

MR. BASEBALL

Don Drysdale

Yrs W L Pct ERA G GS CG IP H SO Sho BA
14 209 166 557 2.95 518 465 167 3432 3084 855 2486 186

If you were a Dodger fan, this was like a death in the family. I am not. I was, however, a Baseball Fan when my father took me, my mother and sister, and his own reluctant self to a night game in newly constructed Candlestick Park in the early sixties. It was a (shudder) night game with the hated Giants, and the starters were fireballing right-handers, Don Drysdale and Juan Marichal, both destined for the Hall of Fame.

The impression these two immortals left on a ten year old mind was considerable. After all, the starters could have just as easily been two nondescripts such as Bob Miller and Jack Fisher. I felt blessed at the time. Still do, I suppose.

Marichal was overpowering, his astonishing high leg kick almost seeming a statement of Dominican pride. Normally he owned the Dodgers, he had a lifetime record of 37-18 against them. But on that frigid night, Big D was the better man. At six foot five, with an almost sidearm motion, he paralyzed right-handed batters. His delivery had the unnerving effect of appearing as if his right arm had two elbows. But beyond that was a special sort of charisma. He just looked like what Southern California was all about. A surfer on steroids playing ball for a hobby. Even the name Drysdale sounded like a town somewhere outside Barstow.

My father was not a baseball fan. I'm convinced it skips generations like Male Pattern Baldness. He took his family to the Stick that night for my benefit. Somehow he knew what it would mean to me. And for that (and a few other things), he has my gratitude.

"The trick against Drysdale is to hit him before he hits you."
-Orlando Cepeda

Somewhere around 1930, Gabby Street, the Cardinal manager, made nation headlines by catching a ball dropped from the Washington Monument. This stunt irritated the Dodgers, who were thus inspired to better this feat in Florida during spring training. Wilbert Robinson was the Bum's manager then, and as Babe Herman politely states, "He had his idiosyncracies." Nevertheless, Uncle Robbie was nobody's fool. He knew that a baseball dropped from an airplane, as was the plan, just had to be travelling at least three times as fast as Street's ball. As Herman recounts, "with some reluctance, Robbie agreed to put on a mask and chest protector and to be the hero of the hour."

We can imagine the scene, as the Dodgers gather around the Florida ballyard, waiting for Dan Comerford, the equipment manager, to launch the record making sphere from the circling aircraft. His first two attempts failed miserably, landing nowhere within a "half mile of the ball park." Since he had armed himself with only two baseballs, he was non-plussed until he noticed a sack of grapefruits on the floorboard of the airplane. With new resolve, the bombardier zeroed in on a perfect strike.

Robbie was now out near second base, spinning around, taking aim on what everyone assumed was a baseball, screaming, "I got it! I got it! Get away! Get away!" And as he made the reeling, staggering, miracle catch, the object of his exertions exploded in his hands, flattening him, and blinding him with juice and pulp. Robbie, stunned, was convinced this supersonic baseball had sheared his hands off at the wrist, and began shouting "Help, help, I'm bleeding to death! Help me, help me!"

The annals are unclear after this, but I think we can be assured that his players responded like the gentlemen that ballplayers were at that time, and went to his aid, and did not fall victim to paroxysms of laughter.

"Gimme good hitting and long hitting and let the rest of them managers get just as smart as they want."

-Wilbert Robinson

QUIZ TIME

- Who was the first player to be intentionally walked with the bases loaded?
 - Cap Anson
 - Nap Lajoie
 - Babe Ruth
 - Tris Speaker
- Who had the best career fielding average of catchers?
 - Gabby Hartnett
 - Ray Schalk
 - Jim Sundberg
 - Bill Freehan
- The most triples in the 50's, AL & NL?
 - Fox and Ashburn
 - Rivera and Burton
 - Vernon and Mustal
 - Minoso and Mays
- Who is the only Rookie to win a batting title?
 - Al Kaline
 - Tony Oliva
 - Al Rosen
 - Fred Lynn
- Every schoolboy knows Rod Carew stole home seven times in 1969, an AL record. But who did

it first for the NL mark?

- Joe Tinker
- Pete Reiser
- Max Carey
- Jackie Robinson

EXTRA CREDIT

Who was the first player to whiff 1500 times?

- Mickey Mantle
- Carl Yastrymski
- Chuck Klein
- Babe Ruth



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