

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

A long, strange trip to Cubs World Series

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The Cubs appear a thoroughly dominant team with no holes, and certainly no “Cubbie Occurrences,” in playing the Cleveland Indians in the generations-delayed World Series.

But, to steal the millionth time from a songwriter, what a long, strange trip is has been. Truth is stranger than fiction in the Cubs Universe. On my own 45-year path of watching games and talking to the newsmakers at Wrigley Field, I have been a witness to:

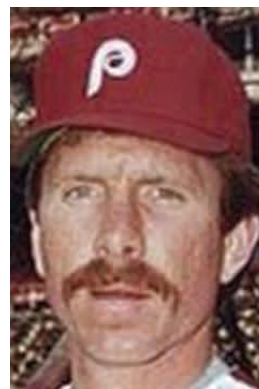
- Burt Hooton slugged a grand-slam homer off Tom “Terrific” Seaver in an 18-5 pounding of the New York Mets in 1972.
- On my 19th birthday, May 27, 1974, lefty Ken “Failing” Frailing pitched a complete-game 15-hitter in a 12-4 victory over the San Francisco Giants.
- A few weeks later, Rich Reuschel tossed a 12-hit shutout against the Lumber Company Pittsburgh Pirates.
- In mid-Aug. 1974, the Dodgers had 24 hits by the sixth inning in an 18-8 victory over the Cubs.
- Apparently peeved, the Pirates in late 1975 racked up the most lopsided shutout in history, 22-0 over the Cubs. Reuschel started and gave up eight runs in the first. Brother Paul Reuschel mopped up in the ninth. Rennie Stennett went 7-for-7. Amazingly, less than a month previously, the Reuschels teamed for the only all-brother shutout in history in a 7-0 victory over the Dodgers (also witnessed here).
- For a very good pitcher, Reuschel’s dips were very, very bad. In 1976, his teammates built a 13-2 lead over Steve Carlton and the Phillies on a warm, windy April Saturday. Woops. Mike Schmidt, a god-like presence at Wrigley, swung free and easy.



Hillary Clinton throws out first ball at Wrigley Field in 1994.

The Phillies stormed back to win 18-16 on Schmidt's four consecutive homers, a 10th inning shot against, guess who else, Paul Reuschel.

- Three years and one month later on a similar balmy wind-swept May day, the Phils scored seven in the first and led 21-9 after five. This time the Cubs staged the impossible comeback by tying the game at 22 apiece after eight. Giving you one guess... Schmidt won the game with another 10th-inning blast, this time moving up in class by connecting off eventual Cy Young Award winner Bruce Sutter.
- The Cubs fielded four first basemen in the lineup in several late-season games in 1980. To make room for the ponderous Cliff Johnson at first, gimpy-ankled Bill Buckner moved to left. Scot Thompson, fastest of the bunch, played center. Larry Biittner, who the year before lost the ball in his hat in right, returned to that position.
- Mike Tyson apparently never caught "Fernandomania" in 1981. Never to be confused with the pugnacious pugilist of the same name, ne'er-do-well infielder Tyson slugged a three-run homer to beat Fernando Valenzuela at Wrigley Field in 1981.
- Lost in Ryne Sandberg's two homers off Sutter in the game named for his feats in 1984 was the fact the Cardinals' Willie McGee hit for the cycle.
- The Expos' Andre Dawson said on Sept. 24, 1985 bleacher fans had been urging him to come to Chicago for years. To accentuate that point, Dawson went out and slugged three homers, including two in a 12-run fifth, in a 17-15 victory over the Cubs. Sure enough, Dawson signed a blank free-agent contract with the Cubs in spring training 1987.
- When President Reagan came to Wrigley Field to throw out the first pitch and broadcast several innings with Harry Caray late in 1988, we were locked in the pressbox while the Gipper navigated the catwalk to Caray's booth. An outraged Red Mottlow, tape recorder in hand but thwarted from his interview attempt, remarked, "What is this, Russia?"
- In mid-summer 1991, Greg Maddux told me in the Cubs dugout he and wife Kathy would buy a home in Chicago if his free-agent deal was settled the following winter. The budding ace of aces never wanted to leave the Cubs. Sure enough, Trib corporate pooh-bah Stanton Cook and hired-gun attorney Dennis Homerin screwed up Maddux's contract. He fled to Atlanta, not to return until after his prime in 2004.
- When Hillary Clinton visited Wrigley Field on Opening Day 1994, I walked right up to the then-First Lady in the pressbox without any Secret Service interference. I asked about the last time she had visited the Friendly Confines, considering she had advertised herself as a Cubs fan. Her response: the 1984 playoffs. Hmmm, about a million fans tried unsuccessfully to get tickets, but the gov'nuh of Arkansas'



Mike Schmidt had god-like actions against the Cubs at Wrigley Field.

wife gets in from long-distance. Clout City, USA! During her entrée to Wrigley in '94, the Hillster got a big, wet kiss on the cheek from Caray in his booth.

- When Kerry Wood and pitching coach Phil Regan worked on his between-starts bullpen soon after his 20-K game in 1998, I listened in from the adjoining box seats for a feature. Regan asked Wood, "Now throw the splitter." The pair tried to trick me into publishing Wood was experimenting with the stressful pitch to get a rise out of GM Ed Lynch. I didn't fall for the ruse, double-checking with Cubs manager Jim Riggleman. You couldn't get close enough, or establish such a relationship, to be part of such a story today.
- When the Cubs collapse, they COLLAPSE. Completing a downward spiral that started with a three-game Sox sweep at Wrigley in June, the 1999 Cubs went 6-24 in August. They were outscored 191-115.
- Wood threatened to boycott his final start of the 2001 season over the firing of popular pitching coach Oscar Acosta. No. 2 Cubs baseball man Jim Hendry had to rush to the clubhouse to persuade Woody to take the mound.
- When Sammy Sosa was caught with the corked bat against Lou Piniella and the Rays in 2003, the Cubs were tipped off Commissioner Bud Selig's men were on their way to snare the evidence. Apparently multiple corked bats were stashed away in car trunks and remote parts of Wrigley Field.
- Dusty Baker got crucified for supposedly overworking Wood and Mark Prior. Well, in a 2003 game, Prior had 16 strikeouts (which would have been the Cubs record if not for Wood's '98 feat) and a 3-2 lead through eight. Baker did the right thing by putting in closer Joe Borowski, who promptly served up a game-winning three-run homer to the Brewers' Geoff Jenkins.
- Cubs president Andy MacPhail shockingly admitted in 2005 he'd rather be understaffed. "I'd rather be one man too short than one man too heavy," he said. When MacPhail finally departed in Sept. 2006, the Cubs were found to rank 29th out of 30 teams in front-office staffing.
- Ryan Dempster largely conquered longtime control problems through a 17-6 season in 2008. But in Game 1 of the NLDS, he picked the wrong time to walk a season-high seven into the fifth inning before yielding a grand-slam homer to the Dodgers' James Loney. The control meltdown set the tone for a crushing three game LA sweep.



After Sammy Sosa was caught red-handed, the Cubs stashed away multiple corked bats when informed the commissioner's men were on the way.

And now, with home cooking in the World Series, the baseball gods have abruptly evened up much of the above. But the bizarre journey down the red-brick road will never be forgotten. In many cases, it will evoke grins. Might as well smile instead of cry.