



CY IS PERFECT

Nothing like swinging an ax or working the crosscut saw on trees to keep in condition during the winter.

—Cy Young (Cy Young files, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum)

CY CAME BACK home, this time to Peoli, a small village next to Gilmore where he and Bobby had bought their own farm, a large one of 160 acres. With his World Series check, Cy had a lot of money to invest in the farm and plenty left over. It surely was a happy time for Mr. and Mrs. Young, as Cy was still the best pitcher in baseball and had earned a good living for many years. Everywhere he went, people recognized him and wanted to shake his hand. There were few places Cy could go without someone yelling, “That’s Cy Young!”

While Cy was home in Peoli, a Cleveland newspaper published an article on why he had been able to have such a long baseball career and such a happy life: “He is a gentleman. He is never guilty of rowdiness. He hasn’t found it necessary to accumulate a stock of bad habits in order to have a good time.”¹ The story mentioned that Cy never drank

much alcohol and made sure that he lived a clean, healthy life. Sports-writers and baseball fans thought highly of him, both on and off the field.

The calendar soon turned to February, and that meant another trip to Hot Springs, Arkansas. Cy was starting his fifteenth year of major league baseball, an amazing feat for any player. A Cleveland newspaper wrote about Cy's wonderful career: "When one considers that great old Cy has been in the big leagues for fifteen years, the greatest praise must be bestowed upon him. Five or six years in the fast company [the major leagues] is more than most of the pitchers get, but here is a man who was a star fifteen years ago and has pitched the same kind of ball every year since."²

The newspaper articles were a good study of why Cy had excelled in major league baseball. He had taken great care to do all the right things to keep himself in condition, more so than a lot of his fellow ballplayers. Even though he was thirty-six years old, Cy still had some good years of baseball left in him.

On April 14, 1904, Boston opened the season at New York. They already had won a pennant and the first World Series. What more could they do? Well, the Americans were determined to win another pennant and play in a second World Series.

Cy faced Jack Chesbro, the best pitcher for the Highlanders. New York scored five runs in the first inning and went on to win 8–2. Five days later Cy pitched his first game at Boston, winning 3–2 in front of another crowd standing behind the ropes. Cy must have been glad to walk to the pitcher's mound and see the blue-and-white "World Champions" flag flying behind him near the center-field wall. Next to it was a red flag for the champions of the American League. The rest of the teams in the American League would try to take those titles away, but Cy and his teammates were ready to defend them.

Near the end of April, Cy pitched two more games, losing the first 2–0 to Philadelphia and winning the second 4–1 over Washington. In that first game, Cy gave up two runs in the first inning but nothing

more for the rest of the game. In his victory against Washington, Cy entered the game in the third inning, with Boston leading 3–1, and did not allow any runs to the Senators. Over the two games, Cy had pitched a total of fourteen innings in a row without allowing a single run.

His next start was at home against the Philadelphia Athletics. The pitcher facing him was Rube Waddell, whom many thought could throw even harder and better than Cy. The spring weather felt more like summer, and many rooters took off their coats and rolled up their sleeves to try to cool off. The battle between two great pitchers began.

Neither team was able to score a run through the first five innings. Cy pitched to fifteen batters, and none of them reached first base. In the sixth inning, Boston got the game's first run, while Philadelphia still had not put a single runner on base. Two more Boston runs came in the seventh, giving Cy a 3–0 lead. The rooters in the grandstand looked at their scorecards and saw that Cy had gotten out twenty-one straight batters. They started cheering loudly with every pitch he threw, hoping to see a no-hit, no-run game.

There had been a no-hitter in the American League back in 1902 by Jimmy Callahan of the Chicago White Sox. He had pitched a wonderful game but walked two batters, and the Chicago fielders made three errors to let runners on base. This game was different because Cy had not walked anybody, and the Boston infielders and outfielders had not made a single error.

