

Introduction

Since major league baseball began, more than 12,000 pitchers have trudged to the mound to face opposing batters. Some have performed successfully; some have not. Of the entire pitching population, however, just 20 hurlers have reached the ultimate goal of their profession.

These 20 form one of the most elite groups not only in baseball but in all of sports. They are major league baseball's 300-game winners.

Being the winning pitcher in 300 games is an achievement that extends far beyond ordinary levels of performance. It is a feat that only the best, the most durable, and the most courageous hurlers attain. The accomplishment requires diligence, perseverance, innovation, and strength.

To be a 300-game winner, a pitcher has to have no long interruptions in his career. And his career has to be lengthy. Along the way, nearly everything has to go just right. Of course, it helps to play with good teams, but that has not always been mandatory.

More than anything, though, the feat demands extraordinary skill and relentlessly good health. There is no room for mediocrity or sustained injury. To enter the charmed circle of 300-game winners, only the finest pitchers with the strongest arms need apply.

Emerging victorious in 300 or more games during a career is an accomplishment that has few parallels in baseball. No other pitching feat can match it, and among batters, only slugging 500 home runs or collecting 3,000 hits is comparable.

Given the fact that just 20 pitchers have won 300 or more games since baseball was first recognized as a major league sport in 1871—indeed, only 97 pitchers have won 200 or more games in

that time—it is no wonder that these mound masters have a special place in baseball history. Nor should it come as a surprise that each one of them is a member of the Hall of Fame.

There are other similarities. Nine of the pitchers achieved their 300th win while working in the National League, and nine hurlers reached 300 as American Leaguers. One climbed to the summit while performing in the Players League and one got there as a member of the Federal League.

Seven pitchers won most of their games in the 19th century. Six reached the 300 level between 1982 and 1990. The group includes 16 righthanders and four southpaws. Sixteen of the 20 pitchers hurled complete games when they got their 300th win. Five won by one run. Phil Niekro was the only pitcher to toss a shutout. Walter Johnson was the only one to win his 300th while working in relief. Eight hurlers won their 300th game after reaching their 40th birthdays.

Ironically, the first three 300-game winners were all born on holidays. Pud Galvin entered the world on Christmas Day, Tim Lincecum arrived on New Year's Day, and Mickey Welch drew his first breath on the Fourth of July.

No pitchers were subjected to greater changes in the way a ball was pitched than the early 300-game winners. Originally, the pitching mound stood 45 feet from home plate. It was moved back to 50 feet in 1880, then to 60 feet, 6 inches in 1893. The early hurlers were also required to throw with an underhand motion. Overhand deliveries were first permitted in the National League in 1884.

It should be noted that among baseball historians, as well as in various books of records, there is not unanimous agreement regarding the statistics or even the actual 300th win of some of the pitchers, particularly the early ones. Using the Baseball Hall of Fame, the Society for American Baseball Research, and *Total Baseball* as primary sources, we have attempted to clarify these discrepancies as accurately as possible.

Beyond being incredibly talented pitchers, baseball's 300-game winners are collectively a fascinating group that is readily

recognized for its many other outstanding achievements. For instance, Grover Cleveland Alexander fired 16 shutouts in one season. Don Sutton never missed a turn in 23 years. Nolan Ryan tossed seven no-hitters and 12 one-hitters. And Welch completed the first 105 games he started.

Numerous other noteworthy facts accompany the pitchers' resumes. Christy Mathewson originally signed a contract with the Philadelphia Athletics. Cy Young won 20 games or more in a season 14 times in a row. Eddie Plank, Lefty Grove, and Warren Spahn didn't win their first big league games until they were 25 years old. Charles (Old Hoss) Radbourn won 60 games in a single season. Johnson once ran for Congress. Steve Carlton ran every day in a tub of rice. Kid Nichols won 30 or more games in seven different seasons. And Tom Seaver's boyhood idol was Robin Roberts.

Mentioning Roberts suggests just how hard it is to win 300 games. He didn't do it, stopping at 286. Nor did numerous other prominent Hall of Famers, such as Carl Hubbell, Herb Pennock, Bob Feller, Bob Gibson, Whitey Ford, Ted Lyons, Jim Palmer, Juan Marichal, Don Drysdale, or Ferguson Jenkins. Some Hall of Famers, including Rube Waddell, Ed Walsh, Dazzy Vance, Dizzy Dean, and Sandy Koufax, didn't even win 200 games during their careers.

