

Joseph Wood, Esq., Pitcher

The Star of the Pennant Winning Red Sox at Twenty-two years of Age, is Walter Johnson's Greatest Rival for the Supreme Honors of the Pitching World

By JOHN J. WARD

When the Red Sox finally overcame the lead of the White Sox early in the season many believed that it was merely the substitution of one temporary winner for another. Neither in the opinion of the public had the class or the stamina to maintain the same speed to the end of the season and it was confidently expected that the Athletics would surpass the best efforts of both once they struck that marvelous stride which had characterized their play in the season of 1911. The opinions of the public in the case of the White Sox were correct and were speedily verified by the gradual sinking of that club in the standing, but the Red Sox refused to slump and went forward triumphantly to the end of the season, gradually widening the space which separated them from the leaders. One reason for this great spurt was Jake Stahl, another was Tris Speaker. And there were others in the persons of Heinie Wagner and Larry Gardner. But the main figure in the wonderful success of the Boston American Club is the subject of the following sketch, their remarkable young pitcher, Joe Wood.

THE season of 1912 will go down in baseball history as one of unexampled changes. Never since the White Sox rushed through the American League leaving behind them a trail of shattered pennant prospects has there been so complete a reversal of good form on the part of certain clubs, or so unexpected a showing of strength on the part of others.

At the beginning of the year the Philadelphia Athletics occupied the whole of the future horizon. Fresh from a victorious series with the Giants, immeasurably superior to any club in the American League, apparently having all the elements of a sure winner, it seemed impossible for any other team to cope with them.

Hugh Jennings early in the season in discussing the pennant prospects said: "The Athletics are a wonderful team. They are so strong and their strength is built so much on younger players that they ought to be equally good for two or three seasons to come." And Hugh Jennings, who had been the club's great-

est rival in times past, who, too, well recognized their strength, voiced merely the prevailing sentiment of all acknowledged sport authorities. But in a season whose course was marked by many disasters, the Athletics bowed to the wonderful work of the Red Sox, and were forced to admit, however bitter, the confession, that the daring band of players led by Jake Stahl, the banker-manager, were the undisputed masters of the American League.

Since the days when Jimmy Collins piloted the Red Sox to the highest pinnacle of baseball success when they twice won the pennant, vanquished the Pittsburgh Pirates in post-season series and were refused an encounter with the Giants, many thought through McGraw's respect for their prowess, things have not gone too well at the Hub. The once great combination immortalized by the deeds of Cy Young and his old comrades in arms was completely shattered and passed away in the winning career of their fearless leader, Jimmy Collins. For several seasons the club slumped badly

and then under the enterprising management of Lake, the team all at once burst forth on the startled baseball horizon as the one best bet for the pennant of that year. The Speed Boys played a wonderful game and but for internal dissensions which eventually broke up the great infield with Harry Lord at third might have won. The prospects of this team have always centered in the great outfield with Speaker at the head and this year the infield built up around Gardner, Wagner, and Stahl has been scarcely inferior. But a great deal of these pennant hopes which have floated for years around Beacon Hill have risen from faith in the ability of one young pitcher who had come at the early age of eighteen from the seclusion of his Kansas club.

Joe Wood has given great signs of promise ever since he broke into the major leagues. It was easy to see that he was a pitcher of tremendous ability and much of his work in the past three years has been gilt edged. Last year he reached that goal of the pitcher's ambition, a no-hit contest against St. Louis, the only pitcher with the exception of Walsh to attain that honor in 1911. But Wood's real claim to success is built upon his marvelous record for the season of 1912.

When the year began the Red Sox were heralded as of first division calibre, though most people placed them about fourth on the list. It was conceded that Philadelphia would win, and it was thought by many that the White Sox and Cleveland to say nothing of Detroit would beat out the Red Sox. As for Washington, no one conceded them a chance higher than sixth or seventh. The great burst of Washington built largely upon the phenomenal work of her premier twirler, Johnson, was duplicated in the case of the Red Sox by the pitching of Wood. In the beginning of the year, Rube Marquard's spectacular series of nineteen victories was the universal theme. Many could see, however, that Marquard was tottering long before fortune finally deserted his banners, and his record since that time has been a fair commentary on what a pitcher with good speed and considerable ability can do with a tremendously fast, aggressive club behind him in the face of weak opposition.

But while Marquard was still being heralded as the pitching sensation of the year, his best efforts were rapidly being surpassed in real victories won, to say nothing of superior excellence, by Joe Wood.

