



The day Holtzman beat Koufax 50 years ago

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You're a raw rookie, 20, with just 10 big-league wins under your belt.

You're facing the greatest pitcher in baseball who has 25 victories already this season—and whom you witnessed pitch a perfect game against your team a year ago.

Are you nervous? Jittery? Anxious?

Or confident and daring?

Ken Holtzman was a little bit of both the night and morning before his Sept. 25, 1966 duel against Sandy Koufax at Wrigley Field. That was the only time the two well-publicized Jewish lefties faced each other, after months of comparison of the young Holtzman with the 30-year-old Koufax, who stood like a colossus astride all of baseball in 1965-66 .

"I wasn't nervous once the game started, but I was a little anxious the night before," Holtzman, now 70, said in an e-mail interview from his St. Louis-area home. "I was extremely apprehensive about finally getting to bat against him, however. I was going to see that blazing fastball up close!"

You just don't see pitching duels ballyhooed the way the Holtzman-Koufax matchup was. But head-to-head confrontations between aces, or in this case the other-worldly Koufax and a kind of protégé, were big gate attractions in mid-20th century baseball.

In this case, 21,659, fourth-largest crowd at Wrigley Field in the 103-defeat '66 season, showed up on a Sunday when the Bears were not playing. The upper deck was populated, a stark contrast from Holtzman's previous start four days earlier, when just 530 souls, smallest Wrigley crowd since the 1940s, watched his 9-3 victory over the Reds.

Wondering if Koufax might throw a fifth no-hitter against the 10th-place Cubs, the fans instead saw Holtzman turn the tables on the fabulous Dodgers lefty. The rookie took a



Ken Holtzman had just one year under his belt, and out-pitched the superstar to which he was compared.

no-hitter into the ninth before utility infielder Dick Schofield, pride of Springfield, Ill., broke it up. Holtzman then hung on to finally stymie the LA rally in a 2-1 complete-game victory.

“I became aware of the no-hitter about the fifth or sixth inning because the crowd seated by the dug-out kept reminding me,” Holtzman said.

With a third-inning walk wiped out by a double play, Schofield had been the only baserunner against Holtzman in the first eight innings.

Jewish players were uncommon in the majors, and an immortal like Koufax was off the charts in fan appeal. The lefty’s legacy grew even more when he declined to pitch in turn on Yom Kippur during the 1965 World Series in Minnesota.

When Holtzman, a fourth-round draft pick out of the University of Illinois the previous June made his Cubs debut on Sept. 4, 1965 in relief against the Giants, the comparisons to Koufax started. And when Koufax’s start was delayed one day due to Yom Kippur falling on Sept. 24, 1966, the pair of southpaws now were formally linked in a game.



Sandy Koufax often had to pitch for his life against determined Cubs foes at Wrigley Field.

Holtzman a Cardinals, not a Koufax, fan

“Although I admired Sandy while growing up because of his being Jewish, truth be told I was a born- and-bred Cardinal fan,” said Holtzman, who grew up the St. Louis suburb of University City. “Pitchers like Harvey Haddix, Harry Brecheen, Al Brazle and Vinegar Bend Mizell were my heroes.

“I understood the media trying to compare us and it was certainly flattering. But Sandy was a one-of-a-kind pitcher.”

Five days after his debut, Holtzman found out why in person. Recruited to emulate a hard-throwing lefty, he tossed batting practice to his teammates at Dodger Stadium. It did not do the Cubs much good. Koufax went out to throw a perfect game, striking out the final six batters.

Meanwhile, Cubs lefty Bob Hendley almost matched Koufax, taking a no-hitter into the seventh-inning himself. But he trailed 1-0 on an unearned run. Hendley allowed just

one hit, a bloop double by Lou Johnson. The game ranked as the record-breaker – the lowest-hit game in major-league history.

“That game should be regarded as the greatest game ever pitched by two opposing complete- game pitchers,” Holtzman said. “A total of one hit combined, one man left on base, fewest batters faced, etc. and other such records.

“Bob Hendley was my roommate for that trip and I didn’t know what to say to him after he lost that game. No-hitters are just well-pitched games with a lot of luck.”

Again, Holtzman would find out himself, between not completing the no-no against Koufax in 1966, then throwing the first of his eventual two hitless gems on Aug. 19, 1969 at Wrigley.

