

= Lee Smith (baseball) =

Lee Arthur Smith (born December 4 , 1957) is a retired American right @-@ handed baseball pitcher who played 18 years in Major League Baseball (MLB) for eight teams . Pitching primarily for the Chicago Cubs , with whom he spent his first eight seasons , Lee served mostly as a relief pitcher during his career . One of the dominant closers in baseball history , Smith held the major league record for career saves from 1993 until 2006 , when San Diego Padres relief pitcher Trevor Hoffman passed his final total of 478 .

A native of Jamestown in Bienville Parish in north Louisiana , Smith was scouted by Buck O 'Neil and drafted by the Cubs in the 1975 Major League Baseball Draft . Smith was an intimidating figure on the pitcher 's mound at 6 feet , 6 inches (1 @. @ 98 m) and 265 pounds (120 kg) with a 95 @-@ mile per hour (150 km / h) fastball . In 1991 , Smith set a National League (NL) record with 47 saves for the St. Louis Cardinals , and was runner @-@ up for the league 's Cy Young Award ; it was the second of three times he led the NL in saves , and he later led the American League (AL) once while with the Baltimore Orioles in 1994 . He also set the major league career record for games finished (802) , and his 1 @, @ 022 career games pitched were the third @-@ most in history when he retired ; he still holds the team records for career saves for the Cubs (180) , and he also held the Cardinals record (160) until 2006 .

Smith has been a candidate for induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame 14 times , but has generally received 37 ? 47 % of the necessary votes on all total ballots cast by the Baseball Writers ' Association of America , with 75 % needed for election . After the end of his major league career , Smith spent time working as a pitching instructor at the minor @-@ league level with the San Francisco Giants . He then served as the pitching coach for the South Africa national baseball team in the 2006 World Baseball Classic and 2009 World Baseball Classic . Lee currently continues his job as a minor @-@ league roving pitching instructor for the Giants .

= = Early life and early career = =

Lee Smith was born in Jamestown , Louisiana , and raised in the small town of Castor in Bienville Parish . Buck O 'Neil claimed credit for having scouted him . At age 17 , partly on O 'Neil 's recommendation , Smith was drafted in the second round as the 28th overall pick by the Chicago Cubs in the 1975 draft . Smith began his professional career as a starting pitcher . In 1978 with the Class AA minor league Midland Cubs , Smith struggled as a starter with an ERA near 6 @. @ 00 , prompting manager Randy Hundley to move him to the bullpen . Smith resisted the move and briefly tried college basketball at Northwestern State University . At the behest of former Cubs outfielder Billy Williams , Smith returned to Midland as a reliever for the 1979 season and pitched well enough to earn a promotion to Class AAA baseball for 1980 . With the major league Chicago Cubs struggling to a last @-@ place finish , Smith came into the big leagues as a September call @-@ up that season .

= = Professional baseball career = =

= = = Chicago Cubs (1980 ? 87) = = =

Smith made his major league debut with the Cubs on September 1 , 1980 , against the Atlanta Braves , coming in relief for starting pitcher Dennis Lamp , who had given up four runs and eight hits in the four innings he pitched . Smith pitched one inning , giving up no hits , striking out one and walking two . He finished the season for the last @-@ place Cubs and was invited back to the majors for 1981 . He was used mostly as a middle relief pitcher . A streak of poor pitching was interrupted by the 1981 Major League Baseball strike , and he finished with an ERA of 3 @. @ 51 .

The Cubs ' closer for 1981 , Dick Tidrow , had a 3 ? 10 season with a 5 @. @ 06 ERA , and as a result , in 1982 Smith , Willie Hernández and Bill Campbell shared closing duties . Smith pitched well

and even started five games from mid @-@ June to early July . Significantly , former Cubs star pitcher Ferguson Jenkins returned to the team in 1982 , and became a major influence on the young reliever ; Smith credited Jenkins with simplifying his delivery , introducing him to the slider and forkball , and teaching him how to set up hitters . In what would be the last start of his career , Smith picked up his first major league hit , a home run off eventual Hall of Famer Phil Niekro . Smith managed only two singles for the rest of his career . He saved 17 games during that season and performed as the regular closer for the Cubs , a position he held for the next five years .

