

This Day in History... May 2, 1887

Birth of Eddie Collins

Edward Trowbridge Collins was born on May 2, 1887, in Millerton, New York. Playing 25 seasons in the major leagues, he played in six World Series, still holds several records, and is considered one of the best second basemen in the sport's history.

Collins was a bright and talented child, excelling both in his classes and athletics. He enrolled in Columbia University in 1903, where he wowed coaches, becoming a starting quarterback on the football team and a baseball shortstop who could hit and run. In the summer before his senior year, Collins, adopted the name "Eddie Sullivan" to join a semi-professional team – doing so under his name would make him ineligible to play for Columbia's team if they found out.

"Sullivan" once again wowed coaches, earning the attention of the Philadelphia Athletics, who quickly signed him to a contract. During his first major league game with the team on September 17, 1906, he flawlessly fielded six hits and knocked a single off the White Sox pitcher. He would play a total of six games that season before returning to Columbia for his senior year. However, the school found out about his stint with the Athletics and barred him from playing that season. He was allowed to coach the team though while he finished his degree.

After graduating in 1907, Collins returned to Philadelphia. He spent most of that season in the minor leagues and played in 102 games in 1908. By 1909, he was part of the starting lineup, playing at second base, where he would remain for the rest of his career. Collins had an impressive record that season, with a .347 average, 104 runs, and 67 stolen bases. Collins's career is full of highlights. In 1910, he had a team-high .422 average and stole a personal record 81 bases – he was also the first player in the league to steal more than 80 bases in one season. Collins also played in his first of six World Series games that season, which they won.

In 1912, Collins stole six bases in a game twice (only four others have stolen as many bases in a single game). He remained with the Athletics through the 1914 season. During that time, he played in four World Series, three of which the team won. His final year with the team, Collins batted .344, had 85 runs, and 58 stolen bases. He was named the American League's Most Valuable Player that year. Collins was one of the few players of his era with a college degree and earned the nickname "Cocky" for his aggressive style.

At the end of the 1914 season, the Athletics were struggling with debt, so they sold Collins to the Chicago White Sox, where he remained for 12 years, for a then-record \$50,000. When he joined Chicago, Collins's salary was \$15,000, twice as much as any of his teammates. He played in two World Series with the Sox and was part of the "Black Sox" team, which had thrown the 1919 World Series, though Collins wasn't accused of being part of the conspiracy. Collins was made player-manager of the White Sox from 1924 to 1926. He got his 3,000th hit on June 3, 1925.

Collins returned to the Athletics in 1927 as a player-coach, though he only played in 143 games over the next four years. He made his last player appearance on August 2, 1930. He had one of the longest major league careers in baseball history, lasting 25 years. He's also the only major league player to play for two teams for at least 12 seasons each. By the time he retired, he stood near the top of many rankings: second in walks (2,826) and stolen bases (744), third in runs scored (1,821), and fourth in hits (3,315), at-bats (9,949), and triples (187). To date he still holds the record for career sacrifice bunts (512) – more than 100 than the next closest player. He also holds the records for career games (2,650), assists (7,630), and total chances at second base (14,591).

After his retirement, Collins remained active in baseball as a manager and executive first with the Athletics and later with the Red Sox. He's credited with helping turn the Red Sox around, after years of decline, leading them to seven winning seasons and their first pennant win (1946) since 1918. Suffering from health problems, Collins retired in 1947 and died on March 10, 1951.



Collins stamp from the 2000 Legends of Baseball issue

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