The year 1912 is destined to be long remembered as a season of pitching records. Marquard led the grand procession with nineteen wins. Then came Jean Dubuc with eleven straight with the rocky support of the much shaken Tigers behind him. This was followed by the grand attempt of Walter Johnson whose series of victories was broken by the adverse decision of Ban Johnson after he had annexed sixteen straight wins and surpassed the American League record by two. And this was followed by the spectacular spurt of the Red Sox Wonder, which is still unbroken as we go to press.

Joe Wood was born at Kansas City, Mo., on the 25th day of October, 1889. This metropolis of western Missouri which has long ranked as the pork-packer's paradise has produced some great ball players. Joe Tinker, of the Cubs, John Kling, of the Boston Nationals, Geo. Stovall of the St. Louis Browns may all dispute with Wood for the honor of having brought the most notoriety to their native city in baseball prominence. But, though Joe is far younger than the others, and has but just begun his real career, he has already outdistanced them all.

In view of his years of big league service, many people refuse to believe that Wood is not yet twenty-three. To those who doubt, however, the accommodating young pitcher is always ready to show a beautiful gold watch which was given to him by his mother, inscribed with the date of his birth. For at a time when most players are substituting in the minors, Wood was a member of a big league club, and at an age when any player considers himself lucky to be noticed by a major scout, Wood has already attained a rank where he is one of the half dozen most prominent stars in the American League.

Joe, for that is the name by which he is universally called, did not long reside at Kansas City. While still very young he was taken by his parents to Chicago

where he remained until he was eleven years old. His baseball career began on the amateur diamonds of the Windy City. It was here that he first dreamed of a future in the professional ranks. It was here that he first began to display that aptitude for handling a baseball which so characterized his subsequent career. But he did not stay here long enough to do more than become an adept player among other boys of his own age. From the midst of a growing city, the great metropolis of the West, the Wood family made a long move, to far different scenes than city streets, for business openings and a healthy climate called them to the mountains of Colorado where they remained for the next five years in the mining town of Uray. The novel scenes of this unbroken country whose wealth was centered in her forests and in the quartz ledges glittering with gold which outcropped from her mountain ridges by no means prevented the young pitcher from perfecting his talents. In this high altitude, breathing the pineladen air, Wood developed that tremendous speed which has made him so great a pitcher, but though he played whenever the opportunity offered, it needed another pilgrimage of this roving family and another change of scene to bring him his opportunity.

When Joe was about sixteen, the Woods once more moved, this time to Kansas, where they resided for the next five years at Ness City. It is no wonder that Wood here rapidly developed a throwing arm which has but one superior, for in this same state that same climate which ripens more acres of wheat than any other state in the Union was also developing that champion of all twirlers, Walter Johnson. Young pitchers who are looking for speed should certainly go to Kansas for here the two slab men who are pre-eminent artists in this department of the game both gained their skill.

The year 1906 was marked by an excursion into the rank of semi-professional baseball on the part of the youthful pitcher. Here his efforts were tempered with considerable success, and the following year, 1907, we find him at Hutchinson in the Western Association alternating his pitching by covering sec-



Wood is a Dangerous Hitter as Well as a Great Pitcher

ond base. In 1908 he rose in the world, joining the Kansas City club in the American Association. And from this ante-room to the majors he ascended, rapidly joining the Boston Americans, that same year taking a brief and unrecorded part in four games. From that time to the present his record has always been pre-eminently in the public eye.

One of the most fascinating things in baseball is a comparison of two great players. Perhaps more than any two pitchers of modern times Wood's and

Johnson's records parallel. The great success of Washington is built mainly upon Johnson. The pennant comes to Boston largely through the efforts of Wood. Both are pitchers possessing the last degree of finished science, of brilliant talents, and absolute mastery of the pitcher's art. Both have almost the same style, are speed pitchers, the best in the game; both have fair curves, both have experimented with the slow ball with equal indifferent success; both have had good batting seasons this year; both have won great series of successive victories.

In a comparison where two men are so evenly matched as Johnson and Wood, there will be many partisans of both. Nor is the difference between them so marked as to make it easy to tender the palm to either. Their finely balanced skill was brought into play in their recent pitching duel where Johnson lost to Wood by the score of 1 to 0. The marvelous Washington twirler held the Red Sox to five hits and gave but one base on balls. Wood allowed six hits and three bases on balls. Johnson struck out five men, Wood struck out nine. Anyone who says that on the strength of this showing Wood is superior to Johnson is a faulty reasoner. Both pitched almost equally well with a shade in favor of Johnson, but the Red Sox club outclassed Washington by sufficient margin to turn the scale. Nor can a single game be taken as a fair comparison of a pitcher's worth. Stars have their bad days and even an acknowledged dub pitches brilliantly at times.