In 1983 , Smith had his best season in the majors up to that point . By May 6 , he had pitched in ten games without allowing any runs while allowing only three hits and striking out 12 batters . His ERA rose to 1 @.@ 85 by the end of May , but he lowered it to 1 @.@ 15 in July . Smith was selected for his first All @-@ Star Game but did not fare well , surrendering the final two runs in the American League 's 13 ? 3 rout . Although the Cubs continued losing , Smith finished with a career @-@ best 1 @.@ 65 ERA ? more than two points below the league average ? and a career @-@ best 1 @.@ 074 WHIP while leading the National League with 29 saves and 56 games finished . He also received a point in the NL 's Cy Young Award voting and eight points in the NL Most Valuable Player Award voting .

The 1984 Cubs were the best team Smith pitched for in his career . While they finished with the franchise 's best record and had their first postseason appearance since 1945 , Smith compiled his worst ERA of the decade ? although he saved more than 30 games for the first time in his career . In Game 2 of the NL Championship Series , Smith recorded two outs for the save to give Chicago a 2 ? 0 lead in the best @-@ of @-@ five series against the San Diego Padres , putting them one win away from the World Series . In Game 4 , the score was tied when Smith began the eighth inning . After a scoreless eighth and a strikeout to start the bottom of the ninth , Smith allowed a one @-@ out ninth @-@ inning single to Tony Gwynn , and Steve Garvey followed with a two @-@ run homer to force Game 5 . The Cubs led that game in the seventh inning , but the underdog Padres scored four runs and won a trip to the World Series . It would be the Cubs ' only winning season in Smith 's eight years with the team .

In 1985 , Smith for the first time dominated the league in strikeouts as a relief pitcher . After averaging fewer than eight strikeouts per nine innings in each prior season , he improved to 10 @.@ 32 in 1985 . He finished the season with a career @-@ high 112 strikeouts in only 97 @.@ 2 innings . Meanwhile , the Cubs were in first place until a 13 @-@ game losing streak from June 12 to June 25 from which they never recovered .

Smith saved more than 30 games while the Cubs had losing records in 1985 , 1986 and 1987 . In 1987 , he was chosen for his second All @-@ Star Game . When the midsummer classic went into extra innings , Smith pitched the 10th , 11th and 12th innings , striking out four and getting credit for the win when the NL scored the only two runs of the game in the 13th .

With his 30th save in 1987 , Smith became only the second pitcher (joining Dan Quisenberry) to reach the mark in four consecutive seasons . Even before then , he was known as one of the most feared relief pitchers in the game . One player told writers Bruce Nash and Allan Zullo for their book , Baseball Confidential , that one of the most daunting sights in the majors was Smith throwing " pure gas from the shadows " of Wrigley Field , which didn 't have lights at the time .

Despite his numbers , rumors were swirling about his weight and its effect on his knees and his request for a trade out of Chicago . On December 8 , Smith , the team 's career leader in saves , was traded to the Boston Red Sox for pitchers Al Nipper and Calvin Schiraldi . Nipper pitched only 104 more innings in the majors , and Schiraldi was out of baseball before age 30 . Smith , meanwhile , registered nearly 300 saves after the trade . The trade started Smith on a journey involving seven teams in eight seasons , which may have hurt his chances in the Baseball Hall of Fame .

= = = Boston Red Sox (1988 ? 90) = = =

After losing the 1986 World Series to the New York Mets , the Red Sox compiled a winning percentage below .500 for 1987 . One of the main problems was a weak bullpen , and Smith was

brought in to rectify the relief problems .

Despite giving up a game @-@ winning home run in his 1988 opening day Fenway Park debut , Smith posted his best ERA in five years . The Red Sox had the good fortune of being in the American League 's Eastern division ; in September , they caught the Detroit Tigers and held off every other team to clinch Smith 's second and last trip to the postseason . In Game 2 of the 1988 ALCS against the Oakland Athletics , Smith gave up three singles , including Walt Weiss ' game @-@ winning RBI single , in the ninth inning of a tied game . Boston had a 0 ? 2 series deficit going to Oakland . After Boston lost Game 3 , Smith surrendered two insurance runs after entering Game 4 with the score 2 ? 1 to complete the four @-@ game sweep .

Smith 's salary rose to over \$ 1 @.@ 4 million , but he followed his 1988 season with a mediocre 1989 , finishing with his worst ERA in five years . For the seventh consecutive season , his number of innings pitched decreased or remained the same . However , he compiled 12 @.@ 23 strikeouts per nine innings , nearly two higher than any other season of his career . It was also the last of his four seasons with more than 10 strikeouts per nine innings .

