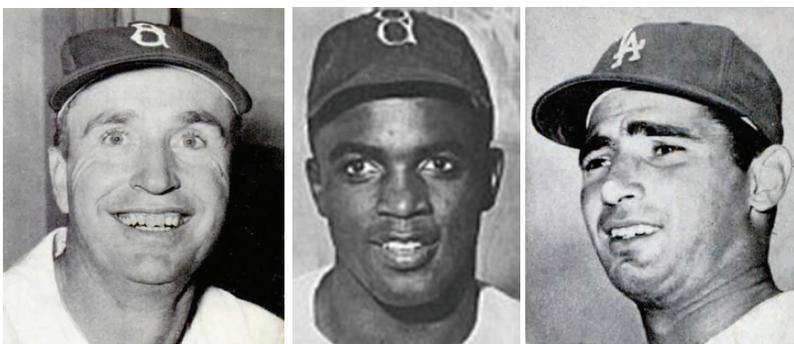


Chicago Cubs were game opponents start to finish in Sandy Koufax's career

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(First of a two-part series on the 50th anniversary of Sandy Koufax's perfect game over the Cubs on Sept. 9, 1965 in what may have been the greatest pitching duel in history with Chicago lefty Bob Hendley.)



Walter Alston (left) first used Sandy Koufax (right) sparingly, a tactic that upset Jackie Robinson (center) in his final season with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Later, Alston grossly overpitched Koufax.

The story about Sandy Koufax's perfect game over the Cubs isn't just about its 50th anniversary, the sheer magnificence of the Hall of Famer's performance or the Cubs' unparalleled streak of not being no-hit since the Koufax game just ended by Cole Hamels on July 25, 2015 at Wrigley Field.

Behind every all-time performance is a back story of people with emotions and desires, of standards and motivations. The Koufax saga goes back a decade from Vin Scully's unforgettable radio call of "Two and two on Harvey Kuenn, one strike away..." and forward two generations to the present.

It is the story of individuals lifted above their middling stature in baseball to establish a special connection to Koufax, a quietly tough-guy manager who grossly mishandled Koufax, the pitcher's resulting underlying push to prove himself and overcome constant arthritic pain, and an undermanaged, undermanned team making Koufax work especially hard for a win in almost every head-to-head battle.

The story branches out in so many different directions, but shares a common thread. The narrative is told in classic oral-history fashion with only Scully's broadcast, pieced together from several sources, as the only on-air record of the perfecto. Just several early innings of a home movie filmed by the Dodgers' trainer – and amazingly halted by a Dodger Stadium employee – exist. So the oral history of one hour, 43 minutes of action

on Thursday night, Sept. 9, 1965 in the “City of the Angels,” as Scully poetically intoned on KFI-Radio, are the main mental highways to bring the legend to life.

Wrigley Field a favorite road stop

Koufax had a decade-long connection with the Cubs as a classy competitor who did not always dominate against the perennial second-division team at the time. In fact, he often had to pitch for his life against the Cubs, before and after his perfecto. He even had a liking for Wrigley Field and the players and coaches employed there, as he confirmed for ESPNChicago.com’s Jesse Rogers in a 2014 audio interview at the Friendly Confines:

“I used to love coming to Wrigley...Part of it was Wrigley and part of it was all the day games. I always liked Wrigley. For me, the ballpark depended on the mound. I liked the mound here...I had a lot of fond memories here. There were a lot of people on those clubs I played against who were friends.”

Those “friends” and others paint a positive portrait of Koufax the pitcher and gentleman amid a storied career that ended prematurely at 30 in 1966 as the pain in his left arm became overwhelming and the prospect of losing the use of the arm grew. His legend and respect has merely grown through the decades, his mere presence at a public event cause to stop bystanders in their tracks or join in mass adulation. Koufax is the oldest living Hall of Famer to attend the annual induction ceremonies, and likely the most admired. He was voted among the four greatest living ballplayers and honored at the 2015 All-Star Game in Cincinnati.

