

BASEBALL HISTORY

by
Terry Cullen



Member, Society For American Baseball Research

Complete Games

In the long history of major league baseball only 209 pitchers (excluding active hurlers) have reached the 150 win plateau. Thirty-five of these men spent the bulk of their careers between 1876 and 1900. Among them was Will White, who, during his ten year career, started 401 games and finished 394 of them, for a completion percentage of a whopping 98.3%. *

Another astounding career feat was performed by the immortal Cy Young. The career leader in games started (816), Young threw his last complete game at the age of 44, in 1911, for a final total of 750 complete games (91.9%). No one is within 110 games of this career total.

As the game has evolved, so has conventional wisdom regarding how best to use a particular pitcher's skills. Now, a complete game by a starting pitcher is an exception to the rule. For instance, in 1998, only two pitchers – Scott Erickson (11) and Curt Schilling (15) had more than 10 complete games. In addition, 20 of the 30 major league pitching staffs that year had a total of 10 complete games or less.

Considering pitchers with 150 or more career wins, the following tables also reflect the changing philosophy regarding starting pitchers.

Table One represents the average wins, games started, complete games and complete game percentage of the pitchers of each time period. Pitchers are grouped in the period in which each spent the most time.

Table One					
Period	No. of Pitchers	Wins	GS	CG	CG%
1876 - 1900	35	226.8	401.3	365.6	91.1%
1901 - 1919	38	212.1	372.4	280.3	75.3%
1920 - 1945	53	199.9	374.8	208.1	55.5%
1946 - 1960	17	217.3	430.6	193.7	45.0%
1961 - 1972	20	205.5	438.9	156.6	35.7%
1973 - 2000	46	211.7	485.8	124.2	25.5%

BASEBALL HISTORY

by Terry Cullen

Table Two shows the pitchers with the highest and lowest complete game percentage of each time period.

Period	Pitcher	Wins	GS	CG	CG%
1876 - 1900	Will White	227	401	394	98.3%
	Adonis Terry	205	407	268	65.8%
1901 - 1919	Jack Taylor	151	286	278	97.2%
	Bill Doak	169	369	162	43.9%
1920 - 1945	Wes Farrel	193	323	227	70.3%
	Bump Hadley	161	355	135	38.0%
1946 - 1960	Bob Feller	266	484	279	57.6%
	Bob Buhl	166	369	111	30.1%
1961 - 1972	Juan Marichal	243	457	244	53.4%
	Jim Perry	215	447	109	24.4%
1973 - 2000	Ferguson Jenkins	284	594	267	44.9%
	Jimmy Key	186	389	34	8.7%

Source: *The Sports Encyclopedia: Baseball* by David S. Neft, Richard M. Cohen, and Michael L. Neft (St. Martin's Press, 1999)

* -- Prior to 1883 pitchers delivered the ball underhanded. In 1883 the modern day pitching distance of sixty feet, six inches was instituted. Until 1891 substitutions were not allowed except for injury or with permission of the opposing team.

This article previously appeared in the March 2001 issue of Bleacher Creature.

Copyright © 2001 by Terry Cullen. All Rights Reserved.