Smith 's statistics for the 1980s gave him a valid claim as the best reliever of the decade , although he was rivaled by Jeff Reardon . While Smith had four consecutive 30 @-@ save seasons , Reardon finished the decade with five consecutive . Smith saved 234 games by the end of 1989 , and Reardon had 266 . Reardon was also a member of the 1987 World Series @-@ winning Minnesota Twins . On December 6 , 1989 , the Red Sox had both closers on their roster when they signed Reardon as a free agent . Two of the past decade 's most dominating closers in history were even pitching in games together for Boston for the first month of 1990 with Reardon setting up Smith for a save on April 18 ? a game started by a third famous pitcher , Roger Clemens . The unusual double @-@ closer situation lasted less than a month before Smith was traded to St. Louis for slugging outfielder Tom Brunansky on May 4 , 1990 .

= = = St. Louis Cardinals (1990 ? 93) = = =

As was the case in Boston , Lee Smith 's first game with St. Louis went poorly as he gave up two runs in his only inning of pitching . He recovered quickly , registered a 0 @.@ 00 ERA for the entire month of July , and finished his partial season with St. Louis with a 2 @.@ 10 ERA and 27 saves . The Cardinals , however , were at a low point in 1990 , finishing in last place for the only time since 1918 . In 1991 , St. Louis righted their ship , and Smith accumulated saves at a record pace . With his salary roughly doubled to nearly \$ 2 @.@ 8 million , Smith reached 40 saves for the first time in his career . On September 28 , he picked up save number 45 to tie Bruce Sutter 's National League record from 1984 (Coincidentally , when Sutter and Smith reached 45 saves in their respective seasons , both were ex @-@ Cubs pitching for St. Louis against the Cubs) . Smith claimed the league record for himself three days later and finished the season with a career @-@ high 47 saves . One difference for him in 1991 was walks as he surrendered only 1 @.@ 60 walks per nine innings , by far the best in his career to that point . Smith won his first Roloids Relief Award , received the most significant consideration for league MVP in his career , and finished second in Cy Young Award voting behind only Tom Glavine , who had a breakout 20 @-@ win season in 1991 .

In the early 1990s , records were falling quickly for closers . Lee Smith set the single @-@ season National League record for saves in 1991 and was on pace to break his own record in 1992 . However , he fell four short of his record , which was broken the following season by Rod Beck . In 1992 , Smith 's former teammate , Jeff Reardon , broke the career saves record held for over a decade by Hall of Famer Rollie Fingers . However , Smith was registering saves at a faster pace than Reardon and by the end of 1992 , he was not far behind him on the career list . Just two weeks into the 1993 season , Smith passed Reardon with career save number 358 . At age 37 , Reardon was slowing down , and Smith was well in front of him when Reardon retired in 1994 . The day after setting the career major league record , he saved his 301st National League game to break that record as well . (As had been the case with the single @-@ season NL record , the career NL record was held by Bruce Sutter) . Smith had 15 saves in June 1993 , the most ever in one month for a pitcher until John Wetteland and Chad Cordero tied him in June 1996 and June 2005 ,

respectively . He reached 30 saves in only the 83rd game of the season , tying the record set by Bobby Thigpen in 1990 for the earliest any pitcher had reached 30 saves . (Éric Gagné broke the record in 2002) . While only in August , Smith logged his 40th save for the third consecutive year , but his ERA had ballooned to a career @-@ worst 4 @.@ 50 . Also , the Cardinals were ten games behind Philadelphia , seemingly out of contention , and Smith was poised to become a free agent after the season . On August 31 , 1993 , the Cardinals traded Smith to the Yankees for Rich Batchelor . Smith left the team as their all @-@ time save leader until Jason Isringhausen passed him on June 13 , 2006 .

= = = Final years (1993 ? 97) = = =

The Yankees were just 1 ½ games behind the Toronto Blue Jays when they acquired Lee Smith , and he pitched nearly perfectly for the last month of the season . In eight games , Smith did not allow a single run and picked up three saves and 11 strikeouts . The Yankees as a team , however , did poorly during the remainder of the season , and Toronto easily pulled away to win the division . Smith 's New York career lasted just those eight games as he filed for free agency after the season . He signed with Baltimore for 1994 for \$ 1 @.@ 5 million plus incentives .

