



Collin's Corner

20-Game Winners on Last Place Clubs

by Lee Collin
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Winning 20 games in a season is a revered milestone in professional baseball, even in the best of circumstances and with championship clubs. Winning 20 games in the majors on a losing ballclub is very tough to accomplish. Winning 20 in a season with a last-place club is one of baseball's truly rare accomplishments.

Only seven pitchers in the 20th century won 20 games for a club that finished in the cellar. Ned Garver, Frank "Noodles" Hahn, Scott Perry, Howard Ehmke, and Hollis "Sloppy" Thurston join two modern-day Hall of Famers, Steve Carlton and Nolan Ryan in this accomplishment.

Noodles Hahn, a durable left-hander, had probably his best season with last-place Cincinnati in 1901. He completed 41 of his 42 starts that year to lead the National League. His 22 wins represented 42% of the Reds' wins for the year.

After bouncing around with three different clubs in three seasons, Scott Perry put up all-star numbers with Connie Mack's last place Philadelphia Athletics in 1918. He chalked up 20 wins with a 1.98 ERA, while also leading the league in losses, games started, complete games and innings pitched.

Howard Ehmke's only 20-win season came as a member of the cellar-dwelling Boston Red Sox in 1923. Ehmke's 20 wins was the American League's fourth-best total. The following year he led the league in losses with 17.

Hollis Thurston won 20 for the 8th place Chicago White Sox in 1924. Arm troubles prevented him from ever reaching that level again.

Ned Garver's big season came in 1951 with the woeful St. Louis Browns, as he posted a record of 20 – 12, as the Browns went 52 – 102. Garver thus became the only 20th century pitcher to win 20 for a team that lost 100 games.

Steve Carlton, amazingly, went 27 – 10 for the 1972 Phillies, who won a total of only 59 games for the season. Carlton led the National League in wins, ERA and strikeouts, while recording a win in 45.7% of his team's victories.

Nolan Ryan's only career 20-win season came in 1974 with the last-place California Angels. The flame-throwing Ryan posted an ERA of 2.89 and struck out a league-leading 367 batters. The season included Ryan's third no-hitter, as he shut down the Twins on September 24th, 4 – 0.

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Year	Player	W	L	ERA	Team	W	L
1901	Noodles Hahn	22	19	2.71	Cincinnati	52	87
1918	Scott Perry	20	19	1.98	Philadelphia (AL)	52	76
1923	Howard Ehmke	20	17	3.78	Boston (AL)	61	91
1924	Hollis Thurston	20	14	3.80	Chicago (AL)	66	87
1951	Ned Garver	20	12	3.73	St. Louis (AL)	52	102
1972	Steve Carlton	27	10	1.97	Philadelphia (NL)	59	97
1974	Nolan Ryan	22	16	2.89	California	68	94

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