



## Ty Cobb: Home Run Hitter

by

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When one mentions the name Ty Cobb it generally brings to mind a fierce competitor sharpening his spikes on the dugout steps before the game, preparing to slash the ball into right field so he could steal 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Perhaps the last thing that one would associate with the Georgia Peach would be home runs.



Cobb played the majority of his career during the Deadball Era when home runs were rare. But in 1925, major league baseball was in the fifth year of the new *lively ball* which ushered in the home run as the newest offensive weapon in a team's arsenal. It was the beginning of a new dimension in the game, one flashed across the headlines of newspapers nationwide by Babe Ruth, who hit 29 home runs in 1919 and 54 home runs in 1920.

Now Cobb was an outstanding hitter, but he was known for hitting for average, not power. He claimed eleven batting titles between 1905 and 1928 and was a .366 lifetime hitter. He batted over .400 three times in his career – 1911 (.420), 1912 (.409), and 1922 (.401).

Cobb did capture a league home run crown in 1909 with 9 dingers, but was never known as a home run hitter.

Which is why Cobb created such a stir in 1925 when the 38-year old player-manager of the Detroit Tigers announced to the press in St. Louis that he intended to hit home runs during the Tigers' upcoming series with the St. Louis Browns.

During the first game on May 5<sup>th</sup>, Cobb was 6-for-6 with three home runs, tying the modern major league record with three home runs in a game and setting a new major league record with sixteen total bases, adding a double and two singles to his three round-trippers. In the second game on May 6<sup>th</sup>, Cobb added two more home runs and established another record with five home runs in two consecutive games. A.C. "Cap" Anson had five home runs in two games in 1884.



Prior to Cobb's performance, the only players to hit three home runs in a single game in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were George Kelly of the New York Giants, Ken Williams of the St. Louis Browns, and Cy Williams and Walter Henline, both of the Philadelphia Phillies.

As far as hitting five home runs in two consecutive games, the previous record was four held by Babe Ruth of the Yankees, Ken Williams of the Browns, and Charles Walker of the Athletics.

Cobb's two-day performance also established several other records:

- It brought his lifetime number of extra base hits to 1,456 to surpass Honus Wagner's mark of 1,448
- It brought his career total bases to 5,139
- It brought his lifetime number of singles to 2,695
- It brought his lifetime total hits to 3,684
- It brought his career total runs scored to 1,951
- It established a new American League record for career at-bats with 9,970

Cobb matched his career best of 12 home runs in a season that he first achieved in 1921, but were well behind league leaders Bob Meusel of the New York Yankees in the American League (33) or Rogers Hornsby of the St. Louis Cardinals in the National League (39). He would hit a total of 117 homers during his 24-year career.

But Cobb achieved more than showing that "any old fool can hit home runs," a comment clearly designed to insult Babe Ruth, a player Cobb despised for changing the nature of the game he felt he had shaped. Cobb regained the admiration of the press and the national spotlight, if only for a moment. He would remain in the game for another four seasons and would be elected to the Hall of Fame in its inaugural class in 1936 – alongside Babe Ruth.