



Doubleheader sweep, Feller no-hitter among impactful Sox Opening Day memories

By Mark Liptak

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On Monday, March 31, the White Sox were scheduled to celebrate their 113th Opening Day in franchise history since they were formed in 1901.

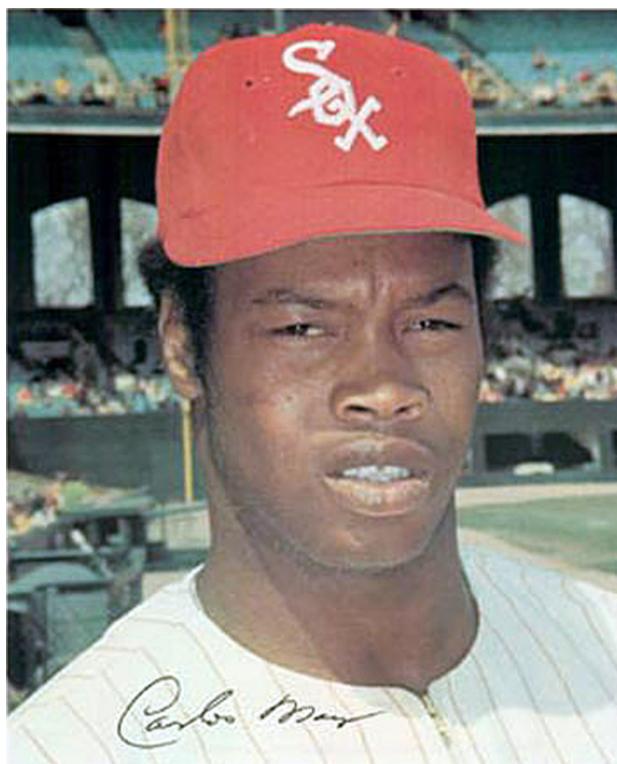
The team and their fans have recognized Opening Day as the first tangible evidence that the bitter cold, howling winds and drifting snow of Old Man Winter are passing from the scene. Opening Day has always been a time for renewed hope, the promise of approaching summer... of warm nights, cold beer and baseball. "The Boys Are Back In Town!" (With apologies to Thin Lizzy.)

Opening Day has provided moments of joy, moments of disappointment and moments of outright strangeness. It has foretold championship seasons and seasons where the Sox only hope of winning a championship was if the rest of the American League forfeited. Some of the best players in franchise history have performed on Opening Day while others have seen themselves disappear from the franchise soon afterwards.

With that in mind here's a look back at some of the most interesting and eventful Opening Days - White Sox style. My top 15 in order of their importance and uniqueness:

April 7, 1971, Oakland

The 'new look' White Sox decked out in powder blue with red trimmed road uniforms beat the Oakland A's 6-5 and 12-4 in the only regularly-scheduled Opening Day doubleheader in history.



Carlos May negated his homer in Oakland in 1971 by forgetting to step on home plate.

The idea was courtesy of A's owner Charlie Finley, who thought he could get a jump on the league by beating the Sox twice. After all, they were coming off a 106-loss season the year before. The Sox would blast five home runs in the doubleheader and should have had a sixth, but Carlos May was called out for failing to touch home plate after hitting what was thought to be a home run in the first inning of the nightcap.

May would talk about that moment: "As I was rounding third base, the bench was empty. I mean nobody was in the dugout; they were all at home plate. As I got towards home they mobbed me and I guess I never touched the plate. I don't know how Gene Tenace saw that I missed it with everybody around. I was in the dugout when Tenace got a new ball, came over and tagged me and the umpire said I was out. I was embarrassed!" The game also marked the first regular-season broadcast for new announcer Harry Caray with the team.

April 10, 1981, Boston

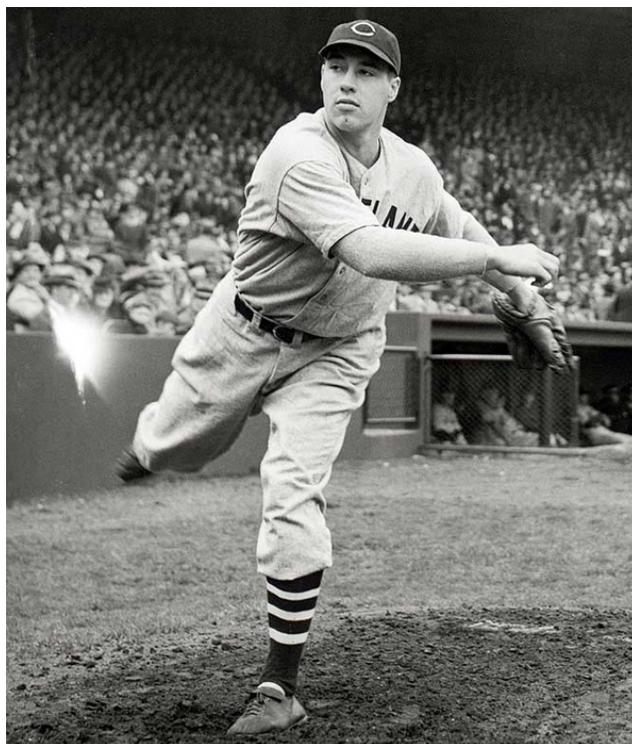
The game was the first Opening Day for new Sox owners Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn and it was a magical moment for newly-signed free agent catcher Carlton Fisk.

