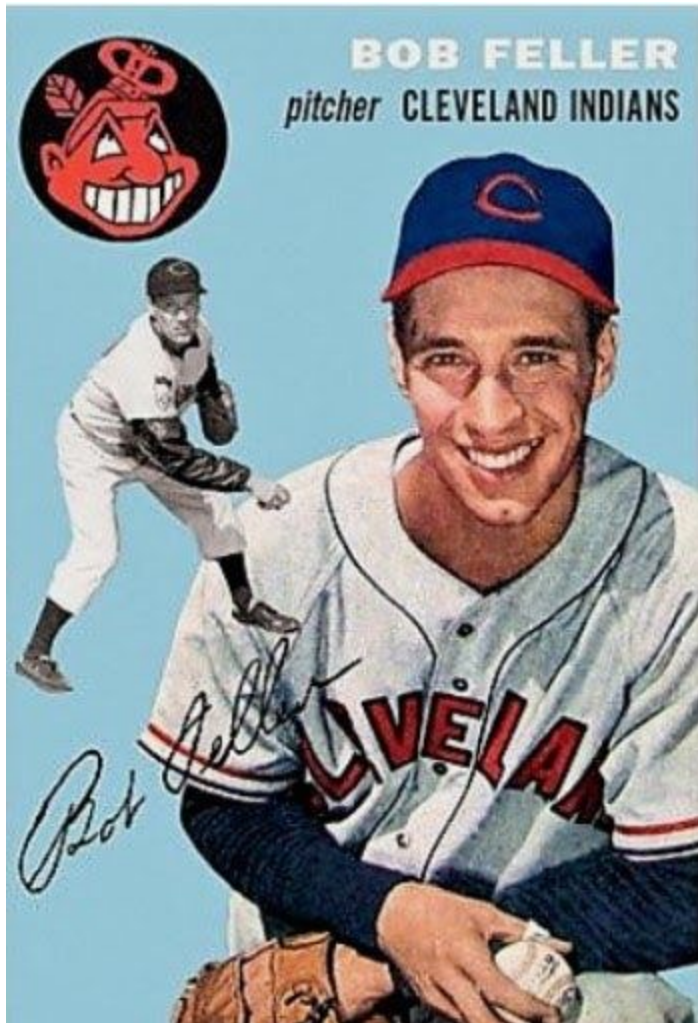


May 20, 2001

BOB FELLER: NO-HITTERS ALWAYS REQUIRE 'LUCK'



By JOE CAPOZZI
Palm Beach Post

PALM BEACH GARDENS -- "No 'happy birthdays.' No 'Happy New Year's.' None of that crap. Just 'Bob Feller, Hall of Fame.' Otherwise, we'll be here all day."

Joe Brumerloh, the assistant on the receiving end of those orders, looked down and nodded his head. As for the 82-year-old man seated next to him, the one ready to face a lineup of 100 people snaking through an atrium outside Macy's?

That's not some Gardens mall curmudgeon. That's "Robert Rapid" Feller, and he still likes to work fast.

Always has. On July 19, 1936, he made his major-league debut for the Cleveland Indians. A 17-year-old schoolboy from Van Meter, Iowa, he retired the Washington Senators in order in the eighth.

A month later, he made his first start and struck out 15 St. Louis Browns. And on Sept. 13 of that year, he struck out 17. He went on to strike out 2,581 and pitch three no-hitters and 12 one-hitters among his 266 wins - all while spending his prime ages, 23 through 26, aboard the battleship Alabama in the South Pacific during World War II.

Before Randy Johnson and Nolan Ryan and Sandy Koufax, it was Bob Feller who epitomized the strikeout pitcher. (And before Feller, it was Walter Johnson.)

And that's why clerks from Express and Nine West leaned on railings Saturday to watch 300 people pass through the Field of Dreams memorabilia store to collect his autograph. Out of baseball since 1956, Feller went the distance, stopping once to dial his cell phone and tell his wife, Anne, he'd be back home today.

"That's Anne with an "e," he says. "We live in Gates Mill, Ohio, with our cat, Felix. Out there in the middle of the woods. I got a couple of barns and I'm adding on because I collect antique farm machinery. Tractors mostly."

Feller passes on a question about Rick Ankiel, who, like Feller in 1936, was a teenage phenom. "I haven't followed him that closely, so I can't make an intelligent comment," he says.

Although Feller played in an era of tamer media scrutiny, he was able to do what Ankiel hasn't - overcome wildness that many attribute to pressure on a young athlete.

"I wasn't very nervous because I always wanted to be a major-league ballplayer since I was 9 years old," says Feller, who signed his first contract for \$75 a month plus a bonus of \$1 and a baseball autographed by the Indians.

"After you pitch an inning or two or three hitters, that nervous tension wears down. You get apprehension like that the beginning of every season, but it wears off rapidly."

Feller is asked what he thought about the no-hitter thrown on May 12 by A.J. Burnett of the Florida Marlins.

"There's a lot of luck in baseball," he replies, not demeaning Burnett's performance but speaking from experience, mainly the dozen no-nos he lost in the late innings.

"The one in Chicago (April 16, 1940), the last out was a tough play. It was the only opening day no-hitter thrown and the second baseman made a great play to his left. Ray Mack. He knocked the ball down and picked it up barehanded and threw out the runner . . .

"My no-hitter in Yankee Stadium (April 30, 1946), the first hitter was Phil Rizzuto and he hit a high hopper over my head and the shortstop, Lou Boudreau, had to field it barehanded and he threw him out by half a step. And in the ninth inning, I had to pitch to Tommy Henrich, (Joe) DiMaggio and Charlie Keller to complete the no-hitter, which luckily I did."

The line of autograph seekers waits. Feller allows a few more questions. Will the Marlins stay in Florida?

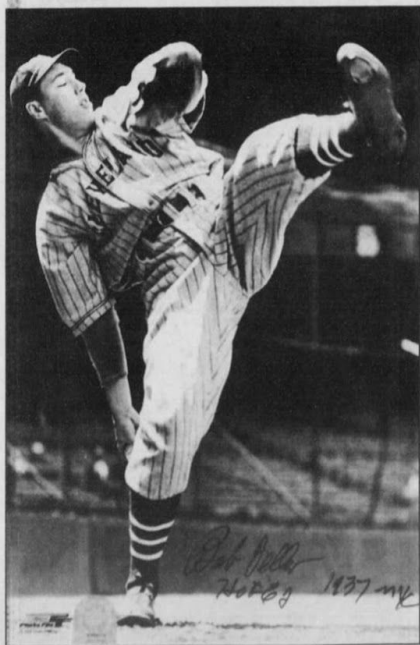
"I hope so," he says. "My son, Steve, is a Marlins fan. He's an architect in Winter Park . . . Major League Baseball probably expanded too much. I think they may have to contract some and wipe out some teams but that's going to be a big problem and it's not going to be done very fast."

What do you think about Florida's promising young pitching staff? Feller can't help but answer by reliving the last time he was at Pro Player Stadium - Game 7 of the 1997 World Series.

"They blew it by changing pitchers in the ninth," he says. The "they" being his Indians.

Feller grips a pen in his fingers, which once held so many strikes and is now bent from arthritis. He allows one final question: To whom would you like to pitch today?

"McGwire," he says without a second thought. "I'd throw him those high fastballs right under his letters and keep him inside."



Baseball legend Bob Feller signed this photo at the Gardens mall, a shot of him warming up as a Cleveland Indian in 1937, for a lineup of about 100 people who wanted a moment of the 82-year-old's time.

Feller: No-hitters always require 'luck'

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On baseball
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