In some cases, there were extenuating circumstances. Playing with bad teams, extended military service, injuries, and early retirements kept some pitchers from joining the 300-win ranks. But regardless of the reason, there is no difficulty reaching the conclusion that winning 300 games is a remarkable accomplishment that among members of the pitching fraternity has no equal.

So, this is a book about some very special pitchers who have a very special place in baseball history. It is a book that while celebrating the playing careers of these pitchers is also intended to provide information—some of it tragic—about them as people. In the process, it is hoped that *Winningest Pitchers* serves as a documentary of one of baseball's most glorious and difficult achievements.

Pud Galvin

The First 300-Game Winner

The first major league pitcher to win 300 games was a short, stocky, easy-going righthander who was a notoriously tireless worker and owner of a ferocious fastball that turned everyday hitters into quivering weaklings.

Standing just 5 feet, 8 inches and usually weighing at least 190 pounds, Jim (Pud) Galvin bore little resemblance to the sleek hurlers who populated most pitching mounds. But give him the ball, and mere physical appearance suddenly became as unimportant as last week's newspapers.

With a ball in his grasp, the underhand-throwing Galvin, who pitched from 45- then 50-foot distances between home plate and the pitchers mound, was a terror. Not only was he the possessor of an intimidating fastball, but he had a changeup that drove batters crazy. Galvin didn't throw a curve. He didn't consider it necessary.

The evidence suggests that he was right. Although he never pitched for a club that finished above third place, Galvin won 361



Through most of his career, **Pud Galvin** pitched every other day.

games during his 14-year career. Twice in succession he won 46 games in a single season, he won 20 or more 10 different times, and he is the owner of two no-hitters.

Pud, who got that nickname because it was said that he made pudding out of opposing batters, had the ultimate work ethic. Most of the

time, he pitched every other day. He worked more innings (5,941) and completed more games (639) than any hurler in baseball history except Cy Young. Galvin worked in more than 300 innings in 10 different seasons. He also ranks second in most losses (308).

Overall, Galvin, also called “Gentle Jeems” because of his easy-going nature, and “The Little Steam Engine” for his relentless work habits, pitched in 697 major league games. He started 681 of them, with 57 being shutouts. He struck out 1,799 and walked 744, which over the length of his career comes to about one base on balls every eight innings. Pud had a career 2.87 ERA.

Not only did Galvin have outstanding control, he was a master at picking off base-runners. Once he walked the first three batters in a game. He then picked off each one.

“If I ever had Galvin to catch, no one would ever steal a base on me,” said Hall of Fame catcher Buck Ewing of the New York Giants. “That fellow keeps them glued to the bag. You notice that funny, false motion of his that can’t really be called a balk. He fooled me so badly one day that I never even attempted to get back to first base. And he certainly also has the best control of any pitcher in this league.”

Sometimes, when he wasn’t pitching, Galvin played in the field. Although not an accomplished hitter—his career batting average was just .202—he appeared in 51 games as an outfielder, plus two as a shortstop. Also regarded as a splendid fielder, he had his best year with the bat in 1886 when he hit .253 in 194 at-bats. In 1887, he hit a home run in Pittsburgh that they talked about for years. The eighth-inning blast sailed over the center field fence and gave the Alleghenys a 1–0 win over Boston.

It took an excessively long time for the modern world to note Galvin’s accomplishments, but the pudgy hurler was finally voted into the Hall of Fame in 1965 by the Veterans Committee. When he was inducted, writer/historian Lee Allen said, “It is difficult to recall when a player elected to membership in the Hall of Fame brought with him more robust qualifications than Galvin.” Added Lefty Grove, “My numbers appear insignificant compared to his.”

Galvin's induction occurred 63 years after he had died penniless in a shabby rooming house in Pittsburgh. Pud's passing went almost unnoticed as flood waters from the Ohio River ravaged a nearby neighborhood, leaving thousands homeless. Suffering from pneumonia, Galvin had been confined to a bed for nearly three months when he died in 1902 of what was reported as "catarrh of the stomach." Accounts of the day said he had been unconscious for five days. Broke from an ill-advised business venture, Galvin, 45, left no money to pay for his funeral. Friends from in and out of baseball raised the necessary funds to pay for the burial and to help Galvin's wife and the couple's six (out of 11 originally) surviving children.

