

= Bob Feller =

Robert William Andrew Feller ( November 3 , 1918 ? December 15 , 2010 ) , nicknamed " The Heater from Van Meter " , " Bullet Bob " , and " Rapid Robert " , was an American baseball pitcher who played 18 seasons in Major League Baseball ( MLB ) for the Cleveland Indians . Feller pitched from 1936 to 1941 and from 1945 to 1956 , interrupted only by a four @-@ year sojourn in the Navy . In a career spanning 570 games , Feller pitched 3 @, @ 827 innings and posted a win ? loss record of 266 ? 162 , with 279 complete games , 44 shutouts , and a 3 @. @ 25 earned run average ( ERA ) .

A prodigy who bypassed the minor leagues , Feller first played for the Indians at the age of 17 . His career was interrupted by four years of military service in World War II , during which time he served as Chief Petty Officer aboard the USS Alabama . Feller became the first pitcher to win 24 games in a season before the age of 21 . During his career , he threw no @-@ hitters in 1940 , 1946 , and 1951 . Feller also recorded 12 one @-@ hitters ( his no @-@ hitters and one @-@ hitters were records at the time of his retirement ) . He helped the Indians win a World Series title in 1948 and an American League @-@ record 111 wins and the pennant in 1954 . Feller led the American League in wins six times and in strikeouts seven times . In 1946 , he recorded 348 strikeouts , a total not exceeded for 19 years . An eight @-@ time All @-@ Star , Feller was ranked 36th on Sporting News 's list of the 100 Greatest Baseball Players and was named the publication 's " greatest pitcher of his time " . He was a finalist for the Major League Baseball All @-@ Century Team in 1999 .

Baseball Hall of Fame member Ted Williams called Feller " the fastest and best pitcher I ever saw during my career . " Hall of Famer Stan Musial believed he was " probably the greatest pitcher of our era . " He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962 on his first ballot appearance ; at the time only three players ever had a higher percentage of ballot votes . He was elected the inaugural President of the Major League Baseball Players ' Association and participated in exhibition games which featured players from both the Major and Negro Leagues . Feller died at the age of 92 in 2010 .

= = Early life = =

Feller was born and raised with his sister , Merrilee , in Van Meter , Iowa . His father , William , ran the 360 @-@ acre ( 150 ha ) family farm , and his mother , Lena ( Forret ) , was a teacher and registered nurse . Feller played catch daily with his father . He had learned to throw a curveball by the time he was eight years old , and could throw a ball 270 feet ( 82 m ) when he was nine . To assist his son , Feller senior started growing wheat on his farm , a less labor @-@ intensive crop than corn , to allow his son more time to play baseball . Originally the Fellers were Roman Catholics but converted to Methodism after Feller 's father was reprimanded by their parish priest for letting him play on Sundays . Feller later suggested that his arm strength and ball speed during his major league career came from his childhood work milking cows , picking corn , and baling hay . He recalled his childhood fondly : " What kid wouldn 't enjoy the life I led in Iowa ? Baseball and farming , and I had the best of both worlds . " The family 's farm is on the National Register of Historic Places .

Feller began to play American Legion Baseball in the nearby town of Adel at the age of 10 ; the following year , his father built a baseball diamond on the farm . The diamond was named Oak View Park and included a pitching mound , scoreboard and concessions area . Feller and other players formed a team , the Oakviews , consisting of semi @-@ pro and high school ballplayers . Feller played primarily as a shortstop or outfielder , and emulated Rogers Hornsby 's batting stance . From the age of 15 , he began to pitch for the Oakviews after a starting pitcher was injured ; while doing so , Feller continued to play American Legion baseball . His catcher during this period was Nile Kinnick , who later became a member of the College Football Hall of Fame .

A student at Van Meter High School , Feller was a starting pitcher for the school 's baseball team . During this time he continued to play on the Farmers Union team in the American Amateur Baseball Congress , and had 19 wins and four losses for Farmers Union one season . He also was the

starting center for the high school basketball team . By the age of 16 , Feller possessed what critics judged a high quality fastball ; major league scouts traveled to Dayton , Ohio to watch him in the annual national baseball tournament . After the game , several big league clubs offered signing bonuses with their contract offers , but he had already been signed to a professional contract with the Cleveland Indians .