The honors are not just for the lightning generated by his left arm. They’re for the entire person, perhaps the most gracious winner in baseball history who respected and admired his opponents, and even consoled those like then-Cubs catcher Chris Krug, whose throwing error led to the only run in the 1965 perfecto.

There may be just one lefty who compared with Koufax. Their careers barely dovetailed in 1965-66. Byron Browne, a Cubs outfielder who made his big-league debut in the perfecto and who played two months with the second lefty on the Philadelphia Phillies seven years later, makes the comparison.

Koufax vs. Carlton ‘tough call’

“Sandy vs. (Steve) Carlton the year (1972) he won 27?” he said. “That’s a tough call. They’re both great. They’re on equal terms for me.”

To Krug, Koufax was far atop the mountain.

“Thing about Koufax were all three of his pitches were the best in the league. He moved the ball around. He wasn’t afraid of anybody. He threw just as hard and effective in the ninth as the first.”

Past is prologue in baseball, so it made perfect sense that Hamels’ old-school 129-pitch feat at a hot, humid Wrigley Field on July 25 conjured up remembrances of Koufax’s feat as the half-century anniversary neared. The Cubs finally were no-hit after a 7,920-

game span, barely avoiding the ignominy via ninth-inning singles from Jimmy Qualls (1969 vs. the Mets), Joe Wallis (1975 vs. the Mets) and Dave Hansen (1997 vs. the Marlins), and a double by Michael Barrett (2004 vs. the Phillies).

But the angle of Koufax's fourth career no-hitter, a mark later broken by Nolan Ryan, did not start with out-of-his-league leadoff man Don Young and end with the strikeout of Kuenn, Koufax's sixth whiff in a row to seal the perfecto. The Cubs vs. Koufax competitive timeline originated eight years previously, with the White Sox playing a cameo role. The factors that pushed Koufax to a performance level seemingly higher than the big leagues themselves go back even further.

Koufax, later nicknamed the "Left Arm of God," was no secret to scouts as the lefty, better known as a high-school basketball star, came out of Brooklyn and attended the University of Cincinnati for his freshman year in 1954-55. The Dodgers were onto him, of course, and he engaged in tryouts with the arch-rival New York Giants and Branch Rickey-run Pittsburgh Pirates. Front-office legend Roland Hemond, then a junior executive, drove Koufax to a workout with the Milwaukee Braves. Conjecture is the Cubs knew about him, too. The story goes that Eastern scout Ralph Di Lullo watched Koufax, was wowed like any other scout, and phoned in the report to Wrigley Field. Apparently Di Lullo did not get approval to offer Koufax serious bonus money.

This was an era when the baseball establishment attempted yet another tactic to hold down salaries and bonuses. Any amateur player signed for more than \$4,000, deemed a "bonus baby," was forced to stay on the major-league team's roster for two years. He could not be demoted to the minors, thus the forced roster spot for an inexperienced player discourage most bonus signings. Nevertheless, the Dodgers could not pass on their own local product, inking Koufax to a \$14,000 bonus – earmarked by the pitcher for college tuition – and a \$6,000 salary to start.

Two shutouts as 19-year-old

Second-year Dodgers manager Walter Alston, whose style and strategy drew raised eyebrows at times from the veteran Bums' core, was sparing in his use of the 19-year-old rookie lefty. But on Aug. 27, 1955 at Ebbets Field, Koufax hurled a two-hit shutout over the Cincinnati Reds, striking out 14, an enormous total for the day. A week later, on Sept. 3 also at Ebbets Field, Koufax blanked the Pirates on five hits with a more workmanlike two walks and six strikeouts. He would not crack the regular rotation, though, with the Dodgers boring in on another World Series appearance – and this time their long-awaited championship.