Philadelphia batted in the eighth, but all three men went back to the bench without a hit or walk. Only three more outs to go! By now, in the ninth inning, almost every rooster in the park was standing up. The first Philadelphia hitter struck out, and the second hit an easy ground ball for out number two. The last batter for Cy was Rube Waddell. In today's games, no manager would let a pitcher bat at such an important time. They are usually the weakest hitters on the team. But this was 1904, and managers, for the most part, just let the pitcher try to hit. Everyone in the ballpark took a deep breath as Cy went into his **windup** and threw. Rube took a big swing and hit a fly ball to center

field. Charles “Chick” Stahl moved a few steps, stopped, and made the catch. Cy Young had pitched a no-hit, no-run, nobody-on-base game! Now we call it a **perfect game**, but in 1904 there was no real word for it.

The rooters climbed out of the grandstands and ran onto the field to shake hands with Cy. One excited man reached in his wallet and gave Cy money. The no-hit pitcher did not need it but smiled and put the bill in his pocket. Chick Stahl ran by and gave the game-winning baseball to Cy, who would later take it home to Peoli.

Sportswriters asked Cy what he thought, and he said, “I did my best to win. I was in perfect shape and the hot weather just suited me. I am glad for the sake of the Boston fans, who have given me such loyal support.”³ Soon the reporters were checking the old records to see when another pitcher had set down twenty-seven straight batters in nine innings. They found only two games, both of which had taken place in 1880, twenty-four years earlier.

Newspapers all throughout the United States printed stories about Cy’s rare feat and called him “King of the Pitchers.” He was able to do things in baseball that few pitchers could match. He could win thirty games a year, win a World Series, and pitch every three days—or even every day or two, if needed.

Cy’s next start was against the Detroit Tigers. The game was scoreless through the seventh inning, when Cy finally allowed a base hit. The scoreless game went to the fifteenth inning, when the Americans scored a single run. Cy got the Tigers out one more time, and the game was his, 1–0. He had now gone thirty-eight innings without giving up a run. In just two games he had pitched twenty-four innings—almost the same as pitching three complete games.

On May 17, the Cleveland Blues were in Boston to face Cy. For seven innings he was as tough as ever, not giving up a single run. In the top of the eighth, the Blues finally broke the streak, scoring three runs and winning the game 3–1. The streak was over, but Cy had made it to forty-five scoreless innings. Cy had set another record, one that would last until 1910. More than a hundred years later, Cy is still tied for eighth

place on the all-time list of scoreless innings, a terrific achievement for any pitcher.

As the 1904 season went on, the Americans showed that they were still the best team around, winning the pennant for the second straight year. They had an even better record than the year before, with ninety-five wins and only fifty-nine losses. Cy won twenty-six games, had a career high of ten shutouts, and allowed fewer than two runs per game. He and his teammates got ready for another World Series, this time against the New York Giants, who were the champions of the National League. But to the great disappointment of baseball rooters everywhere, the Giants manager, John McGraw, refused to play.

McGraw gave long stories to the newspapers, trying to explain why he turned down the chance to play Boston, but few people understood his reasons. Because of his selfishness, there was no World Series in 1904. Cy lost a chance to play for another championship and to make extra money for him and Bobby. The 1903 World Series victory would be the only one for him in his long baseball career.

In March 1905, Cy made his yearly trip to Hot Springs, Arkansas. For one of the first times, he had gained a lot of weight over the winter and needed the exercise and hot baths to lose some pounds. From all reports, he quickly got into playing shape and was ready for his sixteenth year in professional baseball. At Hot Springs, in addition to practicing with his Boston teammates, he joined the Cleveland pitchers and catchers in their workouts. Bill Bernhard, one of the Cleveland men, spoke to the papers about Cy: "When the rest of us pitchers report to Hot Springs, we act if those arms of ours were made of glass. But not so with 'Old' Cy. The very first day he cut loose as if he had been pitching all winter."⁴

Most sportswriters thought Boston would win a third pennant and remain at the top for at least another season. But the year did not turn out that way for Cy and the Americans. They did not win the pennant or even come close. Cy had an incredibly low ERA of 1.82 but still lost more games than he won, and rooters began to think that his

career might be finished. He was thirty-eight years old, and it made sense that the end might finally have come.