= = Professional career = =

= = = Teenage phenomenon ( 1936 ? 41 ) = = =

In 1936 , Feller was signed by Cy Slapnicka , a scout for the Indians , for one dollar and an autographed baseball . While scouting Feller , Slapnicka said , " This was a kid pitcher I had to get . I knew he was something special . His fastball was fast and fuzzy ; it didn 't go in a straight line ; it would wiggle and shoot around . I didn 't know then that he was smart and had the heart of a lion , but I knew that I was looking at an arm the likes of which you see only once in a lifetime . " Feller was assigned to the Fargo @-@ Moorhead Twins and was to report there after finishing the high school semester . Slapnicka was later named general manager of the Indians and transferred Feller 's contract from Fargo @-@ Moorhead to the New Orleans Pelicans . He was planning to add Feller , along with outfielder Tommy Henrich , to the major league roster after a few exhibition and semi @-@ pro games without visiting either farm club . By doing so , the Indians would be in violation of Major League Baseball 's rule stating that , at the time , only minor league teams could sign amateur baseball players to contracts . After a three @-@ month investigation , concluding in December 1936 , about whether the Indians broke any Major League Baseball rules by signing Feller , Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis disagreed with the argument presented by Slapnicka and Indians president Alva Bradley , but awarded both Feller and Henrich free agency and required the club to pay a \$ 7 @, @ 500 fine . Landis made the decision partly due to the testimony of Feller and his father , who wanted his son to play for Cleveland and who had also told Landis he would take the issue to court . Feller elected to remain with the Indians but Henrich joined the New York Yankees . Sports columnist Joe Williams wrote , " For \$ 7500 the Cleveland Indians received \$ 500 @, @ 000 worth of publicity . ... I feel pretty sure Mr. Alva Bradley , president of the Indians , will admit this is the cheapest investment he ever made in publicity . "

Feller joined the Indians and made his Major League debut on July 19 , 1936 in a relief appearance against the Washington Senators . A month later on August 23 , Feller made his first career start against the St. Louis Browns . Indians manager Steve O 'Neill had Denny Galehouse warmed up in the bullpen in case the 17 @-@ year @-@ old Feller had early troubles , but he struck out all three batters he faced in the first inning , and recorded 15 strikeouts in earning his first career win . His strikeout total was the highest for a ( starting ) pitching debut . Two weeks later , he struck out 17 batters , tying a single @-@ game strikeout record previously set by Dizzy Dean , in a win over the Philadelphia Athletics . He finished the season with a 5 ? 3 record , having appeared in 14 games ; he had 47 walks and 76 strikeouts in 62 innings . Feller 's fame reached such a level that when he returned to Van Meter for his senior year of high school , the governor of Iowa greeted him . His record @-@ setting rookie year made him , according to baseball writer Richard Goldstein , " the best @-@ known young person in America , with the possible exception of Shirley Temple . " Feller 's entrance to the big leagues was later described :

It is difficult to imagine now what a marvel Feller was when he burst upon the scene in 1936 , a callow youth of 17 . Many athletes are great . Bob Feller was seminal . In the long @-@ ago time , unlike nowadays , it was unheard of for teenagers to succeed in the big top of athletics . Children politely waited their turn in the sunshine . Perhaps in all the world only Sonja Henie had previously excelled at so young an age in any sport that mattered , and , after all , she was but a little girl wearing tights and fur trim , performing dainty figure eights . Feller dressed in the uniform of the major league Cleveland Indians , striking out ? fanning ! ? American demigods ... in the only professional team sport that mattered then in the United States .

As the 1937 season began , Feller appeared on the cover of the April 19 , 1937 issue of Time magazine . In his first appearance of the season on April 24 , Feller suffered an injury to his elbow while throwing a curveball . He spent April and May healing the arm , and in May graduated from high school ; the ceremony aired nationally on NBC Radio . In mid @-@ May , the Indians considered ending Feller 's season early . " We 're not taking any chances on that arm and we 're not going to allow him to pitch again until the last trace of soreness has disappeared " , said Slapnicka . On May 18 Feller appeared in his first game since April 24 but did not record an out . He did not pitch again until June 22 , when he recorded two innings , then returned to normal pitching duties on July 4 .