That 3-0 triumph over the Braves, four years to the day Jim Maloney tossed a record 10-walk no-hitter over the Cubs in the same location, was as astounding as any Koufax feat. Holtzman did not record a strikeout – 27 batted balls, no hits. Hank Aaron’s sev-



Sandy Koufax (right) got to talk to Ken Holtzman in future years as an NBC-TV baseball analyst. Here he greets Cubs coach Rube Walker (center), among others, at Wrigley Field.

enth-inning homer, rated by The Hammer the hardest-hit ball of his career, actually passed over a row of left-field bleachers before making an inexplicable left turn into Billy Williams’ glove in the vines.

History had another angle when Holtzman bested Koufax. That was the last game Koufax ever pitched at Wrigley Field. He would work two more regular-season starts, including a complete-game victory on two days’ rest in the season finale in Philadelphia to clinch the pennant in a tight race.

Koufax would pitch just one more big-league game, a loss in the Orioles’ four-game sweep of the Dodgers in the 1966

World Series. Then he retired, his continually aching elbow unable to benefit from later advances in sports medicine that would have prolonged his career.

Too bad. Holtzman had a good Cubs run, first of two on the North Side, through 1971. Additional duels with Koufax would have been hyped even more amid the Cubs’ tumultuous contending seasons under manager Leo Durocher.

Koufax pitched for his life at Wrigley

Koufax had professed a liking for Wrigley Field, with fond memories of friends there, to ESPN Chicago’s Jesse Rogers in 2014. But he often had to pitch for his life in the Friendly Confines.

Although he set the ballpark strikeout record of 18 in a 10-2 victory on April 24, 1962 (the mark lasting until Kerry Wood’s 20-K gem in 1998), Koufax often faced a determined Cubs opponent.

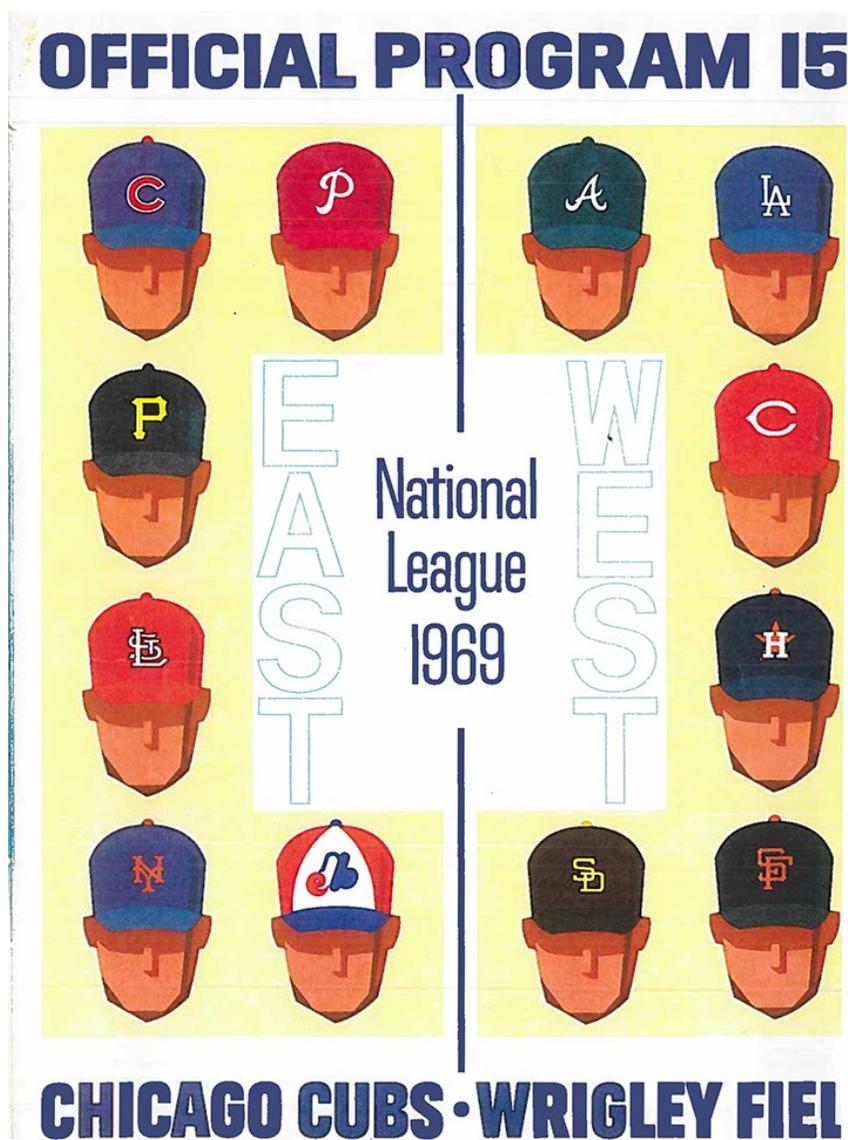
On May 29, 1960, Dodgers manager Walter Alston, who pitched Koufax irregularly at the start of his career, went 180 degrees to allow him to work into the 14th inning. Finally tiring, Koufax walked the first two hitters before Alston yanked him in favor of Ed Roebuck. Moments later, the Cubs got the clinching hit in 4-3 victory.