The following year, 1906, Cy had one of his worst seasons, winning only thirteen games and losing twenty-one. The Americans had played badly, finishing in last place. Rooters were even more convinced that their great star had reached the end of the line.

Despite all the bad talk, Cy refused to listen. In 1907, he proved he could still pitch, winning twenty-one games, though the Americans moved up only one place in the standings, to seventh. The next year, Cy won another twenty-one games and lost only eleven with an ERA of 1.26, the lowest of his career.

Though Cy was winning, he pitched fewer innings and rested his arm more than he had in past seasons. But there were still many times when Cy looked like the same pitcher he had been ten years before. On June 30, 1908, the Americans were in New York to face the Highlanders. Cy pitched carefully to lead-off batter Harry Niles but walked him. As Niles stood at first base, he thought Cy was not watching him closely and tried to steal second. Lou Criger made a perfect throw to second, and Niles became the first out of the game. Cy got the next two batters out to end the first inning.

While the Boston hitters scored a total of eight big runs, Cy actually needed only one as he put down the next twenty-four New York batters for another no-hitter. Cy had pitched another no-hit, no-run, no-base-runner game, coming as close as possible to what he had done in 1904. Only that walk to Harry Niles had spoiled another perfect game.

Later in the season, the Americans planned a day at Huntington Park to honor Cy for everything he had done for the team since 1901. They chose August 13 because none of the American League teams had a game scheduled for that day, which meant an All-Star team could be chosen to play an exhibition game against Boston.

By game time, about 20,000 fans (the new name for rooters) had pushed their way inside the park, all of them wanting to say thanks to

Cy. There were several speeches in Cy's honor and three large silver **loving cups** as gifts. The first was from the players of the American League, the second from the Boston newspapers, and the third from Cy's many friends. After the game, John Taylor, the Boston team owner, gave the total of the ticket sales to Cy: nearly \$7,000! In today's money, that is just about \$170,000.

Since the game was just for fun, the Americans all wore silly costumes, like a clown, a cowboy, a navy admiral, and Uncle Sam. Cy himself walked to the pitcher's mound wearing a large straw hat and farmer's clothes. While the fans had a good laugh, Cy pitched two innings, then left for the bench as everyone gave him a loud cheer.

When the season came to an end, Cy packed his bag and left for Peoli. He would be busy in October, pitching a game for Newcomerstown on the twelfth. This game was a chance for Cy and other local players to earn extra money from the ticket sales. A crowd of 2,500 people was there to welcome him home. Many of the people at the ballpark were farmers taking a break from the fall harvest to see their neighbor Cy pitch. He won the game easily, 11–3.

While Cy was still in Boston, plans had been made to have a "Cy Young Day" in Ohio on October 24, with a charity game to benefit the new Union Hospital being built to serve the people in and around Tuscarawas County. Cy was excited about the day and raising money for the new medical clinic. He told the organizers of the game that he would pay for a large room in the hospital. It was a bighearted thing to do, but Cy was full of pride about where he lived and wanted to help as much as he could.

The day of the game arrived, and the weather was in the upper sixties, perfect for a late fall afternoon. More than 4,000 people bought tickets to see Cy play ball. When he came to bat for the first time, the crowd gave him a long cheer that lasted several minutes. On the pitcher's mound, Cy struck out batters all afternoon, and his team had no trouble in winning 4–1. That night, there was a party for Cy in Newcomerstown. A hundred people attended and gave him another silver loving cup. By



Cy holding a trophy from Cy Young Day, Boston, 1908.

Courtesy of McGreevy Collection, Boston Public Library

the end of the night, a great amount of money had been raised for the new Union Hospital, thanks to Cy and the people around him.