The pair of great outings did not earn Koufax a break from Alston in 1956. He started just 10 games, totaling 58 2/3 innings. He'd rust in the bullpen for weeks on end. That waste of potential talent did not sit well with 10-year veteran Jackie Robinson, who clashed with Alston on this and several other subjects. Koufax lost his most prominent advocate, though, when Robinson retired after the season rather than accept a trade to the Giants.

On May 15, 1957, Koufax passed the two-year anniversary of his signing, beyond which he could be optioned to the minors. He never saw a bush-league ballpark, instead get-



Sandy Koufax struck out Ernie Banks (left) three times in his first complete game against the Cubs in 1957. But Banks slugged two of his three homers against Koufax in a hyped 1963 game, while Ron Santo (right) also touched the lefty for a two-run shot in the same contest.

ting a start against the Cubs at Wrigley Field on May 16. Again, Koufax tantalized with his other-worldly stuff, fanning 13 while allowing no earned runs and four hits in his third career complete game in a 3-2 victory before just 3,105 fans. He struck out Ernie Banks, then entering the prime of his career, three times, most of any of the otherwise-mediocre Cubs lineup. Banks – who went on to slug 43 homers while batting .285 in '57 – played third that day as the Cubs experimented with playing the immortal Jack Littrell at shortstop. Starting a pattern that would prevail for much of the next decade, Koufax had to pitch for his life against the Cubs. Opposing hurler Moe Drabowsky, one of the two Cubs' Gold Dust Twins with fireballer Dick Drott in 1957, allowed three runs on three hits in six innings.

Despite such a spectacular line and 122 strikeouts in 104 1/3 innings in '57, Alston would give Koufax just 13 starts. His wildness in which he in essence averaged a walk every two innings was likely exacerbated by his inconsistent use and inability to get into a rhythm for control. When the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles and far away from his welcoming Brooklyn in 1958, Koufax doubled his starts to 26 and finished 11-11. Backing him was the worst Dodgers team of his career in a right-handed hitter's dream of a bandbox left-field wall, when a baseball diamond was shoehorned into the football-shaped Los Angeles Coliseum. He led the NL with 17 wild pitches.

Alston should have put Koufax in the rotation 35 times in 1959, but still wasn't convinced despite empirical evidence. Koufax still got just 23 starts. On June 22, 1959, he set the night-game record with 16 whiffs in a 6-2 win over the Philadelphia Phillies at the Coliseum. Later, on August 31, he set the National League record while tying Bob Feller's all-time major-league record with 18 strikeouts in a 5-2 home win over the Giants, a clutch outing just as the pennant race began heating up. Koufax finished just 8-

6, but had 173 strikeouts in 153 1/3 innings. Alston did reward Koufax with a World Series start in Game 5 against the White Sox before nearly 93,000 in the Coliseum. Koufax pitched like a crafty veteran over seven innings, but lost 1-0 when Nellie Fox scored on a double-play grounder.

Pitcher abuse amid a pair of 13-inning marathons

As if to make up for under-using Koufax his first five seasons, suddenly Alston could not get enough of a good thing when he gave Koufax the ball at Wrigley Field on May 28, 1960. Leading 3-2 but still locked in a duel with 20-year-old rookie Cubs lefty Dick Ellsworth, Koufax was within one out of a victory in the bottom of the ninth when he served up a game-tying homer to (the other) Frank Thomas. He came out of the inning with 130 pitches.

After so much inactivity, no way was Koufax leaving a winnable game when work was being offered. Alston rode him like a mule, leaving him in four more innings to total 185 pitches while totaling 15 strikeouts. Koufax came out again for the 14th and promptly walked Ed Bouchee and Banks, finishing with 196 pitches. Alston finally pulled him for right-hander Ed Roebuck. Three batters later, ex-Koufax teammate Don Zimmer, an unnecessary 1960 acquisition for third with Ron Santo waiting in the wings, singled in the winning run with the loss tagged to an exhausted Koufax.

Alston was a manager who simply kept doling out what was later termed “pitcher abuse points” as if they were going out of style. In fact, he was a serial abuser spanning his entire 23-season Dodgers tenure.