On October 2 , 1938 , Feller was the starting pitcher against the Detroit Tigers . Detroit 's Hank Greenberg was two home runs short of Babe Ruth 's then @-@ single @-@ season record of 60 home runs . By the ninth inning , Feller had recorded 16 strikeouts , one fewer than the MLB record in a nine @-@ inning game . He tied the record when he struck out Detroit 's Pete Fox and passed it , to set a modern major league record of 18 strikeouts , when he struck out Chet Laabs for the fifth time that day . Greenberg said , " Feller 's curve was jumping wickedly and with that and his fast ball , he was murder . " Feller did not earn a win , however , as the Indians lost , 4 ? 1 . " It was one of those days when everything feels perfect , your arm , your coordination , your concentration , everything . There was drama in the air because of Greenberg 's attempt to break Ruth 's record , and the excitement grew even greater when my strikeouts started to add up " , Feller said . For the 1938 season , Feller led all pitchers with 208 walks and 240 strikeouts . In 1939 , Feller received his first career Opening Day start against the Tigers after a match against the Browns was rained out . He won the game 5 ? 1 , after allowing three hits . On Mother 's Day , Feller pitched against the Chicago White Sox with his family in attendance . One pitch was fouled off by Marv Owen into the seats and into the face of Feller 's mother ; he went on to win the game . Feller finished the 1939 season having led the AL in wins ( 24 ) , complete games ( 24 ) and innings pitched ( 296 @.@ 2 ) and led the majors for a second consecutive year in both walks ( 142 ) and strikeouts ( 246 ) .

Opening Day of the 1940 season featured a no @-@ hitter from Feller against the Chicago White Sox . Feller was assisted by Indians second baseman Ray Mack when he made a diving play to record the final out . This is the only no @-@ hitter to be thrown on Opening Day in major league history . He followed his no @-@ hitter with a six @-@ run , three @-@ inning performance in his next start , however , in a game against the Detroit Tigers . By the end of the season he had a 27 ? 11 record , his win total the best in the majors that season and a career @-@ high for Feller . He accomplished a pitching triple crown for the 1940 season as he led the AL in ERA ( 2 @.@ 61 ) , wins ( 27 ) and strikeouts ( 261 ) ( the latter two led the entire majors ) . Feller also led the majors with 31 complete games and 320 @.@ 1 innings pitched , and won the Sporting News Player of the Year Award . Feller later assessed his first few years in the majors : " I relied on the catcher too much . It 's swell to have a good catcher calling ' em for you , but the pitcher should take responsibility on his own shoulders . "

Due to Feller 's pitching speed , Lew Fonseca was commissioned by the Office of the Commissioner to pit Feller 's fastball against a Harley @-@ Davidson motorcycle in a speed trial . The test was conducted in Chicago 's Lincoln Park and required Feller to hit a target 12 inches ( 300 mm ) in diameter , 60 feet 6 inches ( 18 @.@ 44 m ) away . The motorcycle passed Feller going 86 miles per hour ( 138 km / h ) and with a 10 foot ( 3 @.@ 0 m ) head start but the ball beat the bike to the target by three feet ( 0 @.@ 91 m ) . Feller 's throw was calculated at the time to have reached 98 @.@ 6 mph ( 158 @.@ 7 km / h ) , and later 104 mph ( 167 km / h ) using updated measuring methods .

Feller again led the majors in wins ( 25 ) , strikeouts ( 260 ) , innings pitched ( 343 ) , and walks ( 194 ) for the 1941 season . His six shutouts were an AL @-@ best on the season . That year , Joe DiMaggio talked about Feller 's pitching ability , stating " I don 't think anyone is ever going to throw a ball faster than he does . And his curveball isn 't human . " Feller appeared in the May 12 , 1941 , edition of Life , which said : " ... he is unquestionably the idol of several generations of Americans , ranging in age from 7 to 70 . They represent of city , town , and village in the land , speak of him familiarly as ' Bob ' , and talk about him by the hour , with enthusiasm . "

