

For September dominance, nobody did it better than Cubs of '35

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This is the month of stretch drives, and there have been many epic ones in Major League Baseball history. None has been as dominant as that of the Cubs in the heat of the 1935 pennant race.

On Monday, Sept. 2, when the Cubs dropped the second game of a doubleheader against the Cincinnati Reds at Wrigley Field, 4-2, they fell 2½ games off the pace in a heated National League race. The North Siders would not lose again for 25 days, during which they won 21 games in a row to establish a National League record and claim first place.

The previous season the Cubs finished in third place, eight games behind the eventual World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals. They entered the new campaign with much of same core group in place. Along with the Cardinals and the New York Giants, they were expected to be in the middle of another three-team scramble.

As the season progressed, it became apparent that this Cubs team was without an obvious weakness. Their line-up boasted five .300 hitters, catcher Gabby Harnett (.344 batting average, 13 home runs, 91 RBI), second baseman Billy Herman (.341, 7, 83), third baseman Stan Hack (.311, 4, 64) and outfielders Bill Demaree (.325, 2, 66) and Augie Galen (.314, 12, 79) among them.

It was an unusually deep group of young arms that would carry the Cubs for the better part of the next three weeks, however. The rotation was anchored by Bill Lee, 25, Lon Warneke, 26 and Larry French, 27, each of whom would finish the season with at least 17 victories, 30 starts and 246 innings pitched. Of the 21 victories, the trio combined for 14 of them.

Because of travel and economic limitations, marathon road trips and homestands were commonplace at the time. The Cubs scored all but three of the victories as part of a favorable schedule in which they played 20 consecutive home games. (They had just returned from a 19-game, 19-day journey to Brooklyn, Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Pittsburgh).

The streak began on Wednesday, Sept. 4, when French beat the Philadelphia Phillies, 8-2, a victory that allowed the Cubs to remain 2 ½ games behind the first-place Cardinals in the division chase. In the next two days, French went the distance in a 10-inning, 3-2 triumph, and Warneke followed with an 11-inning victory by the same score. When Lee completed the sweep with a 4-0 shutout in the series

finale, the Cubs moved past the Giants into second place. The Cardinals beat the Braves for a fourth consecutive time to maintain their 2 ½-game lead.

On Saturday, Sept. 14, the Cardinals blinked finally. While the Giants edged the host Cardinals in 11 innings, 5-4, the Cubs outlasted the Dodgers in a battle of 18-14 to take a one-game advantage. The slugfest marked the only time that they allowed more than three runs in the 21 games.

When the Cubs arrived at St. Louis for the start of a three-game showdown on Wednesday, Sept. 25, they owned a three-game lead with five left to play. In the opener, Warneke was brilliant in a 1-0 victory, as he outpitched Paul Dean for his 20th victory of the season.

After a rainout at Sportsman's Park on Thursday, the Cubs clinched the pennant with a 6-2 triumph in the first game of a twin bill the next day. Lee beat Cardinals ace Dizzy Dean to join Warneke in the 20-win ranks. In the nightcap, the visitors extended their streak to 21 in a row with a 5-3 victory, their 100th of the season.

One day later, on Saturday, Sept. 28, the Cardinals won in 11 innings, 7-5, and the streak was history. Literally. Only the 2002 Oakland Athletics (20) have come close to it since then.