



SATCHEL PAIGE

IP ERA W L SV ER
476 3.29 28 31 32 174

BB SO H
183 290 429

Leroy Paige was all angles, a jangling, fluid deliberate pitcher many regard as the game's greatest. He played his first organized game in 1922 when he was sixteen. He played his last, three scoreless innings versus the Athletics in 1965 at the age of 59. His life and career is the stuff of legend, probably more so than any other player. His prime years were spent in North Dakota, where he lived in a boxcar and hunted jackrabbits to feed his family. The nebulous nature of his statistics, that lifeblood of the game, has probably contributed more than anything to his saga, but most researchers agree on at least some points.

Satchel Paige worked in over 2,500 ball games over roughly 43 years, often pitching 125 games a year.

He won 2000.

He threw an estimated 250 shutouts and 45 no-hitters.

He was regarded at the time, by his peers, press, and fans, as having the most ferocious fastball of any man alive. Time has done little to diminish this perception.

For some twenty years he was a solo barn-stormer, advertised as "Satchel Paige, World's Greatest Pitcher, Guaranteed to Strike Out the First Nine Men." Rarely failing this, he made a nice living for himself. Often, he would wave his outfielders off the field and then strike out the side. Keep in mind, this was no charade of Globetrotters type exhibition. These home town duels between the local boys, with visions of pro contract in their Depression era eyes, and the outland hired gun, were taken very seriously. If Paige didn't perform, he was out his fee and occasionally had to leave town after dark, via side streets.

In 1934 he assembled the Satchel Paige All-Stars, which included Josh Gibson, Judy "Sweet Juice" Johnson, Harry Williams, and Cool Papa Bell. They played high talent exhibitions along the West Coast, many against major league all-stars, and won 128 while losing 23. One of these games bears mention. In Hollywood, Paige was opposed by the great Dizzy Dean, who was just coming off a 30-7 season and a superb World Series with the Cardinals. Dean was typical, giving up one earned run and striking out 15 of the Negro League's best. But Paige was unflappable, shutting out the major leaguers and fanning 17. After the game, Dizzy Dean told the crowd of reporters that Satchel Paige was the best pitcher in existence. Bill Veeck later said it was the greatest game he had ever seen.

In 1935, newly signed Yankee Joe DiMaggio was playing with a team of established major league stars around his home town of San Francisco. The Yankees, eager to see how their bonus baby could hit against the best, cabled Paige in L.A., where he was lounging poolside. After hearing the guarantee, Paige collared his catcher, Ebel Brooks, and headed for Oakland. There he filled out the "Paige All-Stars" with three

semi-pros and various petrified high-schoolers. He struck out 15, gave up three hits, and lost 2-1 on a wild-eyed throwing throwing error. DiMaggio, after fanning twice and fouling out, finally bounced a single as daylight was fading. The ecstatic Yankee scouts telegraphed New York: "DiMaggio all we hoped he'd be. Hit Satch one for four."

Satchel Paige had a fastball (Long Tom), an arm saving fastball (Little Tom), an up-shoot (The Barber), a "two-hump blooper", and a two motion hesitation pitch that must have been some epic change up. But it was Long Tom that could change the laws of physics. Biz Mackey, catcher for the Baltimore Elite Giants, recalled that Feller, Grove, and Johnson had the wicked hop on their fastballs that made them great pitchers, but only Satchel could make it disappear.

"Yes, disappear. I've heard about Satchel throwing pitches that wasn't hit but that never showed up in the catcher's mitt, nevertheless. They say the catcher, umpire, and the bat boys looked all over for that ball, but it was gone. Now how do you account for that?"

Satchel Paige finally entered the Major Leagues as a rookie in 1948, 40 plus years old and won 6 and lost 1, garnering several rookie of the year votes. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1971, and died June 8, 1982 in Kansas City. The chapters of this legend are many, among them dodging Maracaibo natives with blow-guns, playing as the hardball champion of Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and a close escape from irate fans armed with machetes, and being named "Long Rifle" in tribal legend by the North Dakota Sioux. I haven't the time, space nor inclination to elaborate on these tales, but I urge you, as a fan, to do so. Mythology is an indicator of a culture, and Baseball is no different. You could do worse than to begin with Leroy Satchel Paige.

READER MAIL

Mr. L. S. of Prineville writes: "I don't understand why so many non-dome teams still play on turf, when so many players are suffering turf related injuries. With all that money in long term contracts, is this wise?"