= = = Military service ( 1941 ? 45 ) = = =

The United States entered World War II with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7 , 1941 . Feller heard about the bombing while returning from a visit to his terminally ill father at Des Moines to Chicago where he was to sign a new Indians contract . Two days later , he volunteered for the United States Navy , becoming the first American professional athlete to enlist . Originally he tried to enlist as a fighter pilot but failed hearing tests . Feller attended basic training at Norfolk Naval Base and served as a physical fitness instructor there . He also pitched in baseball games hosted by the military . Although he had received a military exemption owing to his father 's failing health , he wanted to serve in combat missions . Feller said , " I told them I wanted to ... get into combat ; wanted to do something besides standing around handing out balls and bats and making ball fields out of coral reefs . " Feller was assigned to the USS Alabama ; he had hoped to serve on the USS Iowa , but nearly all servicemen from Iowa had requested a place on that ship , and Feller was not selected .

Shortly before Feller left for combat , his father died of brain cancer in early January 1943 . Five days later he married Virginia Winther whom he met while in Florida for spring training ; she was a student at Rollins College . After the marriage , Feller returned to service as Gun Captain aboard the Alabama and kept his pitching arm in shape by throwing near a gun turret . Feller and the Alabama crew spent most of 1943 in the British Isles along with USS South Dakota , but in August were reassigned to the Pacific Theater of Operations . Feller 's first taste of direct combat was at Operation Galvanic in November 1943 . The Alabama also served during Operation Flintlock while primarily being used as an escort battleship in 1944 . Feller participated in the Battle of the Philippine Sea before his combat duty ended in January 1945 ; he spent the rest of the war at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station as an instructor .

When the war ended , Feller was discharged as a Chief Petty Officer on August 22 , 1945 . Feller was decorated with six campaign ribbons and eight battle stars while serving on missions in both the Pacific and North Atlantic , and he was made an honorary member of the Green Berets later in life .

= = = Return to Cleveland ( 1945 ? 48 ) = = =

Upon arrival in Cleveland after his discharge , Feller was honored with a civic luncheon on August 24 , 1945 , with more than 1 @, @ 000 people in attendance at the Carter Hotel . Feller said to the crowd : " The real heroes didn 't come home . " Later that day , the city held a parade and Feller was the starting pitcher in the Indians ' game against the Detroit Tigers . Feller allowed four hits in the game and earned a win in the Indians ' 4 ? 2 victory . " I was so tired from all the receptions I didn 't know if I could finish the game " , Feller said . For the 1945 season , he appeared in nine games and notched a 5 ? 3 record with 59 strikeouts and 2 @. @ 50 ERA .

Before the 1946 season , Feller signed a \$ 50 @, @ 000 contract for the year , including a bonus for attendance , as the Indians felt many were attending baseball games primarily to see him ; he was offered \$ 100 @, @ 000 by Jorge Pasquel to play in the Mexican League , but declined to leave the States again . Feller recorded his second career no @-@ hitter on April 30 , 1946 , against the New York Yankees . He allowed five walks and struck out 11 Yankees . Feller said of the game , " The no @-@ hitter on opening day in Chicago is the one that gets all the attention . But my no @-@ hitter at Yankee Stadium was against a much better team than the White Sox . There was no comparison . I had to pitch to Tommy Henrich , Charlie Keller and Joe DiMaggio in the ninth inning to get the Yankees out . " At one point during the season ( as Feller thought he might be nearing Rube Waddell 's AL record for strikeouts ) , Feller confirmed Waddell 's record of 344 strikeouts with the AL office as opposed to 349 . In his last appearance of the season on September 29 , Feller threw five strikeouts against the Detroit Tigers to set the then @-@ AL single @-@ season strikeout record . During the 1946 season , he registered career @-@ highs in strikeouts ( 348 ) , games started ( 42 ) and games pitched ( 48 ) , shutouts ( 10 ) , complete games ( 36 ) and innings pitched ( 377 @. @ 1 ) ? all major league bests that season . Feller finished 26 ? 15 with an ERA of 2 @. @