At age 36 , Smith started 1994 pitching better than ever . In his first 12 games , he had 12 saves and a 0 @.@ 00 ERA . After nearly two months , his ERA was still under 1 @.@ 00 and it was still under 2 @.@ 00 in mid @-@ July . Smith had been selected for the All @-@ Star Game in 1991 , 1992 and 1993 but had not played . After his sixth selection in 1994 , Smith was brought into the game to hold a two @-@ run American League lead in the ninth inning . Instead , he gave up a game @-@ tying two @-@ run home run to Fred McGriff , and the AL lost in ten innings . Smith 's bad streak continued for the next several weeks until the 1994 ? 95 Major League Baseball strike ended the season . He filed for free agency again and signed a two @-@ year contract with the California Angels for over \$ 2 @.@ 5 million while the strike was still in progress .

In 1995 , Smith registered a save in every appearance from April 28 to June 25 . On June 11 , he saved his 16th consecutive game to break the major league record set by Doug Jones in 1988 . He ran his streak to 19 games before finally blowing a save on June 28 . (John Wetteland broke the record the next year by saving 24 straight) . After keeping his ERA at 0 @.@ 00 through the first two months of the season , he was selected to his seventh and final All @-@ Star Game , thereby becoming only the fourth player to be an All @-@ Star for four different teams (after Walker Cooper , George Kell and Goose Gossage) . Smith did not fare well for the next month , pushing his ERA all the way up to 5 @.@ 40 . Regardless , the Angels held a double @-@ digit lead in the division and seemed set for the postseason . Instead , California suffered one of the worst collapses in major league history , blowing the entire double @-@ digit lead in less than six weeks . While the rest of the team was reeling , Smith reverted to his early @-@ season form and pitched fantastically for the last two months , only blowing one save attempt in that span . He finished the season with 37 saves and a 3 @.@ 47 ERA , which was more than a point higher than the league average .

For 1996 , the Angels replaced Smith in the closer role with second @-@ year pitcher Troy Percival . After only eight games as a setup pitcher , Smith , who was unhappy in California , was traded to Cincinnati for Chuck McElroy on May 27 . He resumed setup duty for the Reds ? this time for Jeff Brantley , who was in the midst of his best season ? but did not fare as well in his return to the National League . His ERA was nearly as high as the league average , his strikeout rate was the lowest in 15 years , and the Reds granted him free agency after the season .

He was picked up by the Montreal Expos in the following season for only \$ 400 @,@ 000 and had the worst season of his career . His last game of the season was two innings of relief during extra innings of an all @-@ Canada interleague game (sometimes called the Pearson Cup) won by Toronto on July 2 . It turned out to be the last game of his major league career . On July 15 , 1997 , Lee Smith announced his retirement .

After posting career @-@ worsts in ERA (5 @.@ 82) , hits per nine innings (11 @.@ 63) and several other statistics and then announcing his retirement in mid @-@ July , Smith was released by the Expos on September 25 , 1997 . Regardless , the Kansas City Royals signed Smith as a free

agent and invited him to spring training for 1998 . When he refused to start the season in the minor leagues , the Royals released him . Later in 1998 , he signed a minor league deal with the Houston Astros , but with an ERA near 7 @. @ 00 at Triple @-@ A , he retired from the majors again .

= = Post @-@ retirement = =

Two years after his retirement in 1998 , Smith went to work as a roving minor league pitching instructor for the San Francisco Giants . A former teammate , Dick Tidrow , and the manager of the Double @-@ A Shreveport Captains , Jack Hiatt , offered the job to Smith , who gladly agreed , since it was right in his hometown . Smith still held this job with the Giants as of 2009 .

In the 2006 World Baseball Classic , Smith served as the pitching coach of the South Africa national baseball team , which was given 20 @, @ 000 to 1 odds of winning the tournament . In 2007 , Smith participated as a coach in the second annual European Baseball Academy for Major League Baseball International in Tirrenia , Italy . The Academy provides instruction to young players from Europe and Africa , several of whom have signed professional contracts .

Lee Smith became the father of twins , Nicholas and Alanna , in October 2003 . He also has three children from a previous marriage , Nikita (born c . 1987) , Lee Jr . (born c . 1989) and Dimitri (born c . 1993) .