Mr. L. S. -- The baseball heirarchy never professed to be wise, or even near a clue, when it came to its butter (the fans being its bread). Artificial turf causes and aggravates injuries, changes the basics of our game, and is an aesthetic abomination. Fake grass in baseball? Why aren't we rioting in the streets?

The Royals and the Cardinals have at least a half-ass explanation. The Party Line -- "Our clubs have a diverse geographical fan base, with families coming from many miles. We can't afford rain-outs."

Look at the victims:

Jackson, Wilson, Oquendo, Davis, and so on. Who can afford this?

Mr. E. A. of Hillsboro queries: "Why the constant meddling? Now we must have interleague play, based on regional considerations? My Dodgers playing the Angels during the regular

season? I think I shall vomit on my shoes."

Mr. E. A. -- I agree. I shall hurl with thee. I, and every other fan who can sleep easy, secure in the knowledge of the difference between Smokey Joe Wood in 1912 and Gator Ron Guidry in 1978. This inter-league play rabble-rousing must be nipped, nipped in the bud. Money, surprise! is the motive here, but enough is enough. If any of you have time for meaningful correspondence, I have addresses.

Mr. D. L. of Astoria complains: "Why does everyone seem to think baseball in Chicago is blue and white? The Pale Hose still do play the game."

Mr D. L. -- You are absolutely correct. The White Sox deserve better. Perhaps if the Cubs dressed their players in short pants, staged a Disco Riot of two, and tanked a World Series, people would perceive them differently. But seriously, I thank you for the lovely letter, replete with visions of the bleachers with Veeck's showers and Ruth's between inning bar. A future column may spotlight the '59 Go-go Sox in your honor. One question - that rusty pipe in the scoreboard at the Comiskey? Just where did that thing GO?

BRAIN FLOGGAGE

Who are these guys?

1) I think I'll use a 3 wood here. We were talkin' the game? I hit almost 300 life, SB leader three times, and played in five decades!

2) Nice hack, Orestes. I think the guy by the barbeque needs medical attention. Which reminds me of a nightmare day game at Shibe Park. I'm going with a driver. Anyway, I'm facin' this cat I can't hit with a paddle, Newcombe maybe. Second at bat, I foul one off, BOOM, hits a fan, sweet old lady, breaks her nose. Awful. I take a strike, then one outside, then he jams me and I foul another one off, and BOOM, I clock this little old lady one more time as she's being carried out on a stretcher. And get this: She's the wife of the sports editor for the Bulletin! Talk about bad ink! Quit laughin', ain't funny, dammit.

3) I'm using my mulligan. Here's a sob story. Game 4 of the Series, we're up 8-0, I lose two balls in the sun, one to Cochrane, then one to some two year man named Mule, which ends up a three run inside the park homer.

4) Any of you guys seen my ball? My only claim to fame is the Giants traded Willie Mays for me.

5) I can two putt for a birdie, here. Not bad for a Texas boy who went 3 for 4 pinch-hitting in the Series to set a record.

Opening Day is April 5. Support your favorite team. If you don't have one, get one. If you have doubts, talk to Billy. He will be happy to tell you why Baseball is one of the finest things of any summer. Good luck, and Play Ball!

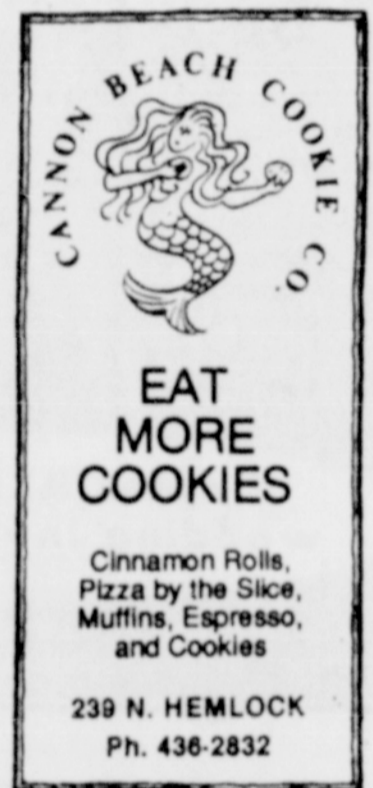
* HOW TO STAY YOUNG

1. Avoid fried meats which angry up the blood.
2. If your stomach disputes you, lie down and pacify it with cool thoughts.
3. Keep the juices flowing by jangling around gently as you move.
4. Go very light on the vices, such as carrying on in society. The social ramble ain't restful.
5. Avoid running at all times.
6. Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you.

(Signed) Leroy Satchel Paige

With many thanks to Richard Donovan for much information.

QUIZ ANSWERS PG 15



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