On June 30, 1965, lefty starter Nick Willhite lasted just 1/3 of an inning against the Cubs at Wrigley Field. Alston summoned right-hander Bob Miller, the No. 2 bullpen man after southpaw relief ace Ron Perranoski, whom the Cubs had traded back in 1960 for Zimmer. Miller was typically a two-inning man who totaled 103 innings in 1965. Alston, no doubt worried that the game was the nightcap of a doubleheader, had Miller pitch the remaining 8 2/3 innings for the victory. Then, in 1974, Alston allowed Mike Marshall to set the all-time record as Dodgers closer with 106 games pitched over 208 1/3 innings. Marshall was a self-styled kinesiology expert who insisted he never got tired, but who was managing whom in this relationship?

Apparently remembering the 1960 heartbreak in Chicago, Koufax seemed determined to even the score. Once again matched in a tight game against Ellsworth on Sept. 20, 1961 at the Coliseum, Koufax dodged a bullet as the Dodgers pulled even 2-2 in the eighth on Norm Sherry’s leadoff homer. No one else scored the next five innings. Once again Koufax had 15 strikeouts in 13 innings, but even more pitches than the previous year’s marathon. He had totaled 160 after nine, 184 after 11 and 213 after 13. Showing mercy for their beloved teammate, the Dodgers finally pushed across the winning run on Ron Fairly’s two-out single off reliever Barney Schultz.

In today’s game, Alston would have been fired. But the baseball mindset of the mid-20th century was radically different. Even though common sense should have prevailed for a multiple pennant-winning manager who helmed good pitching staffs, a macho attitude was in evidence.

“Walter Alston and many managers of his day did not have the knowledge of the potential for serious damage to the pitcher's shoulder and elbow with those ‘extreme’ outings,” said Dr. Charles Bush-Joseph, White Sox team physician, professor of orthopedic surgery and associate director of the Rush Orthopedic Sports Medicine Fellowship in Chicago.

“Players like Sandy Koufax did what they were told to do unfortunately with severe consequences. His career was dramatically shortened due to the pitching abuse. The only benefit to tragedy of Koufax's career was that it stimulated the brilliant medical minds like Dr. Frank Jobe. Dr. Jobe's experience with Sandy Koufax eventually led to better diagnosis and treatments for the baseball player and even led to the ‘Tommy John Procedure.’”

Pitchers conceal pain, take their turn

However, the typical pitcher of the day often hid his injuries from his manager and trainer. As Koufax demonstrated in upcoming seasons, they took the ball in pain. The era of hundreds of minor-league players backed up into “B,” “C” and “D” bush leagues still existed, giving rise to a certain sense of job insecurity. Ellsworth suffered tendinitis in 1964 after his 22-win season for the Cubs and could not throw his trademark slider, but made all his starts, increasingly ineffectively. Few were willing to yield their rotation turns in this atmosphere.

“I don’t think these guys thought the way they do now,” said Browne. “Baseball was different in that era. These pitchers wanted to pitch. They had the gumption and drive and attitude, ‘I’m going to win this game.’ They’re not thinking of their arm.”

Koufax wasn’t the only ace who’d pitch a game and a half – or more. In 1963, Juan Marichal and Warren Spahn engaged in a 16-inning duel in San Francisco. And in another all-time classic, the Pirates’ Harvey Haddix took a perfect game into the 13th inning in Milwaukee before losing 1-0 on a Joe Adcock homer that was changed to a ground-rule double because of base running confusion. Opposing Braves hurler Lew Burdette went 13 complete innings for the victory, allowing 12 hits and striking out just two – 37 batted balls for outs.

By the time of 213-pitch outing on Sept. 20, 1961, Koufax was used to battling the Cubs. The Chicagoans had four future Hall of Fame position players, but otherwise had deteriorated to the 90-loss dregs level as the comical College of Coaches system threw the organization into near-chaos.