18 , the latter a career @-@ low . Nearly 20 years later , Feller recalled , " For the 1946 season , though , the Indians were so thin in pitching that Boudreau decided I was to pitch every fourth day , regardless of rainouts , open dates , or anything else . "

Feller began 1947 by setting up a barnstorming tour , pitting his own selected team against a Negro league baseball team led by Satchel Paige . Feller 's team included Stan Musial and Phil Rizzuto while Paige 's included Buck O 'Neil and Hilton Smith . They played in 22 games across the United States , and at the conclusion of the tour , each player had made nearly as much money as the St. Louis Cardinals made as a team for their 1946 World Series win . Against the St. Louis Browns in Feller 's second start of the season , he extended his major league record for one @-@ hitters when he recorded his ninth one @-@ hit game in a shutout win on April 22 . In a June 13 game against the Philadelphia Athletics , having already amassed 10 strikeouts through four innings , Feller fell from the mound , which rain had made slippery , and injured his back . " My fastball was never the same after that " , Feller said . He ended the season as the AL leader in wins ( 20 ) and shutouts ( 5 ) , and led the majors in strikeouts ( 196 ) and innings pitched ( 299 ) .

= = = World Series champion ( 1948 ) = = =

In 1948 , the Indians had one of their finest seasons , though Feller experienced a season that had more ups and downs . Feller was selected to represent the AL All @-@ Stars for the seventh time in his career in the 1948 All @-@ Star Game but declined to play , feeling that his performance did not warrant selection as an All @-@ Star . At one point he was winless for a month , and by July 22 , his record was 9 ? 12 . Lou Boudreau , the Indians ' player @-@ manager , declared " we sink or swim with Feller " , and continued to pick him . Feller proceeded to go 10 ? 3 for the remainder of his appearances to finish the season with a record of 19 ? 15 , a league @-@ leading 164 strikeouts , and a 3 @.@ 56 ERA . The Indians won a one @-@ game playoff against the Boston Red Sox to determine the team to represent the AL in the World Series ; it was the first time the team had won the pennant since the 1920 season .

Feller started Game One of the 1948 World Series against the NL @-@ champion Boston Braves . In the eighth inning , Feller and Boudreau appeared to have picked off the Braves ' Phil Masi as he attempted to steal a base , but umpire Bill Stewart ruled he was safe . Masi scored the only run of the game on a Braves single . Despite surrendering just two hits on 85 pitches for the game , Feller and the Indians lost 1 ? 0 . Later , photographs showed that Boudreau had tagged Masi out by two feet . Feller said , " Stewart was the only guy in the park who thought he was safe . " Feller was again named the starter in Game Five , which set an attendance record ; the 86 @, @ 288 fans in Cleveland was the then @-@ largest attendance at a baseball game . The Braves put up three runs in the top of the first inning . The Indians came back to tie the game , but by the seventh inning the Braves regained the lead for good and Feller was removed from the game . He finished having allowed eight hits and seven earned runs . Lemon won Game Six and gave the Indians their second World Series championship . After the Indians returned to Cleveland and were given a victory parade , Feller said , " This is as good as being President . "

= = = Later years ( 1949 ? 56 ) = = =

After taking a pay cut to start the 1949 season , Feller pitched on Opening Day against the St. Louis Browns . During the game , he injured his shoulder and missed the rest of April . His performances were mixed in the rest of the season and he finished the year with a 15 @-@ 14 record and a 3 @.@ 75 ERA . Before the 1950 season , Feller suggested to Indians management he take a pay cut , and did so . Indians general manager Hank Greenberg said , " He himself made the suggestion . In fact , he offered to take more than the 25 per cent maximum pay cut allowed . There was absolutely nothing to it . We all agreed quickly on the figure after Bob showed up yesterday . " In a win over the Detroit Tigers in the second game of a doubleheader , Feller became the 53rd pitcher to win 200 games . Throughout the year , players noted that his velocity had returned , and , winning games with finesse rather than power , he was again effective . He finished the year with 16 wins and a 3

@. @ 43 ERA .