The future Hall of Famer returned to Boston and belted a three-run home run off Bob Stanley in the eighth inning to get his revenge in a Sox 5-3 win. The game and the season marked a new start for the franchise as the new owners provided enthusiasm and money to improve the team. By 1983 the Sox had won 99 games and the Western Division, marking the first time since 1959 the team was in the playoffs. Reinsdorf and Einhorn have at least provided stability to the franchise for over 30 years.

April 4, 2005, Chicago

The Sox began what would turn out to be a magical season, beating Cleveland 1-0 at U.S. Cellular Field in front of more than 38,000.

The game itself took less than two hours and set the tone for the year. The Sox got great pitching and timely hitting to win the game. They'd do it 99 times in the regular season, then go 11-1 in the postseason to win the franchise's first world championship since 1917. It was a year Sox fans had been dreaming about for decades, a dominating club that won games in a manner the old Yankee dynasty teams did in the 1950s and early 1960s.



Bob Feller threw the only no-hitter on Opening Day in 1940.

April 23, 1919, St. Louis

Perhaps the greatest White Sox team ever, in terms of talent, opened the season in St. Louis, destroying the Browns 13-4.

The Sox scored three runs in the third inning and put the game away with five more in the fourth. Claude “Lefty” Williams got the win backed by “Buck” Weaver’s five RBIs and Eddie Collins’ three. This time however, six months later, after winning the American League pennant, the “Black Sox” reportedly threw the World Series and lost to the Cincinnati Reds. Eight players would be banned the following year by new commissioner Kennesaw “Mountain” Landis and the only franchise capable of stopping the emerging New York Yankees juggernaut was decimated.

April 16, 1940, Chicago

The Indians Bob Feller fired the only Opening Day no-hitter ever, beating the Sox in Chicago 1-0 in front of 14,000 cold fans at Comiskey Park...or did he?

Sox Hall of Fame shortstop Luke Appling hit a drive that appeared to kick up the chalk down the left-field line. However, it was ruled foul. An incredulous Appling challenged the call, only to be told by home-plate umpire Harry Geisel “it isn't a big deal because Feller is going to be a credit to the game” Appling angrily responded: “What the hell am I, chopped liver?” Sox starter Edgar Smith took the loss, allowing only six hits on the day. Cleveland’s only run scored thanks to a triple by catcher Rollie Hemsley in the fourth inning.

April 15, 1951, St. Louis

The dawn of the “Golden Era” of White Sox baseball begins with a 17-3 destruction of Bill Veeck-owned St. Louis.

Manager Paul Richards unveiled the “Go-Go Sox,” who’d go on to have 17 consecutive winning seasons relying on terrific pitching, great defense and blinding speed. In seven of those 17 years the Sox would win more than 90 games. Billy Pierce picked up the complete-game win. It was easy going for him after the Sox put six on the board in the second inning. Al Zarilla and Gus Zernial knocked in four runs apiece.

April 9, 1990, Chicago

It was the last Opening Day in the original Comiskey Park and the Sox celebrated with a 2-1 win over the Brewers.

Melido Perez and Bobby Thigpen combined to hold Milwaukee to only four hits. The winning



Manager Paul Richards got the "Go Go Sox" era off to a rousing start in 1951.

run came in the seventh inning on a sacrifice fly from Scott Fletcher. The win was the first of 94 for the club, which became known as the team that was always “doin’ the little things.” The Sox team picked for last in the division stunned the baseball world by doing what they did under manager Jeff Torborg. A capacity crowd of more than 40,000 turned out to see the spunky team.

April 24, 1901, Chicago

In the first game for the new American League, the Sox beat the Cleveland Blues 8-2.

The ceremonial first ball was supposed to be thrown out by Robert Burke, special counsel to the mayor. He declined, however, stating that he was afraid the ball might get hit back to him. The first batter in White Sox history that day was “Dummy” Hoy, a deaf-mute who overcame his disabilities to play major league baseball. The winning pitcher was Roy Patterson.

