal performances by the Iowa farm boy. For instance, Feller's professional career had an auspicious beginning. In an exhibition game in July of 1936, he struck out 8 St. Louis Cardinals in a 3-inning stint. Later that year in September, in his

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second major league start, he set the American League strikeout record when he mowed down 17 Philadelphia Athletics. Pretty heady stuff for a 17-year old!

Unfortunately, Feller would never manage to record a victory in a World Series game. He was 0 – 2 in the 1948 World Series, despite pitching a 2-hitter in the Series opener. The Indians emerged victorious, though, defeating the Boston Braves, 4 games to 2. Cleveland went back to the World Series in 1954, but Feller did not appear, as the Tribe was swept in four straight by the New York Giants.

Feller's career achievements include three no-hitters (the others came in 1946 and 1951), twelve one-hitters, seven league strikeouts titles, eight All-Star appearances, six 20-win seasons, six times the league leader in wins, and 44 career shutouts (nearly 10% of his starts). These numbers were more than enough to lead to Feller's election in 1962 to the Hall of Fame.

When looking over his career stats (below), keep in mind that this baseball legend is also an American hero. While serving on the battleship *USS Alabama* in the South Pacific during World War II, he earned eight battle stars for leading an anti-aircraft gun unit against the enemy. This patriotic involvement cost him nearly four full major league seasons in his prime – an estimated 75 – 100 wins and about 1,000 strikeouts.

Feller's Career Stats											
W	L	Pct	ERA		G	CG	IP		H	BB	SO
266	165	.621	3.25		570	279	3,827		3,271	1,764	2,581

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