On June 9, 1963, before a Sunday crowd of more than 35,000 attracted by his duel with Cubs lefty Dick Ellsworth, Koufax's 4 2/3-inning yield was six runs and eight hits, including two homers by Ernie Banks and one by Ron Santo. He got the no-decision in an 11-8 Dodgers victory.

And on Sept. 14, 1965, Hendley got revenge for the perfect game in their previous starts five days earlier. He pitched a 2-1 complete game win over Koufax, with Don Drysdale's pinch-hit single accounting for the Dodgers' only run.

In his only other 1966 start at Wrigley on April 22, Koufax edged Ellsworth 2-1 as both pitchers went the distance, totaling 19 strikeouts. The next day, Fergie Jenkins made his Cubs debut with a memorable 5 1/3-inning relief performance and homered off Don Sutton.

After Koufax's retirement, he'd come through Wrigley Field on Saturday backup Game of the Week assignments for NBC-TV. In this role, he had the chance to talk further with Holtzman.



Ken Holtzman missed a no-hitter on Sept. 25, 1966, but finally nailed one -- without a strikeout -- on Aug. 19, 1969 at Wrigley Field. Here and on the next page is Chicago Baseball Museum President Dr. David J. Fletcher's scorecard from that memorable game.

CHICAGO CUBS VS ATLANTA BRAVES



In Honor of the
anniversary of Pro-
fessional Baseball,
of the Cubs wear
official Centennial
blem on his uni-

ATLANTA

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	AB	R	H	RBI
29	4.3		4.3			F.7			F.8						
17	F.9			5.3		F.8			5.3						
44	F.9			F.5			F.7		4.3						
25		4.3		F.4			<u>W</u>								
30		F.7			6.3		F.8								
6		F.8			F.6		F.9								
4			4.3		<u>W</u>			4.3							
7			<u>W</u>		1.3			6.3							
35-31			F.9			6.3									
P-15								4.3							
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

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|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 3 Silvestri, Coach | 9 Goodman, Coach | 18 T. Aaron, IF | 29 F. Alou, OF | 34 Upshaw, P | 42 Britton, P |
| 4 Didier, C | 10 Tillman, C | 19 Francona, OF | 30 Cepeda, IF | 35 P. Niekro, P | 43 Gonzalez, C |
| 5 Dorish, Coach | 14 Aspromonte, IF | 25 Carty, OF | 31 Neibauer, P | 36 Raymond, P | 44 H. Aaron, C |
| 6 Boyer, IF | 16 S. Jackson, IF | 26 Harris, Mgr. | 32 Pappas, P | 38 Reed, P | 45 Doyle, P |
| 7 Garrido, IF | 17 Millan, IF | 28 Lum, OF | 33 Jarvis, P | 40 G. Stone, P | 65 Paige, Coa |
| 8 Busby, Coach | | | | | |

CHICAGO CUBS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	AB	R	H	RBI
11	<u>W</u>	3-			-		F.8								
18	<u>W</u>		6.3		5.3			4.5							
26	<u>W</u>		3.1			F.2		4.3							
10	<u>W</u>		4.5			F.3		F.7							
14	<u>W</u>			4.5		5.3									
28	5-3			5.3			F.8								
19-12		4.3		F.7			<u>W</u>								
29		<u>W</u>			F.2		-								
30		F.6			F.8		F.6								
	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0				

UNIFORM NUMBERS

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|---------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 2 Durocher, Mgr. | 9 Hundley, C | 15 N. Oliver, IF | 25 W. Smith, OF | 30 Holtzman, P | 38 Nottebart, |
| 3 Becker, Coach | 10 Santo, IF | 18 Beckert, IF | 26 B. Williams, OF | 31 Jenkins, P | 39 Selma, P |
| 4 V. Walker, Coach | 11 Kessinger, IF | 19 Heath, C | 27 Reagan, P | 32 Nye, P | 42 Qualls, O |
| 5 Amalfitano, Coach | 12 G. Oliver, C | 21 Spangler, OF | 28 Hickman, OF | 34 Aguirre, P | 46 K. Johnson |
| 7 Reiser, Coach | 14 E. Banks, IF | 22 Popovich, IF | 29 Young, OF | 37 Abernathy, P | 49 Hands, P |