Life had started out on a much happier note for Galvin. Born on Christmas Day in 1856 in an Irish neighborhood in St. Louis known as Kerry Patch, a baseball hotbed, Galvin began playing baseball at an early age. By his late teens, he had become the top amateur player in St. Louis.

Galvin had trained as a steamfitter but found baseball much more appealing. And in 1875 at the tender age of 18, he signed with the St. Louis Brown Stockings, a member of the National Association, the first recognized major league. Galvin was uneducated and largely unrefined. As a teenager, according to baseball historian Joseph Overfield, he wore only flannel shirts and ate with his fingers. Appalled by his untidy habits, other players made him eat in the hotel kitchen.

Galvin, who later switched to wearing white duck pants, patent leather shoes, and a straw hat, posted a 4–2 record in eight games. After the season, however, the five-year-old National Association disbanded. Pud hooked up with the St. Louis Red Stockings, an independent professional team, and in 1876 won 31 of 47 decisions, including a no-hitter against Philadelphia and a perfect game against the prominent Cass Club of Detroit.

The following year the fireballing righthander joined Allegheny, a member of the International Association, the first minor league and Pittsburgh's first professional club.

At one point, Galvin pitched four shutouts in 19 days while winning 12 and losing six.

In 1878, Galvin jumped to the Buffalo Bisons of the same IA and went 28–10. The next season, when Buffalo joined the National League, Galvin made his big league debut with a sizzling 37–27 record. Over a two-year period, he pitched in 106 of the Bisons' 116 games, completing 96 of them. At one point, the Bisons played 22 games, and Galvin started and completed each one of them.

One newspaper account of the day could hardly contain itself about Galvin's mound exploits. "In Galvin, Buffalo has the speediest pitcher in his profession," gushed the *Syracuse Courier*. "The celebrity of his pitches is a marvel to behold and it is a wonder he can find the catchers to hold him."

Galvin, who sported a wide, flowing handlebar mustache, stayed with Buffalo until 1885—with the exception of a short stint when, after getting involved in a contract dispute, he jumped to the California League in 1880. He left California, despite having signed a contract, and while departing had to hike 36 miles to escape a group of armed local police who were attempting to thwart his getaway.

Back in Buffalo, he was greeted as a returning hero. "The picturesque form of the mild-mannered pitcher was recognized by loud, continuous applause," said the *Buffalo Express*. "A smile illuminated his classic countenance and he bowed modestly."

Pud was rapidly becoming one of the most highly acclaimed pitchers in the National League. After winning 20 in 1880, he went 28–24 and 28–23 before exploding to 46–29 and 46–22 seasons in 1883 and 1884.

In 1880, Galvin pitched his first major league no-hitter, blanking the Worcester Brown Stockings, 1–0. He registered his second no-hitter in 1884 with an 18–0 decision over the Detroit Wolverines. The no-hitters made Galvin only the second major league pitcher (after Larry Corcoran) to record two no-hitters in a career.

In that era, Galvin had many other outstanding achievements. In 1882, he beat Worcester in both ends of a doubleheader, 9–5 and 18–8. In 1884 against Detroit, he pitched a one-hitter, the no-hitter, and a three-hitter just six days apart, then the eighth day lost 1–0 in 12 innings. During that span, he pitched 38 consecutive scoreless innings and allowed 12 hits and one run (unearned) while striking out 36 and walking none. Galvin also ended the 18-game winning streak of Old Hoss Radbourn, who won 60 that year, and the 20-game winning streak of the Providence Grays when he notched a 2–0 victory in 1884.

The 1883 and 1884 seasons were by far Galvin's best. In 1883, he worked in 76 games and 656 innings, completing 72 of the 75 games he started. The next season, he appeared in 636 innings, completing 71 of the 72 games in which he appeared and firing 12 shutouts. He struck out 369, one of the highest totals of the 19th century, while walking just 63.

While playing in Buffalo, Galvin also became friendly with the local sheriff. Eventually, the sheriff, Grover Cleveland, became mayor of the city and, still later, President of the United States. The two remained close friends long after their careers went separate ways. Once, when a team of baseball players visited the White House, Cleveland asked, "How's my old friend Jimmy Galvin?"