More than five decades later, the likes of outfielder George Altman and pitcher Bob Anderson still burst with pride in besting Koufax. On August 4, 1961, Altman slugged two homers off Koufax while hard-throwing right-hander Anderson outdueled him, allow-



Early 1960s Cubs were proud of competing with – and besting – Koufax. Outfielder George Altman (left) had two homers against him in a 1961 game in which Bob Anderson (right) out-pitched Koufax.

ing one earned run in 7 2/3 innings, in a 4-2 Cubs victory. In the middle of an All-Star season in which he had a Cubs-leading 96 RBIs and .303 average, Altman was forever proud of the fact he likely was the only left-handed hitter to belt two homers in a game off Koufax.

The Cubs also went deep multiple times against Koufax in a much-anticipated faceoff against Ellsworth on June 9, 1963 at Wrigley Field. A capacity crowd of 35,743 showed up to watch the Sunday southpaw exhibition, buoyed by the fact the Cubs were a surprise contender after enduring their worst season in their history with 103 losses in 1962. Three days earlier, Cubs closer Lindy McDaniel had powered his team into first place with a game-winning 10th-inning homer off ex-Sox ace Billy Pierce to beat the Giants. Second-year Cubs outfielder Lou Brock already had attracted attention with his speed as a fan dangled a “Go Go Brock” sign from the right-field bleachers.

The all-lefty duel did not play out as projected. Banks slugged three homers for the afternoon, including two off Koufax, while Ron Santo added a two-run shot off him. Koufax was tagged for six runs in 4 2/3 innings, but Ellsworth gave up eight (six earned) in 5 2/3 innings as the Dodgers won 11-8, sweeping the three-game series.

18-strikeout Wrigley record lasts 36 years

Far fewer Wrigley fans had witnessed Koufax at his strikeout-best the year earlier. A total of 8,938, big for a Tuesday early-season game, showed up to watch Koufax tie the major-league record he shared with 18 strikeouts in a 10-2 victory on April 24, 1962. Every Cubs batter fanned at least once. Shortstop Elder White, soon to disappear after his 15 minutes of Cubs infamy, fanned three times. No. 1 and 2 hitters Brock and Kenny Hubbs struck out twice each. No pitcher would strike out any more in a Wrigley Field game until Kerry Wood with 20 on May 6, 1998.

The 1962 season represented the first when Koufax dealt with mounting injuries. He missed time in the second half of the season, with his absence a huge factor in the Dodgers’ failing to hold on in a race against the Giants. After being jammed with a pitch while batting, Koufax suffered circulatory problems in his left index finger. The eventual diagnosis was a crushed artery in his palm. During the 1964 season, Koufax jammed his left arm diving back into second base. When he could not straighten his arm a few weeks later, he was first diagnosed with traumatic arthritis by pioneering sports-medicine physician Robert Kerlan.

His physical condition worsened going into the 1965 season as the left arm swelled after starts, and even was black and blue from hemorrhaging. But with his sense of competitiveness and enforced idleness still fresh in the memory, Koufax took all his turns thanks to pain-killers and anti-inflammatories along with caustic Capsolin ointment, nicknamed “atomic balm,” applied to his left arm. He soaked the arm in an ice-filled beer cooler post-game. His treatments were apparent to teammates and foes alike.

“When Sandy came to the plate, he smelled like a training room with that analgesic balm,” recalled Krug from his up-close-and-personal catcher’s vantage point.

In spite of the pain and painstaking preparation, Koufax built up his best-ever season in 1965 on his way to setting the all-time season record of strikeouts with 382. He had

to battle again against the Cubs, beating Cal Koonce 3-1 at Wrigley Field on May 22 and blanking Larry Jackson 3-0 on July 16 at Dodger Stadium.

One special performance, not witnessed by the masses yet talked about for ages to come, awaited Koufax and his friends from Chicago. The relationship between all-time lefty and game competitor would soon elevate to a much higher level.

(In Part 2: A perfecto, a re-match and a budding no-hitter thrown against the master).