On July 1 , 1951 , Feller recorded his third career no @-@ hitter against the Detroit Tigers . " I was depending on my slider and I didn 't begin to think of a no @-@ hitter until about the seventh inning . I tried to keep it in the back of my mind , bearing down and concentrating on one hitter at a time " , Feller said . Feller was the third pitcher , after Larry Corcoran and Cy Young , to record three career no @-@ hitters . He became the first pitcher of the 1951 season to reach 20 wins after he pitched a shutout against the Washington Senators on August 21 . Along with Early Wynn and Mike Garcia , Feller reached the 20 @-@ win mark during the season ; they were the first trio of pitchers on the same staff to earn 20 wins since 1931 . Feller was named the Sporting News Pitcher of the Year .

Feller started the 1952 season with three wins in his first five starts ; one of the losses was an April 23 one @-@ hitter against Bob Cain , who also allowed only one hit . Feller struggled for the rest of the season , and after an argument with an umpire over a strike call in late August , manager Al López shut Feller down for the season . He finished the season with a 9 ? 13 record , a 4 @. @ 74 ERA , and a rating of ? 3 @. @ 1 in wins above replacement , worst in the major leagues . He improved the following year , winning 10 games and losing 7 in 25 starts after Lopez gave him extra days of rest between appearances . The Indians won 111 regular season games during 1954 , beating an AL record previously held by the 1927 New York Yankees . The 35 @-@ year @-@ old Feller finished 13 ? 3 on the year , earning his 250th pitching victory in a May 23 win and his 2,500th career strikeout in a win on June 12 .

The Indians played against the New York Giants in the 1954 World Series , but unlike the 1948 Series , Feller did not make an appearance . The Indians were swept in four games by the Giants . Indians manager Al López said of not starting Feller , " I know Feller wanted to start one of the games in the 1954 World Series ( when the Indians were swept by the New York Giants ) , though we never really talked about it ... If we had won the first or second game in New York , I was going to start Feller in Cleveland in the fourth game . But when we didn 't ( win either game in New York ) , why in the hell was I going to pitch Feller ? He was the fifth starter on the club at that time , and wasn 't the Feller he 'd been ( earlier in his career ) . " In 1955 , Feller spent part of the season as a starter , then was moved to the bullpen later in the season . He won and lost four games each in 25 appearances . During the offseason , he became chairman of the Ohio March of Dimes and served as player representative for the American League . He worked with National League representative Robin Roberts throughout the offseason , discussing the possibility of player arbitration and pensions with baseball owners ; he then became president of the Baseball Players ' Association .

In the 1956 season , Feller started four games and appeared in 15 others , and finished with an 0 ? 4 record and career @-@ worst 4 @. @ 97 ERA . The Indians held " Bob Feller Night " on September 9 , and he appeared in his last major league game on September 30 . After the season , speculation mounted regarding whether Feller would retire as a player . In December 1956 , Feller told The Plain Dealer : " I will return to Cleveland later this week and plan to confer with Hank Greenberg before Christmas . I hope to reach a decision at that time . " Greenberg had also offered Feller his release or a job with the Indians in their front office . Greenberg said , " We sincerely want Feller to remain with us . As far as I 'm concerned , there will always be a job waiting for Bob in the Cleveland organization . " On December 28 Feller officially retired from the Indians as a player to continue his work selling insurance . Announcing his retirement , Feller said , " I could have gone with a couple other ball clubs , but anything I might have done with them would have taken the edge off the success I have had with the Cleveland club the last 20 years . " He continued , " What if I did pitch another year , so what ? I would have to come to the decision I am making now , some time . "

He spent his entire career of 18 seasons with the Indians , being one of " The Big Four " in the Indians ' pitching rotation in the 1950s , along with Bob Lemon , Early Wynn and Mike Garcia . Feller shares the Major League record of 12 one @-@ hitters with Nolan Ryan , and was the first pitcher to win 20 or more games before the age of 21 . He ended his career with 266 wins , 2 @, @ 581 strikeouts and 279 complete games . Over the course of his career , he led the AL in strikeouts seven times and walks four times . Upon his retirement , Feller held the major league record for most walks in a career ( 1 @, @ 764 ) , and holds the 20th @-@ century record for most walks in a season ( 208 in 1938 ) . The Indians retired his jersey number , 19 , in 1957 .

