Bob Feller's Opening Day No Hitter
April 16, 1940 - Comiskey Park

INDIANS (1)	ab	r	h	WHITE SOX (0)	ab	r	h
Bodreau ss	4	0	0	Kennedy 3b	4	0	0
Weatherly cf	4	0	1	Kuhel 1b	3	0	0
Chapman rf	3	0	0	Kreevich cf	3	0	0
Trosky 1b	4	0	0	Solters lf	4	0	0
Heath lf	4	1	1	Appling ss	3	0	0
Keltner 3b	4	0	1	Wright rf	4	0	0
Hemsley c	4	0	2	McNair 2b	3	0	0
Mack 2b	4	0	1	Tresh c	2	0	0
Feller	3	0	0	Smith p	1	0	0
Totals	37	1	6	a-Rosenthal p	1	0	0
				Brown p	0	0	0
				Totals	28	0	0

a-batted for Smith in the 8th.

BATTING: 2B - Mack. 3B - Hemsley. RBI - Hemsley.
Team LOB - Indians, 7 White Sox, 6.

SB Kuhel. DP: 1 (Kuhel - unassisted).

INDIANS	- 000 001 000 --	1 6	0
WHITE SOX	- 000 000 000 --	0 0	0

INDIANS	ip	h	r	er	bb	so
Feller (W, 1-0)	9	0	0	0	5	8

WHITE SOX	ip	h	r	er	bb	so
Smith (L 0-1)	8	6	1	1	2	5
Brown	1	0	0	0	0	0

Umpires - Geisel, McGowan and Kolls.
T—2:24. Att—14,000.

Scorer Ed Burns

Opening Day will not be the same without one Bob “Rapid Robert” Feller, who passed away three months ago at the age of 92. But you gotta figure that his heavenly spirit will be floating somewhere over Progressive Field at game time. Feller was never one to miss an Opening Day in Cleveland.

One of the old righty's crowning achievements was pitching the only opening day no-hitter in Major League Baseball history. He was so proud of that feat, he hoped it would not be repeated by another pitcher in his lifetime -- a wish that the powers that be have granted him.

In his memory, we conjure up the drama of that cold, windy day in Chicago, almost 71 years ago. Here’s how it went down…

A Miserable Day for Baseball

On April 16, 1940 in old Comiskey Park, a sparse crowd of about 14,000 included Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis, American League President Will Harridge, and Feller's family visiting from Van Meter, Iowa: father Bill, mother Lena, sister Marguerite.

"Cold [35 to 40 degrees], windy and Norway-gray," Feller once remembered. "The wind was blowing off the lake, coming in from centerfield. My arm was stiff."

At 21 years of age, Feller had already won 55 games. He'd posted a 24-9 won-loss record the previous year with a league-leading 246 strikeouts. But his 1940 training camp performance left many fans wondering if he'd lost his stuff.

"I had pitched [the previous] Saturday," Feller remembered. "I went five innings and gave up about 15 hits and 10 runs, getting ready to open the season. I had a bad spring; I never pitched well in the spring. All the writers were saying, 'Bob doesn't have it. He might have a bad year.'"

Feller admitted many times that the '40 opener wasn't his best game. Struggling to maintain his curveball grip in Comiskey's icy chill, he had severe problems controlling that pitch during the first couple of innings.

The first sign of trouble came in the second inning when the White Sox loaded the bases. First, Tribe centerfielder Roy Weatherly, battling the vicious wind, dropped Taft Wright's one-out fly ball. It could have been ruled a hit but was scored a two-base error. (Feller always conceded that he got the benefit of the doubt from Ed Burns of the *Chicago Tribune,* who was the official scorer.) With two out, Feller walked Mike Tresh and the opposing pitcher, Edgar Smith. But then he struck out Bob Kennedy to end the inning.

The first two innings took 48 minutes. Because things had gotten so dicey in that second inning, Tribe manager Oscar Vitt almost removed his star moundsman. "After that," Feller noted, "I

started pitching better." By the third inning, he had pretty much abandoned the curve and was throwing his blazing fastball almost exclusively.

In the top of the fourth, the Indians scored a run on two of their six hits: a single by Feller's roommate Jeff Heath through the left side of the infield, a fly-out by third baseman Ken Keltner, and a triple by catcher Rollie Hemsley that Chicago's rightfielder misplayed, allowing Heath to score.

Then Feller started to breeze. By the end of the eighth inning, he had retired 15 consecutive batters -- but more drama was in store.

