

BASEBALL HISTORY

by
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One Time Only

Who hurled the greatest game in major league history? As with most baseball absolutes, the answer to this question is debatable. However, it's hard to argue with the sterling performance turned in by Harvey Haddix of the Pittsburgh Pirates on May 29, 1959. On that memorable occasion, the veteran left-hander – all 5'9" and 160 pounds of him – accomplished what no other major league pitcher has done before or since: he pitched perfect ball for more than nine innings. In fact, his streak of perfection continued until thirty-six straight batters had fallen victim to his unhittable (for one night only) repertoire.

His opponents that night were the mighty Milwaukee Braves, who were World Series champions in 1957 and National League kingpins in 1958. The homestanding Braves featured a strong cast led by Hall of Famers Eddie Mathews and Hank Aaron, as well as slugging first baseman Joe Adcock from Coushatta, LA. Despite their offensive muscle, the Braves managed to knock only two balls out of the infield for the first nine innings, while striking out eight times.

Lew Burdette, who threw three complete game victories in leading the Braves in the 1957 World Series, matched zeros with Haddix through 12 innings. Burdette shut the Pirates down in the top of the 13th. He allowed 12 hits in his 13 innings of work, but he issued no free passes. The Milwaukee infield supported Burdette by turning three double plays.

In the bottom of the 13th the Braves had the top of their order due to bat. Pirate manager Danny Murtaugh was without his star right fielder Roberto Clemente. He also had considered skipping Haddix in the pitching rotation because the left-hander had been ill with a bad cold and sore throat. With the 13th inning looming, Murtaugh tried to persuade his tiring left-hander to come out of the game, but Haddix insisted on taking the mound again.

Felix Mantilla, who had entered the game in the 11th, led off the inning with a ground ball to the usually reliable Don Hoak at third base. Hoak heaved the ball wildly – some players thought first baseman Rocky Nelson should have made the play – and the perfect game was gone. Next up was the powerful Eddie Mathews, one of only 18 major leaguers with over 500 career home runs. Mathews *sacrificed* Mantilla to second base. Home run king Hank Aaron was intentionally walked to

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set up a potential double play. Joe Adcock was next up for Milwaukee. He swung at a high slider and smashed the Braves' only hit of the evening – a 375-foot shot over the right centerfield fence for an apparent 3 – 0 Braves triumph. But due to a base running blunder involving Aaron and Adcock, Joe was ultimately credited with a double, and the Braves were officially 1 – 0 winners.

And so it was that 33-year old Harvey Haddix lost it all – perfect game, no-hitter, shutout and victory; but he won baseball immortality. He would end a fine 14-year career in 1965 with a 136 – 113 record and a 3.63 lifetime ERA.

As for Lew Burdette, he would later quip with tongue in cheek, "I'm the guy who won the greatest game ever pitched."

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		R	H	E
Pittsburgh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	12	1
Milwaukee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		1	1	0

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