In 1962 , Feller was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum along with Jackie Robinson . Both were the first to be elected on their first ballot appearance since the original induction class of 1936 . At the time of his induction only Ty Cobb ( 98 @. @ 2 % ) , Babe Ruth ( 95 @. @ 1 % ) , and Honus Wagner ( 95 @. @ 1 % ) had a higher percentage of ballot votes . In 2010 , after Feller had been admitted to hospice , a reporter released a story recalling a 2007 interview with an aged Feller where he brought up Feller and Robinson 's occasional dislike for each other . " They overhyped Jackie Robinson . He was a good baserunner . He was a fair hitter . He was an average second baseman . He was not as good a ballplayer as Larry Doby . There were a lot of better black ballplayers than Jackie Robinson " , said Feller .

= = Dispute with Commissioner Chandler = =

Throughout his career , Feller played exhibition games during the off @-@ season , playing in towns unaccustomed to seeing major league ballplayers . His exhibition tours often featured other big leaguers and Negro League players , like Satchel Paige , who was also a teammate of Feller 's with the Indians . Other players included Stan Musial , Mickey Vernon , and Jeff Heath . During a barnstorming tour in 1945 , Feller pitched against Jackie Robinson after he had been signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers . He told a reporter in Los Angeles he believed Robinson was too muscle @-@ bound to succeed against pitching in the major leagues although Robinson recorded two hits off Feller . Players had to notify the Commissioner of Baseball , A.B. " Happy " Chandler , before participating in exhibitions games and were not allowed to begin games before the conclusion of the major @-@ league season . Feller wrote to Chandler , challenging the league 's limit on the number of games that were allowed to be played and proposing an increase ; the Commissioner agreed to Feller 's proposal . To minimize travel time , Feller employed airplanes , such as two DC @-@ 3s in 1947 , to transport players from town to town . Feller 's involvement , as well as that of other major league players , was the subject of meetings between the Commissioner and AL and NL presidents .

In 1947 , Feller announced that he would pitch in the Cuban winter league during the off @-@ season , but Commissioner Chandler ruled no major leaguer could play in Cuba . Feller said he would donate his profits from playing in the Cuban winter league to the American Major League players ' pension fund : " I want to prove I 'm not going to Cuba for any selfish interest but because there is a principle involved and that is the right of any ball player to work at his chosen profession " . Feller also believed it was " grossly unfair " that major leaguers who were U.S. citizens could not play in winter leagues but Latin Americans were permitted . Indians owner and president Bill Veeck said , " I have no comment on Bob 's outside activities . I don 't know whether they 've hurt him or not . But I do know this . The great majority of the people of Cleveland think they 've hurt him . " Feller 's barnstorming business savvy and endorsement details made him one of the wealthiest players of his time but he claimed his off @-@ season exhibitions and barnstorming were necessary to pay for increased medical expenses for his family . His first wife developed anemia after giving birth to their second child when she was given the wrong type of blood during transfusions ; she subsequently became addicted to the prescribed medication for her condition . Feller was trying to make up lost earnings as a result , since he missed out on over \$ 200 @, @ 000 in salary when he served in the Navy ; he missed more than three major league seasons . Feller 's biographer John Sickels suggested : " They were trying to make money , but part of it was also , he felt that the black players weren 't necessarily getting a fair chance and that he wanted to sort of showcase it . And seeing those , I think , those exhibition games helped people realize that the Negro League players were just as good as the Major League players . "

= = Records = =

Feller estimated that military service cost him at least 100 career wins . Based on his exceptional 1941 and 1946 seasons , it is likely that Feller would have finished his career with more than 300 wins and perhaps 3 @, @ 800 strikeouts . Feller said " I know in my heart I would have ended up a

lot closer to 400 than 300 if I hadn 't spent four seasons in the Navy . But don 't take that as a complaint . I 'm happy I got home in one piece . "

