



Johnny Vander Meer

November 2, 1914 - October 6, 1997

Tampa, Florida

Johnny Vander Meer, the only pitcher in major league history to throw two no-hitters in a row, died at his home in Tampa, Florida, on October 6, 1997. He was eighty-two. Nearly sixty years after June 1938, the record still stood, and almost nobody expects it to fall.

John Samuel Vander Meer was born in Prospect Park, New Jersey, on November 2, 1914, and grew up in nearby Midland Park in a Dutch-American family, which is how a hard-throwing left-hander came to be called the Dutch Master. The Brooklyn Dodgers signed him in 1933, and for a few years minor league clubs passed him around as if they were not sure what to do with a pitcher who could throw very hard to places nobody, including him, could predict.

The Cincinnati Reds kept him. On June 11, 1938, at Crosley Field, he no-hit the Boston Bees. Four days later the Reds visited Ebbets Field in Brooklyn for the first night game ever played there, a promotional evening with a big crowd and brand-new lights. Vander Meer walked eight batters, loaded the bases in the ninth and still did not allow a hit. To match him, a pitcher would need three in a row.

He started that summer's All-Star Game, pitched for the Reds team that won the 1940 World Series, and led the National League in strikeouts three straight seasons. He lost two prime years to Navy service during the Second World War and finished with a record of 119 wins and 121 losses, a reminder that greatness and consistency are not the same thing.

He kept pitching in the minors until he was forty and threw one more no-hitter for the Tulsa Oilers in 1952. He

then managed in the Reds farm system for a decade, worked for a brewing company, and in 1958 entered the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame in its first class. He spent his last years in Tampa, answering the same happy question at every card show.

Services

Died of an abdominal aneurysm at his home in Tampa, Florida, October 6, 1997, aged 82. Cincinnati Reds left-handed pitcher; only major leaguer to throw no-hitters in consecutive starts (June 11 and June 15, 1938). Inaugural class, Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame, 1958. Portrait: public-domain baseball photograph, hosted by Notice Nearby.

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