No mention of Johnson is ever made without mention of Wood in the same breath, but yet almost without exception the players give the preference to Johnson. This is no discredit to Wood. It is rather the highest honor to him that at the age of twenty-two years, it requires the nicest investigation to determine whether he or another is the greatest pitcher in the game.

Wood has tremendous speed. He pitches with an over-arm motion; Johnson generally with a side-arm motion. Wood is faultlessly clever, brilliantly fast, a marvel of pitching grace. So almost all the players agree, but they add "Johnson can put more stuff in the ball than any man in the world." Johnson is

the king of pitchers, but he has to battle with all his skill to retain his title against the claim of a young pitcher not yet twenty-three years of age.

In this contest of stars Wood himself very generously gives the preference to Johnson. It is a good instance of his eminent fair-mindedness that he is so willing to yield the palm to his closest rival. "Walter Johnson is the greatest pitcher in the game," says Wood, "I am perfectly willing to admit it. I do not know that he has much more speed than I have, for people who are unprejudiced have told me that there is not much difference between us. Speed is my main strong point just as speed is his. I use curves with good effect, particularly a drop. I have never yet succeeded in developing a specially good slow ball, but neither, for that matter, has Johnson. He has used a slow ball this year, at times very effectively, but he is not a great slow ball pitcher as Dubuc is, for instance. Johnson has good curves and great speed. I am willing to concede that he is the leading pitcher in the game."

Wood very generously gives credit to his team-mates for much of his success. "I do not know that I pitched much better this year than I did last," he says, "but, of course, I have had a far better club behind me, and that accounts for the difference."

"Tris Speaker has played a wonderful game this year. It is his great work which has shown up so strongly and which accounts so largely for the Red Sox' success. Many people compare Speaker with Ty Cobb. I suppose the Chalmers Automobile Commission will have to choose between these two for the final honor. Personally, I think Speaker on many accounts should get the prize, and at that, I am willing to admit there is only one Ty Cobb. Ty is a better batter than Speaker, he is a better base runner. Everyone will concede that. He has always been more daring, more resourceful, although Speaker is fast breaking into that department of the game as well. But Speaker is a better fielder than Ty Cobb. He covers more ground, has as good if not a better throwing arm and while many people think that Cobb can run back an outfield fly farther than any other player in the game. I do

not think he has anything on Speaker in this respect. Speaker often plays well in, backing up second base in good shape, but he can go back into the outfield territory for a hard batted drive as far as anybody I ever saw. I think Speaker is superior to Joe Jackson, admitting that Joe is a wonderful player in every department of the game and Joe, too, has one point in which he exceeds not only Speaker and Ty Cobb, but everyone else in the business. He can throw from deep outfield farther than anybody I ever saw. I firmly believe there is no man in either league who can throw a ball as far as Jackson, but in several games where I have watched his peculiar ability in this line I have noticed that he is not always accurate in his throws and much of the advantage which should come to him from this ability is lost through wildness.

"Jackson, of course, is a very great player and still young. He has been greatly handicapped by lack of early training, and I believe has not always had the encouragement or good coaching to bring out the best of his talents. No doubt he will improve in coming seasons and if he could play in the East as well as he does in the West, he would beat them all out. Jackson bats at a .500 clip in his own city or on the average western tour but for some reason cuts that in half on his Eastern excursions. Why this is so, no one knows. It is one of the peculiarities of baseball and baseball players.

It is hard to compare these three players, for they all excel in some one point or more. Oddly enough, they are all Southerners, and all wonders. They are far and away the greatest outfielders in the game, bar none. It is very fortunate for the Red Sox that they have on their club one of these three players. No one can appreciate better than a pitcher the worth of a man who covers acres of ground, has a sure and deadly throwing arm and bats in the near neighborhood of .400.

"In talking about the value of any one player, it is natural to speculate on the choice of the Chalmers Commission. Many people, in my experience, have thought that Walter Johnson should be given the automobile this year, as the leading representative of the American League. Personally admitting all that is

claimed for Johnson, I do not think he has a chance. Pitchers are not considered along with infielders or outfielders. Authorities are inclined to bar the pitcher out in such a contest because they say he pitches only once in every three or four days, whereas the regular player is on the field taking his fair share of work day in and day out.

