

This Day in History... July 16, 1941

Joltin' Joe DiMaggio Sets 56-Game Hitting Streak

On July 16, 1941, Joe DiMaggio extended his record-setting hitting streak to 56 straight games, a Major League mark that still stands. For more than two months, the New York Yankees center fielder had turned each trip to the plate into a national sports story.

The streak began quietly on May 15 at Yankee Stadium. DiMaggio entered the game against the Chicago White Sox after going hitless in his previous two games. In the first inning, he lined a run-scoring single off left-hander Eddie Smith. DiMaggio finished 1-for-4 in a 13-1 Yankees loss. Nothing about that afternoon suggested that baseball history had begun.

DiMaggio was already one of the game's leading stars. He had won the American League batting title in both 1939 and 1940. He had also produced a 61-game hitting streak for the minor-league San Francisco Seals in 1933. Still, the 1941 streak attracted little attention at first. Newspapers began following it closely after he passed the 20-game mark. The pressure increased with every game, as reporters, photographers, and fans waited to see whether he could keep it alive.



One of the first modern imperforate stamps issued in 2012.

The streak survived several close calls. On June 24, DiMaggio was hitless in three at-bats against the St. Louis Browns. Before his final appearance, Browns manager Luke Sewell ordered pitcher Bob Muncrief to walk him intentionally. Muncrief resisted the order, and Sewell allowed him to pitch. DiMaggio singled, extending the streak to 36 games.

Five days later, DiMaggio passed George Sisler's modern American League record of 41 consecutive games. He tied the mark in the first game of a June 29 doubleheader against Washington. He then reached 42 in the second game. On July 2, DiMaggio homered against Boston Red Sox pitcher Dick Newsome for a hit in his 45th straight game. That carried him beyond Willie Keeler's 44-game single-season streak from 1897.

By July 16, DiMaggio and the Yankees were playing the Cleveland Indians at League Park. He removed the suspense during the first inning by singling to center field off Al Milnar. DiMaggio later added another single and a double. He finished 3-for-4, scored three runs, and helped New York win 10-3. The streak had reached 56 games.

Across those 56 games, DiMaggio collected 91 hits in 223 at-bats for a .408 batting average. His hits included 15 home runs, and he drove in 55 runs. He struck out only seven times. The streak continued through doubleheaders, difficult pitchers, travel days, and steadily growing public attention.

The run ended the following night at Cleveland Municipal Stadium before more than 67,000 spectators. Indians third baseman Ken Keltner made two difficult backhanded stops on sharply hit ground balls and threw DiMaggio out both times. DiMaggio later walked. In the eighth inning, shortstop Lou Boudreau handled another hard grounder and helped turn a double play. DiMaggio finished 0-for-3, although the Yankees won 4-3.

The interruption was brief. On July 18, DiMaggio collected two hits against Cleveland ace Bob Feller and began another 16-game hitting streak. He had at least one hit in 72 of 73 games. DiMaggio finished the 1941 season with a .357 average, 30 home runs, and a league-leading 125 runs batted in. He won the American League Most Valuable Player Award, while Boston's Ted Williams batted .406. The Yankees then defeated the Brooklyn Dodgers in the World Series.

In 1955, four years after retiring, Joe DiMaggio was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, securing his place among the game's greatest legends.



challenge has shown how difficult it is to avoid even one hitless game for weeks at a time.



From the 2012 Major League Baseball All-Stars Issue



Beyond his famous hitting streak, DiMaggio tied the major-league record with three triples in one game and retired with 361 home runs against only 369 strikeouts.

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