April 10, 1959, Detroit

The first AL pennant-season in 40 years began in freezing Detroit and was won by an unlikely long ball hero. Nellie Fox, who hit home runs as often as he struck out, collected a long ball in the 14th inning, his first home run in two years, to give the Sox a 9-7 win. Detroit had tied the game with three runs in the eighth inning. Fox had a terrific afternoon with five hits and three RBIs. His game-winning shot came off future Sox relief pitcher Don Mossi. On Sept. 22, 1959, the Sox clinched the flag in Cleveland, then



In the first game of his MVP season, Nellie Fox showed uncommon power in 1959.

lost the World Series four games to two to the Dodgers. Fox would go to win the MVP award with teammates Luis Aparicio and Jim Landis finishing second and third in the voting.

April 15, 1972, Kansas City

The first labor impasse to cause regularly-scheduled games to be cancelled caused Opening Day to be pushed back.

In Kansas City the Sox lost 2-1 to the Royals in 11 innings despite Dick Allen’s first home run that broke a scoreless tie in the top of the ninth inning. Kansas City tied the game with two out when Bob Oliver homered off Wilbur Wood. The Royals won it on a John Mayberry single. The Sox dropped three consecutive one-run games to Kansas City before coming home to blow out the new Texas Rangers 14-0. The year turned out to be a remarkable one as the Sox won 87 games in a shortened season, Allen won the MVP award and the franchise became relevant again in Chicago.

April 10, 1961, Washington. D.C.

The Sox opened the season in Washington against the “new” Senators with a 4-3 win. (The original Senators fled to Minnesota the previous winter.)

The winning run came in the eighth inning, thanks to a sacrifice fly off the bat from Roy Sievers. However, the big news was made before the game when both President John Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon Johnson were interviewed by WGN-TV’s Vince Lloyd as part of the “Lead Off Man” show. It’s the only time a sitting president agreed to a pre-game interview from his box. Sox outfielder “Jungle” Jim Rivera, by the way, caught the ceremonial first ball tossed on to the field by Kennedy.

April 5, 1974, Chicago

Nolan Ryan and the Angels beat Wilbur Wood and the White Sox 8-2 in freezing weather at Comiskey Park.

All was not lost however...it was the days of the “streaking” craze.” One female unclothed herself to the delight of fans in the upper deck. Then a guy wearing nothing but a Sox batting helmet ran onto the turf in the left-field corner before he was lifted back up into the stands by his friends. Sox manager Chuck Tanner later said, with tongue planted firmly in his cheek: “I wasn’t impressed by him.” Announcer Harry Caray described the “action” in ways that you couldn’t get away with today. “Ah ya can’t beat fun at the old ballpark!”

Read George Castle’s recent feature, “Seventies openers featured as much fan action in and out of the stands as on the field” at <http://www.chicagobaseballmuseum.org/files/CBM-Opening-Day-20140325.pdf>

April 9, 1976, Chicago

Bill Veeck, in his second go-around as Sox owner, wanted to make a splash in his return to the game.

So Veeck lined up manager Paul Richards and business manager Rudie Schaffer and the three of them marched on to the Comiskey Park field as the drummer, fife player and flag carrier from the Revolutionary War for the playing of the national anthem. After all it was the Bicentennial. Wilbur Wood threw one of his last good games for the team in shutting out Kansas City 4-0, allowing only six hits. Newly-acquired Jim Spencer hit a two-run homer in the game in front of more than 40,000.

April 7, 1977, Toronto

The “Southside Hitmen” were born in a snowstorm as American League baseball came to Canada.

The expansion Blue Jays won the game 9-5, but the Sox banged out 15 hits, including a tremendous home run by Richie Zisk. That season would prove to be one of the best-loved in team history as the group of castoffs, has-beens and injured players battered the baseball to the tune of 90 wins by season’s end.

April 12, 1966, Chicago

The Sox opened the season with a 3-2 win over the Angels in 14 innings.

Tommy McCraw delivered the game-winning hit off George Brunet after Tommy Agee's two-run homer in the seventh inning tied the score. But the game is known for what the 28,000-plus fans sang to open the afternoon. It was not "The Star Spangled Banner," but "God Bless America." The Sox made the change, stating that the words to the

usual anthem were too hard to remember and to sing. Famous songwriter Irving Berlin wrote a letter to the Sox, begging them to go back to the original anthem. The Sox then decided to let the fans vote on which they preferred. "The Star Spangled Banner" won.



Rudie Schaffer (from left), Paul Richards and Bill Veeck get into the Bicentennial spirit in 1976.