"This looks plausible enough, and at first sight it seems just to say that a good infielder or a brilliant outfielder who plays 150 games a year ought to be chosen in preference to a pitcher who perhaps takes part in thirty or forty contests. This looks fair enough but there is one fact that the average person generally does not see and fails to make allowance for. It is true that a pitcher works only once in three or four days, but on the other hand he does as much real work in that space of time as the average player, at least the average outfielder, does in his daily visit to the diamond. An outfielder as a usual thing has perhaps three or four chances in the game and goes to the bat four or five times. A pitcher doesn't go to bat anywhere nearly so many times in the course of a season as does an outfielder, but he does have to throw maybe a couple of hundred balls with his full strength in the course of a game. He actually does more real work in his two games a week than the typical outfielder does in six days of steady playing, but, of course, that makes no special difference to the judges.

"I am not arguing in favor of the pitcher as against any other position on the diamond, and personally, I think Speaker of our own club should get the trophy. I am merely pointing out a feature of the case wherein I think the pitcher has not always received justice.

"I do not know that any special game I ever pitched seemed to me measurably better than any other, but I suppose the no-hit contest I worked against St. Louis last year may have been about my best effort. Every twirler hopes sooner or later to break into the group of pitchers who have not allowed a hit for there is a certain amount of distinction that goes with such a performance whether or not it be deserved. There are many great players who have never pitched a no-hit

game and there are some who were perhaps not so great who have accomplished that feat. A pitcher's reputation is not built upon his showing in any one game. It is built on his showing for the entire season, and, better still, from season to season. I was very glad to have a no-hit game to my credit, and I suppose that game was the most conspicuous of my career, but at that I have always considered there was a good deal of luck in pitching such a contest, and a game wherein an opposing batter fails to get a hit is not necessarily better pitched than some other game where a twirler is touched up for several hits.

"Ed Walsh has pitched a no-hit game, but I have always understood that the game which he considered the greatest of his career was that in which he opposed Addie Joss and allowed three hits while striking out fifteen men.

"On the eve of the World's Series I am, of course, looking forward to my share in those important games. It will be a new experience for me. I have never before played on a championship team even in the minors and the games when I am called upon to oppose the winners in the National League will be my first appearance in such a series. But I am not worrying particularly about this. In a World's Series game I shall pitch my best as I try to do in all my games. It is true that these games are very important and I naturally want to win more than I would in an ordinary contest during the course of the season. But I am not in the least anxious about my showing, and do not believe that I will be any more nervous on my first appearance than I would be if I had had any previous experience."

Wood is often referred to as "Little Joe." Why this is so, no one knows. As a matter of fact, he is five feet ten and one-half inches tall and weighs 175 pounds. He is by no means little, though he looks rather slender in street clothes, but he has a finely developed arm and shoulder, and it is there that his great speed lies.

Johnson is taller, rangier, and heavier. From his six feet of height he puts all his 190 pounds of bone and muscle into his throws, and the crushing weight behind the ball as it flashes across the plate is a terror to any batsman. Wood has

not so much weight to put in his throws and he has a different style of delivery, but his speed is inferior only to Johnson's and superior to that of any other twirler in the game.

Wood is a quiet young man, rather reserved in his manner, wholly unspoiled by the brilliant success which has come to him so young. No player is more popular with his team-mates or better liked by the great baseball community to whose club he is so conspicuous an ornament.

"I have no special calling mapped out for the time when I am through with the game," said Wood, "for as I am not very old at present, I suppose I can count on a few years yet before I have to step down and out to make room for someone else. I hope before the time comes when I have to say goodbye to baseball that I will be in a position where I can enter some other profession to advantage, but it looks a little too distant and a little too hazy to bother me just now. I am thinking more about the World's Series just at present than of any of those things.

"My winters pass pleasantly enough," said Wood, "I spend them mostly on a farm near Parker's Glen, Pa. This is a rather out of the way place, but the scenery is fine and the out-door life very pleasant. I suppose my profession during the winter months is not specially romantic, but it is at least healthy and fairly profitable. Yes, I do not mind saying that when I am through with the Diamond for the season I spend the intervening months down on my farm in the humble but always interesting occupation of raising chickens. I do not know that I shall spend my share of the profits, whatever they may be, in the coming World's Series toward adding blooded stock to my farm, but there are worse ways in which I could invest my money or spend my time than among my own people and my own chickens at Parker's Glen."

Joe Wood's Record

Year	Games	Won	Lost	Aver.
1909	24	11	7	.611
1910	35	12	13	.480
1911	44	23	17	.575
1912	39	31	4	.886