

Babe Ruth's Forgotten Day



Everybody knows about the Bambino's called-shot homer in the 1932 World Series; but he topped that by far in '28—as this former pitching star gratefully recalls

By WAITE HOYT

as told to John M. Ross

Waite Hoyt, now a radio broadcaster for the Cincinnati Reds, spent 21 years in the major leagues, pitching for four American League and three National League clubs. He racked up a lifetime record of 237 wins and 182 losses, and in World Series competition was 6-4.

WHEN WORLD SERIES nostalgia warms up each October, the tale that always gets top billing is Babe Ruth's "called-shot" homer against the Chicago Cubs in 1932.

It unfolded like a storybook incident, with the Big Guy answering the taunts of a hostile Chicago crowd by pointing to the center-field bleachers and following up this threat with a tremendous home run to the target. Old-timers say this was the Babe's finest hour. I don't agree.

I remember an all-but-forgotten World Series day in which Ruth called not one, not two, but three home runs. And I remember it with gratitude because I was on the mound for the New York Yankees, and I needed every one of those homers to turn back the St. Louis Cardinals and give our club the world championship.

It happened in the fourth game of the 1928 World Series at Sportsman's Park, St. Louis. We had beaten the Cardinals in the first three games, and this was our chance for a sweep.

Ruth was the natural target of desperate Cardinal fans that day; the heroes always are. But the game has never produced a player who could so consistently respond to the challenge of a hostile crowd. Actually, he never really got mad at a crowd. He loved exchanging barbs with them, and his raucous voice often reached the last row of seats.

Almost from the minute the Babe took his post in left field, the bleacherites went to work on him. I was a bit busy on the mound. I had beaten Willie Sherdel, 4-1, in the opening game, and now I faced him again. Needless to say, I didn't have too much time to tune in on Ruth's exchanges with the bleacherites. However, the late Bill McGowan, who was umpiring at third, often told the story.

"The fans were giving the big fellow an unmerciful going-over," McGowan once told me. "He exchanged insults with them and sometimes would stick his thumbs in his ears and wiggle his hands like donkey ears. But the razzberries would only get louder. Finally, he turned to the crowd, pointed to the right-field fence, and made a high arc with a sweep of his hand."

The Babe made good his threat when he came to bat in the fourth inning. The Cards were leading, 2-1, and Ruth pounded the ball over the same

right-field barrier he had confidently pointed to.

That wasn't enough to quiet the Cardinals' supporters. They roasted Babe even hotter. Now Ruth turned and made another menacing gesture toward the fence. The customers booed.

It was the seventh inning when the Babe got his next turn at the plate, and the Cardinals were again in front, 3-2. Sherdel fired two strikes past the Big Guy. Ruth stepped out of the box to slow down the pitcher. As he got set to hit again, Sherdel whipped in another strike. The crowd bellowed in delight. Ruth only laughed.

"That big bloke can't do that," he said to the umpire. "That's a quick pitch."

Ruth was right, and plate umpire Cy Pfirman confirmed it, canceling the strike.

Anyone who knew the Babe could have read his mind while he waited for the next pitch. There was only one way for the great Ruth to respond to such a trick. Sherdel fired, and Ruth flicked his big club like it was a bamboo stick. The explosion stilled the audience, and the ball sailed out of sight over the right-field wall. The Babe was laughing so hard he could hardly run around the bases.

THE FANS didn't ease up on the Babe. Now they said he was just lucky. Sherdel had struck him out. He was a crybaby. He had the umpires helping him. So Ruth turned to his audience and made still another sign toward right field.

In the top of the eighth, with old Grover Cleveland Alexander hurling for the Cards, Ruth sent home run No. 3 screaming out of the park.

There was a sprinkling of applause for Babe from the bleacher patrons this time, but most of the fans preferred to shower him with torn-up score cards and paper cups. Ruth had one more dramatic stroke up his sleeve, however.

With one out remaining in the game, and the Yankees ahead, 7-3, the Cardinals' Frankie Frisch sent a long foul ball twisting down the left-field line. I looked over my shoulder and saw that Ruth didn't have much of a chance of getting to it. The Babe didn't agree. He raced for the ball as though his life depended on the catch. Picking his way through the littered outfield and keeping his eyes glued on the ball despite a continuous paper shower, Ruth crossed the foul line and with a final lunge plucked the ball out of the grandstand.

We won the game and, of course, the Series. And a lot of fellows pounded my back that day for having chalked up the sixth Series win of my career. But that was the Babe's game—his finest—and, for some strange reason, his forgotten day.

COVER:

As Ozzie Sweet's vivid photo shows, the hunting season is here. Finding the best places to pursue the sport is made easy in our article on hunting grounds (see p. 8).

Family Weekly

October 2, 1960

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