There is footage of a Feller fastball being clocked by Army ordnance equipment ( used to measure artillery shell velocity ) and registering at 98 @. @ 6 mph ( 158 @. @ 7 km / h ) . However , this took place in the later years of his career and the speed of the ball was measured as it crossed the plate ( whereas later methods measure the speed as it leaves the pitcher 's hand ) . With primitive equipment Feller was at one point measured at 105 mph ( 169 km / h ) . Feller once mentioned that he was clocked at 104 mph ( 167 km / h ) at Lincoln Park in Chicago . He also threw the second fastest pitch ever officially recorded , at 107 @. @ 6 mph ( 173 @. @ 2 km / h ) , in a game in 1946 at Griffith Stadium . Feller said a 1974 test involving Nolan Ryan would be evaluated when he threw the ball rather than when it reached home plate , and as columnist Milton Richman wrote , Feller said " Sandy Koufax had the best live fast ball he ever saw . " Ted Williams said , " Three days before he pitched I would start thinking about Robert Feller , Bob Feller . I 'd sit in my room thinking about him all the time . God I loved it ... Allie Reynolds of the Yankees was tough , and I might think about him for 24 hours before a game , but Robert Feller : I 'd think about him for three days . " Feller was ranked 36th on Sporting News 's list of the 100 Greatest Baseball Players and also the publication 's " greatest pitcher of his time " as well as a finalist for the Major League Baseball All @-@ Century Team in 1999 . Each year , American Legion Baseball presents the " Bob Feller Pitching Award " to the pitcher " with the most strikeouts in regional and national competition . "

= = Later life = =

Feller was elected the inaugural president of the Major League Baseball Players ' Association in 1956 . As president , he appeared before Congress to speak about baseball 's reserve clause . Feller was the first player to get a franchise to agree to a share of game receipts when he was the starting pitcher for Indians ' games . He was also the earliest player to incorporate himself ( as Ro @-@ Fel , Inc . ) . He was also one of the first players to work for the right of a player to enter free agency .

Feller and his wife , Virginia Winther , had three sons , Steve , Martin , and Bruce . The couple divorced in 1971 ; from the divorce settlement , Virginia received the house she and Feller had built . Virginia died on May 6 , 1981 in her home in Shaker Heights , Ohio . In retirement , Feller lived with his second wife , Anne Feller , in Gates Mills , a suburb of Cleveland .

Feller is credited with being the first baseball star to sign autographs at baseball memorabilia conventions , and was such a frequent guest at such events that one ESPN writer speculated that he may have signed more autographs than any other person .

In June 2009 , at the age of 90 , Feller was one of the starting pitchers at the inaugural Baseball Hall of Fame Classic , which replaced the Hall of Fame Game at Cooperstown , New York . Feller was treated for leukemia in August 2010 . By October , Feller was fitted with a pacemaker and was diagnosed with pneumonia and thrush , an infection of the mucous membrane lining the mouth and throat . He was transferred on December 8 from the Cleveland Clinic to hospice care . On December 15 , Feller died of complications from leukemia at 92 .

= = Legacy = =

Of Feller 's death , Mike Hegan , Indians broadcaster and son of former Feller teammate and battery mate Jim Hegan , stated , " The Indians of the 40s and 50s were the face of the city of Cleveland and Bob was the face of the Indians . But , Bob transcended more than that era . In this day of free agency and switching teams , Bob Feller remained loyal to the city and the team for over 70 years . You will likely not see that kind of mutual loyalty and admiration ever again . " In 2010 , the " Cleveland Indians Man of the Year Award " was renamed the " Bob Feller Man of the Year Award " .

On Opening Day of the 2011 season , the Indians invited Feller 's widow , Anne , to present a silent first pitch . During pregame introductions , Cleveland players wore a No. 19 jersey in honor of Feller



. For the entire 2011 season the players ' uniforms were outfitted with an outline of Feller 's pitching motion . The organization also made a permanent memorial of the press @-@ box seat that Feller used in later life .

The Bob Feller Museum opened in Van Meter , Iowa , on June 10 , 1995 . Designed by Feller 's son Stephen , on land donated by Brenton Banks , the museum has two rooms that contain Feller memorabilia and items from his own collection . The Feller bat used by Babe Ruth when he made his last public appearance at Yankee Stadium is at the museum . Feller said a teammate had stolen the bat and eventually it was purchased by the sports card company Upper Deck for \$ 107 @,@ 000 . Feller later offered the company \$ 95 @,@ 000 in return for the bat .