

This Day in History... January 16, 1910

Birth of “Dizzy” Dean

Born on January 16, 1910, in Lucas, Arkansas, Jay Hanna “Dizzy” Dean rose from humble beginnings to become one of the most dominant pitchers in Major League Baseball history. A Hall of Famer and multiple-time All-Star, Dean’s blazing fastball and fearless style helped lead the St. Louis Cardinals to World Series glory and earned him a reputation as one of the greatest pitchers of the 1930s.

Dean only attended public school until second grade, however he pitched for the junior high school team in Spaulding, Oklahoma, even though he wasn’t a student there. Between the ages of 10 and 16, Dean worked with his father and brothers as a cotton picker.

Dean’s father had been a semiprofessional baseball player. Dean, however, claimed he and his brothers learned to pitch by throwing hickory nuts at squirrels. Dean enlisted in the Army when he was 16 and quickly joined the post laundry baseball team. By 1929, he was pitching for the Fort Sam Houston baseball team. It was here that he earned his nickname while pitching against the Chicago White Sox. During a game, Dean quickly worked his way through the team’s hitters, leaving the White Sox manager to exclaim, “Knock that dizzy kid out of the box!” He continued to call Dean “dizzy kid,” and the name stuck.

In the fall of 1929, the St. Louis Cardinals signed Dean. He had an impressive record pitching in the minor leagues before being called up to the majors on September 28, 1930. However, his boasting reportedly angered his manager and he was sent back to the minor leagues. During the 1931 season in the minors, he became the only pitcher to lead the league in wins, earned-run average, and strikeouts.

Dean returned to the major league team in 1932. During his rookie year with the St. Louis Cardinals, he led the National League with 191 strikeouts. On July 30, 1933, he tallied a record 17 strikeouts in one game.

Dean was known for his colorful personality. Prior to a game with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1934, he entered the opposing team’s clubhouse and informed each player of the pitches he planned to throw them. He pitched the Cardinals to a 13-0 victory that day.

Dean’s best season was 1934, when his 30 wins and 195 strikeouts made him the National League’s Most Valuable Player. An injury in 1937 strained his arm, and it was never the same. He was traded to the Chicago Cubs in 1938, and pitched in the World Series that year. During his eight-year career, Dean had 150 wins and 83 losses, led the league in strikeouts four times and in complete games and innings pitched three times.

In 1941, after his baseball career ended, Dean traded his bat for a microphone. His folksy style made him a popular baseball commentator, and he was known for using words like “slud” instead of slid and “throwed” for threw. He returned to the mound in 1947, pitching four scoreless innings after complaining about the team’s pitching staff. Then in 1950, he was recruited to an all-star team of former major league players.

Dean’s life story was turned into a movie, *The Pride of St. Louis*, in 1952. He also became the first national baseball television broadcaster on “Game of the Week” and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1953. During the induction ceremony, Dean said “This is the greatest honor I ever received, and I wanna thank the Lord for givin’ me a good right arm, a strong back, and a weak mind.” He died on July 17, 1974, after suffering two heart attacks.



From the 2000 Legends of Baseball Sheet



From the 2017 Have a Ball Issue



Issued for the 100th anniversary of the beginning of baseball.

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