Galvin was named manager of the Buffalo team for the 1885 season, but after winning just seven of 24 games, he was relieved of his duties. Soon afterward, although he had won 218 games for Buffalo, the Bisons sold Galvin to the Pittsburgh Alleghenys of the American Association for a reported \$2,500, an almost unheard of figure at that time. Galvin was given \$700 of the purchase price and a lofty \$3,000 contract, representing a raise of some \$1,000 and making him at the time baseball's highest-paid player.

Although modest and unassuming and a man with legions of friends, Pud was never shy about making financial demands, especially when he switched teams. "They talk about slaves," he said. "Every time they sold me, I benefited by the operation."

Galvin would not leave Pittsburgh until 1892. He registered a 29–21 mark in 1886, and when the club joined the National

League the following year, he went 28–21. Galvin won for the franchise that would eventually be called the Pirates the team's first two games in its new circuit, beating John Clarkson and the Chicago White Stockings, 6–2, and Lady Baldwin and Detroit, 8–5.

In 1888, Galvin became the first major league pitcher to win 300 games. He reached the charmed circle October 5, 1888, beating the Washington Nationals with a four-hitter, 5–1. There were 14 errors in the game, including nine by the losers, and only one earned run.

That season and the next, he won 23 games each year, then in 1890 became one of many players to jump to the newly formed Players or Brotherhood League. The National League was said to have offered Pud \$8,000 and a house to come back, but he rejected the offer out of loyalty to his fellow Brotherhood players. Remaining in Pittsburgh and playing with the Burghers, Pud won just 12 of 25 decisions in the circuit's only season. About the most noteworthy occurrence during the season came when Galvin faced Tim Keefe in the first battle of 300-game winners. Pud won that confrontation, 8–2. He and Keefe would square off three more times (with Galvin winning once) in what would be the last meeting of 300-game winners until Phil Niekro and Don Sutton tangled in 1986.

Galvin returned in 1891 to the newly named Pirates, whose catcher was a slender young stalwart named Connie Mack. Pud's career was obviously on the decline. Realizing that, the Pirates acquired veteran hurlers Mark (Fido) Baldwin and Silver King in 1891. Galvin was pushed to the background and his salary was cut in half. Midway through the 1892 season, after Galvin had won 24 games in one and one-half seasons with the Pirates, he was sold to the St. Louis Browns. Hurting from a leg injury suffered from a collision with Cap Anson, Pud finished an uneventful season in his hometown.

The following year he tried to stay in baseball as a National League umpire but did not deal well with the arguments and abuse and quit after just one season. Galvin attempted a comeback in 1894 as a pitcher with Buffalo, now a member of the Eastern League, but that did not work out either.

Returning to Pittsburgh, Galvin tried his hand at different jobs, working as a bartender and in construction. Eventually, he opened his own saloon, which was billed as the largest in Pittsburgh. Pud employed nine bartenders, but while each of them was said to have later opened his own bar, Galvin, a poor businessman, soon went broke and was forced to close the business.

Having saved little of the substantial money he had earned as a player and by now weighing well over 300 pounds, Galvin sank rapidly into a financial abyss from which he wouldn't recover. Forced into a meager existence, he died a pauper, a tragic contrast to the glamorous life he once led.

October 5, 1888—Alleghenys 5, Nationals 1

Pittsburgh	AB	R	H	Washington	AB	R	H
Miller, c	4	1	0	Hoy, cf	4	0	1
McShannick, 3b	4	0	0	Myers, 2b	4	0	1
Smith, 2b	4	0	0	Wilmot, lf	4	0	0
Coleman, 1b	4	1	1	O'Brien, 1b	4	0	0
Kuehne, ss	4	0	1	Mack, c	4	1	0
Fields, lf	4	2	1	Dailey, rf	3	0	0
Maul, rf	4	0	1	Donnelly, 3b	4	0	1
Nichols, cf	3	1	0	Shoch, ss	3	0	0
Galvin, p	4	0	0	Haddock, p	3	0	1

Totals	35	5	4		33	1	4
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Pittsburgh	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	–	5
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Washington	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	–	1
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Pittsburgh	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
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Galvin (W)	9	4	1	0	0	1
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Washington

Haddock (L)	9	4	5	1	1	0
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DP—Pittsburgh 2. E—McShannick 2, Smith 3, Myers 2, Wilmot 1, O'Brien 1, Donnelly 1, Shoch 3, Haddock 1. 3B—Fields. SB—Coleman, Kuehne, Fields, Maul. T—1:30.