

## Opening Day

by

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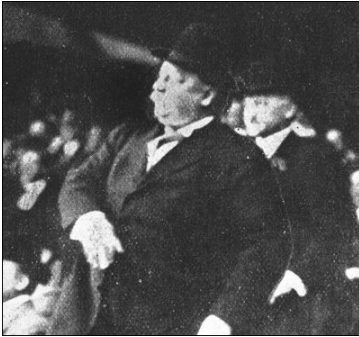
Among the many things that distinguish baseball as the National Pastime is the ritual of Opening Day. With the beginning of every season, each player starts with a clean slate and each team begins its march to October. It marks the beginning of spring. It offers a sense of adventure – perhaps a turnaround for a favorite team or player, perhaps the first game in a new ballpark, or perhaps the continuation of a traditional rivalry like the Red Sox and the Yankees.

The fans never know what to expect on Opening Day. There have been several spectacular performances that occurred on Opening Day.

- In 1900, Morris “Doc” Amole opened the American League season with a no-hitter for Buffalo against Detroit. Since the American League was not yet considered a major league that year, Amole’s performance has largely been forgotten.
- On April 16, 1940 Bob Feller threw the only Opening Day no-hitter on record against the Chicago White Sox at old Comiskey Park. The 21-year old braved 35° temperatures, a scant two-day rest, and a test of will against Chicago’s Luke Appling, who fouled off 15 pitches in a single at-bat before he was retired.
- The New York Giants’ Red Ames nearly threw a perfect game on Opening Day in 1909 until his bid for history was broken up by Brooklyn in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning with one out. The following two seasons Ames flirted with making history on Opening Day, throwing seven no-hit innings in 1910 and six no-hit innings in 1911. Incredibly Ames lost all three of these Opening Day games.
- Babe Ruth owns several remarkable Opening Day performances. As a pitcher he won three Opening Day starts in 1916, 1917, and 1918. As a hitter he became one of only twelve men to hit 5-for-5 on Opening Day on April 13, 1921. He also hit the first home run in the history of Yankee Stadium – a three-run shot on Opening Day in 1923.



- Ted Williams enjoyed Opening Day more than most hitters. He compiled an Opening Day record of .449 with three home runs and 14 RBIs in 14 games. He also collected at least one hit in every Opening Day game he started.
- Hank Aaron tied Babe Ruth as the all-time home run leader, clouting homer number 714 on April 4, 1974 in Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium.



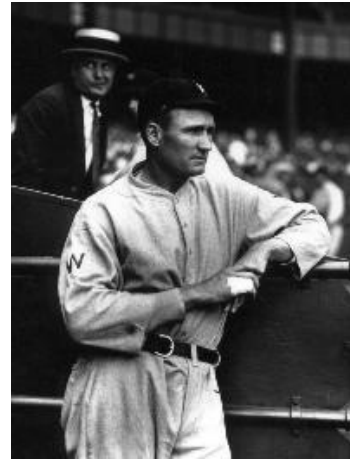
Opening Day took on special significance in Washington, D.C. when President William Howard Taft threw out the ceremonial first pitch on April 14, 1910 at old League Park in the nation's capital. While he was not the first sitting President to attend a major league baseball game – that honor goes to Benjamin Harrison, who watched Cincinnati beats Washington on June 6, 1892 – Taft established a tradition that still exists today.

*President William Howard Taft was the first President to throw out the first ball of the baseball season on April 14, 1910. He threw a pitch to the Washington Senator's Opening Day pitcher, Walter Johnson.*

Since Opening Day 1910 there have been eleven U.S. Presidents who have thrown out the season's first pitch. Only one president has failed to throw out an Opening Day pitch while in office – Jimmy Carter. Franklin D. Roosevelt holds the record with eight Opening Day tosses. Republicans boast a 13 – 10 record in presidential openers while the Democrats are 11 – 13. Richard Nixon was the last president to throw out a first pitch in Washington, D.C. until the 2005 season opener when George Bush will help the Washington Nationals open their inaugural season.

Taft threw out his first pitch to long-time Washington Senators pitcher Walter Johnson, who has the distinction of having started more Opening Day games for his team than any other pitcher (14). His record was later tied by the Phillies' Steve Carlton. Included in Johnson's Opening Day feats were seven shutouts. His final Opening Day appearance was a 15-inning marathon on April 13, 1926 against the Philadelphia Athletics that the Senators finally won, 1 – 0.

The following table shows the most Opening Day starts by team through the 2004 season.



*Walter Johnson*



<b>American League (1901 – 2004)</b>	
<b>A's</b>	Dave Stewart (6)
<b>Angels</b>	Mike Witt (5)
<b>Blue Jays</b>	Dave Steib (4)
<b>Devil Rays</b>	Wilson Alvarez (2)
<b>Indians</b>	Bob Feller (7)
<b>Mariners</b>	Randy Johnson (6)
<b>Orioles</b>	Mike Mussina, Jim Palmer (6)
<b>Rangers</b>	Charlie Hough (6)
<b>Red Sox</b>	Roger Clemens (8)
<b>Royals</b>	Kevin Appier (7)
<b>Tigers</b>	Jack Morris (11)
<b>Twins</b>	Brad Radke (8)
<b>White Sox</b>	Billy Pierce (7)
<b>Yankees</b>	Whitey Ford, Ron Guidry, Mel Stottlemyre (7)
<b>National League (1900 – 2004)</b>	
<b>Astros</b>	Shane Reynolds, J.R. Richard, Mike Scott (5)
<b>Braves</b>	Warren Spahn (10)
<b>Brewers</b>	Teddy Higuera, Ben Sheets, Jim Slaton (3)
<b>Cardinals</b>	Bob Gibson (10)
<b>Cubs</b>	Fergie Jenkins (6)
<b>Diamondbacks</b>	Randy Johnson (6)
<b>Dodgers</b>	Don Drysdale, Don Sutton (7)
<b>Giants</b>	Juan Marichal (10)
<b>Marlins</b>	Josh Beckett, Kevin Brown, Ryan Dempster, Alex Fernandez, Charlie Hough (2)
<b>Mets</b>	Tom Seaver (11)
<b>Phillies</b>	Steve Carlton (14)
<b>Pirates</b>	Bob Friend (7)
<b>Padres</b>	Randy Jones, Eric Show (4)
<b>Reds</b>	Mario Soto (6)
<b>Rockies</b>	Mike Hampton, Darryl Kile, Kevin Ritz (2)

*Data Source: Baseball National Hall of Fame*