In the bottom of the ninth, Rapid Robert faced the heart of Chicago's lineup. He easily retired centerfielder Mike Kreevich and leftfielder Moose Solters. But then he had to face shortstop Luke Appling, an expert at fouling off pitches who was destined for the Hall of Fame. Appling worked the count to two-and-two, then fouled off four consecutive pitches. The last two pitches of the at-bat were outside, and Appling jogged down to first base.

"He was timing me pretty good," Feller remembered perfectly. "He had hit a shot off me in the third, [so] I threw the last two outside on purpose" (in an apparent effort to conserve his remaining energy and not allow Appling a chance to destroy baseball history). "Nobody knew it but me. Even my catcher didn't know."

Wright then came to bat and, on the first pitch, hit a screaming grounder into the hole between first and second. Second baseman Ray Mack, ranging far to his left, dove to his knees in the outfield grass, snatched the ball, spun, and threw to first baseman Hal Trosky.

"Mack dove for the ball, knocked it down, picked it up barehanded, and threw him out at first base," Feller recalled vividly. "I can still see [him] racing to his left, out on the grass, in pursuit of the ball. He slipped a little as he came up with it. Wright was out by a step. It was close, but it wasn't bang-bang. Ray made a very good play. Wright's ball was the hardest hit off me all day. It was really tagged."

Final score: Indians 1, White Sox 0.

The fans that day rewarded Feller with a rousing standing ovation. It was the first time the Sox had been no-hit since May 6, 1917, when Robert Groom of the St. Louis Browns blanked them, 3-0.

Feller, surprisingly, was not overly dominant during the game, yielding five walks and striking out eight.

“I didn’t have no-hit stuff that day,” he recalled. “I’ve had much better stuff. But it was such a cold day, if you hit a ball on the fists, it was like you had a handful of bees stinging you.”

After the game, Feller posed with Vitt and Hemsley on the dugout steps for famous baseball photographer George Brace. The clubhouse celebration featured Rev. Charles Fix, Feller’s pastor at the Van Meter Methodist Church. Feller himself fielded questions after the game at the Hotel Del Prado.

But to his family, the singular feat was barely more than another day at the ballpark. “We were staying at the Congress Hotel downtown on Michigan Avenue,” Feller remembered. “My dad, mother and sister and I had breakfast the next day. That was about the size of it.”

Some day, somewhere in America, some pitcher will hurl another Opening Day no-hitter. But there will never be another Bob Feller.

No-Hit Tidbits

>> It was the first major league no-hitter since Monte Pearson of the Yankees shut down the Indians on August 27, 1938.

>> Ed Burns of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote this: “It was a treat day yesterday for baseball rejoicing or brooding, according to the mood and the inspiration. What would you do on a rainy, cold day if you were just over having participated on the winning side of a no-hit season opener?”

>> The day of his return to Cleveland, 7,000 fans and a uniformed band awaited Feller at Union Terminal. After the celebration, he went to St. Luke’s Hospital and visited Indians fan Paul Hauschulz, Jr. of Canton, who was sick with a strep throat and mastoiditis but rallied after the unexpected visit.

>> In his 1947 autobiography, “Strikeout Story,” ghost-written by Frank Gibbons of the *Clevelan d Press* , Feller noted that, “I can honestly say that I have pitched many better games...I was lucky that day, and I got fine support.”

>> Feller’s accomplishment would later be overshadowed by Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams slugging it out for the American League batting title the rest of the year.

>> “Everything after Opening Day that season,” Feller always contended, “as far as I was concerned, was downhill. We lost the pennant by one game to Detroit.” Yet his performance was nothing short of great. He won a career-high 27 games in 1940, leading the league with a 2.61 ERA, 261 strikeouts and 320-1/3 innings pitched.

>> Feller went on to pitch two more no-hitters in his career: against the Yankees on April 30, 1946, and against the Tigers on July 1, 1951. “My Opening Day no-hitter, of course, has gotten a lot of publicity,” he once said. “But my no-hitter at Yankee Stadium was against a much better team, by far, than the White Sox. I had to pitch to Tommy Henrich, Charlie Keller and Joe DiMaggio in the ninth inning to get the Yankees out.”

>> Before he retired in 1956, Rapid Robert also threw 12 one-hitters.

>> “If you don’t strike out 27, there’s probably going to be some luck involved in no-hitters,”

Feller said not long before his death. “I had good defense behind me.”

—Sources: Dr. David Fletcher (www.bobfellermuseum.org), *The Baseball Almanac*, Anthony Castrovince (MLB.com), Dennis Manoloff (
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