= = Hall of Fame candidacy = =

In 1995 , Pulitzer Prize @-@ winning sportswriter Jim Murray selected Lee Smith as the active player most likely to be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame , describing him as " the best one @-@ inning pitcher the game ever saw " , and " the best at smuggling a game into the clubhouse in history . " Since his retirement two years later , much speculation has centered on Smith 's specific chances of becoming a member of the Hall of Fame as well as the criteria for relief pitchers and closers in general . Only Hoyt Wilhelm , Rollie Fingers , Dennis Eckersley , Goose Gossage , and Bruce Sutter have been inducted into the Hall of Fame @-@ based primarily on their relief pitching , and only Sutter has been inducted with fewer innings or starting appearances than Smith . In addition , Fingers and Eckersley ? the only two to be elected in fewer than eight tries ? won MVP awards , and Sutter captured a Cy Young Award , but Smith was rarely a serious contender for either trophy . He pitched in a transitional era , when closers began to be expected to pitch only a single inning ; although Smith and Goose Gossage each pitched in slightly over 1 @, @ 000 games , Gossage ended his career with over 500 more innings . Sutter was the first pitcher ever elected to the Hall with fewer than 1 @, @ 700 innings pitched ; Smith , who pitched fewer innings every year from 1982 through 1989 and never pitched more than 75 innings after 1990 , ended his career with fewer than 1 @, @ 300 . In 2005 , statistician Alan Schwarz described Smith as a long shot for election despite the career record , and used Retrosheet data to compare the saves of several top relievers including Smith , Eckersley , Fingers , Gossage and Sutter . While Smith 's save percentage (82 %) , outs per save (3 @. @ 72) and average of inherited runners per game (.50) compared well with Eckersley 's marks (84 % , 3 @. @ 33 , .49) , his figures in the last two categories sharply trailed those of the others ; Fingers , Gossage and Sutter all averaged between 4 @. @ 72 and 4 @. @ 82 outs per save , with Sutter inheriting .67 runners per game and the other two .86 , suggesting their saves were harder to achieve . Smith started his career earning multiple @-@ inning saves , but the strategy in baseball for closers changed , and he was later used as a one @-@ inning pitcher . He had a higher career save percentage than Fingers , Gossage and Sutter . Trevor Hoffman and Mariano Rivera both exceeded Smith 's former record of 478 saves , and the two are now widely considered the best one @-@ inning closers ever .

At Sutter 's July 2006 induction to the Hall , Smith talked with reporters about his chances for election . Like many others , he commented that he was puzzled that he had not yet been selected . " This confuses the hell out of me . But I 've always been baffled by it " , he said . Smith 's candidacy may have been hampered by the number of outstanding relievers on the ballot ; Sutter had earned increasing vote totals for nine years before Smith appeared on the ballot , and Gossage ? who first

appeared on the ballot three years before Smith ? has received greater support in each year from 2004 until his induction in 2008 .

To be eligible for induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame , a candidate needs to receive votes on 75 percent of the total ballots cast by the Baseball Writers ' Association of America . However , if the candidate receives less than 5 percent , he is no longer eligible for future Hall of Fame consideration by the BBWAA . Smith was first eligible for the ballot five years after he retired , and is allowed to be on the ballot through 2017 if he continues to meet the minimum vote threshold . Should he fail to be elected by the BBWAA , he will remain eligible for consideration by the Veterans Committee ; under current rules , his first chance for consideration by that body would be in 2019 for the induction class of 2020 . In his first year of eligibility , 2003 , Smith received 210 votes , or 42 percent of the 496 total ballots cast . The following year , Smith only received 185 votes , or 37 percent of the 506 total ballots cast . In 2005 , Smith improved from the previous year 's results , and received a total of 200 votes , or 39 percent of the 516 total cast . Smith came closer to joining the Hall of Fame in 2006 by receiving 45 percent of the ballots cast , or 234 votes . In 2007 , Smith 's received only 217 votes , just 40 percent of the 545 total ballots cast . Smith increased his total in 2008 , with 235 votes , 43 @. @ 3 % of the total ballots cast . He received 44 @. @ 5 % of the vote in 2009 and 47 @. @ 3 % of the vote in 2010 . In 2011 , he received 45 @. @ 3 % of the vote . He peaked at a new high of 50 @. @ 6 % in 2012 , but dropped down to 47 @. @ 8 % the following year . In 2014 , he dropped to 29 @. @ 9 % , but received 30 @. @ 2 % of the vote in 2015 .

Smith is the last player to be on 15 BBWAA ballots after the Hall of Fame reduced eligibility to ten years . His final year of eligibility is 2017 .