

Always on Sunday: The Saga of Ted Lyons

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Theodore Amar Lyons entered major league baseball in the summer of 1923, direct from the campus of Baylor University. With no minor league service he began pitching for a Chicago White Sox team still badly scarred by the Black Sox scandals, and he remained with the Sox until he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1942. After the war he remained in baseball as manager and coach of various teams before his retirement. He was elected to Baseball's Hall of Fame in 1955.

This paper stresses two aspects of Lyons' career. It describes first his very considerable accomplishments with one of the consistently worst teams in the game—the Sox generally finishing in sixth or seventh place in Lyons' day. Using a variety of sources including official statistics, interviews, and my own observations, I have concluded that rarely in baseball history has one man performed so ably with so little support.

The other theme of this paper is that Lyons had a second career, beginning at age 39, resulting in part from his perfection of the knuckle-ball and in part from his use as a starting pitcher every Sunday for the White Sox. Lyons needed the rest, but League owners also discovered that he could draw crowds in every city in those years when the continuation of the game was threatened by war. Astonishingly Lyons' performance in his second or Sunday season significantly improved upon all his records made as a young man, and in his last four years—age 39 to 42 — he won .609 of his games, finished .855 of his starts, and achieved an earned run average of just below .300.

Lyons would have been a noteworthy pitcher by any standard, but the paper concludes that his second career demonstrated the possibility that more teams might find this a highly effective way of using the talents of the older players in the game.