In early December, Cy was working on the farm when he got the news his favorite catcher and good friend Lou Criger had been traded to the St. Louis Browns. The two men had been teammates since the old days in the 1890s with the Cleveland Spiders. Lou and Cy had worked well together for many seasons, probably the best pitcher-catcher team in all of baseball.

Before the season began, the manager of the St. Louis team asked Cy what he thought about the trade. Cy started to walk away but turned around and said, "That's a sore subject with me. I had an idea that you were trying to get me started, so I ducked."⁵ Cy knew he had to move on and find another catcher, but the idea that Lou was gone still bothered him quite a bit.

At the beginning of 1909, rumors began to spread that Boston was thinking about trading Cy. The fans in Boston started to get worried, causing manager Fred Lake to tell the newspapers, "I want it understood we will never trade Cy unless he expresses a desire to go. In the first place I believe Cy would quit baseball if he was traded to some club he did not like."⁶ That stopped the rumors for a short time, but soon the owners of the Chicago Cubs and Chicago White Sox told sportswriters they would pay a big price to get Cy on their team. Cy had little to say about all the talk and made sure to sign his 1909 contract and send it to Boston.

Early on a cold February morning, the phone rang, getting Cy out of his bed to answer. A Cleveland newspaper was calling to ask him if he knew about the trade that had just happened, sending him to Cleveland for two pitchers and \$12,500. Cy told the paper, "I have heard nothing about the trade. Of course, the whole thing is up to Mr. Taylor and Mr. Somers [the Cleveland owner]. If they want me for the Cleveland club, I can see no objection to my playing there."⁷

Before long, Mr. Somers called to tell Cy that he was once again a member of the Cleveland ball club, now called the Naps. He took the

news well, having started his career in that city and having had many fine years there. He would no longer need to make the long trip to Boston, instead traveling the short distance from Peoli to Cleveland. Cy looked forward to seeing old friends again and visiting with his younger brother Jesse, who worked for a telephone company in downtown Cleveland.

In 1908, the Cleveland team had finished in second place, just behind the Detroit Tigers. They had a good pitching staff, with stars Addie Joss and Bob Rhoads. Adding Cy helped the team's chances for another try at the pennant. Many of the sportswriters thought the Naps were one of the best teams in the American League.

At the end of February, Cy took a train to Cleveland, meeting with Charles Somers to talk about plans for the new season. Cy wore a fancy green suit with a green hat, hardly looking like a farmer from Peoli.

A few weeks later, he left for Mobile, Alabama, to begin workouts with the other Cleveland pitchers. On March 29, Cy and his teammates celebrated his forty-second birthday. He received **telegrams** from Cleveland, Boston, and other American League cities. Cy told the Cleveland sportswriters he could not wait for the season to begin.

Adding to all the excitement, everyone knew that Cy had won a grand total of 478 games in his career. For a long time, it had been thought no major league pitcher could ever win 500, but Cy was closing in on the impossible number. With a good year in Cleveland, he had a chance to reach it.

On April 15, Cy and the Naps were in St. Louis for the opening series. Cy pitched the second game against his old teammates, Lou Criger and Bobby Wallace. Lou got two hits off Cy, but Cleveland scored four times, and Cy held on for his first win of the year, 4-3. After the game, the two friends met in Cy's hotel and talked for several hours.

Eight days later, the team held "Cy Young Day" for the home opener at League Park, but the weather was miserable. The temperature was below fifty degrees, much better for football than baseball. Mr. Somers had hoped for 9,000 to 10,000 fans to welcome Cy, but

because of the cold weather only 5,334 were in the grandstands. St. Louis won the game 3–1 to spoil the afternoon for Cy and the Cleveland fans.

The 1909 season did not go as planned. The Naps were losing more than winning, and they finished all the way back in sixth place. During the season, player-manager Nap Lajoie had quit the managing part of the job, and James “Deacon” McGuire took his place. Cy was one of the few Cleveland players to have a good year, winning nineteen games and losing fifteen. He had a strong chance to win twenty games, but in mid-September, McGuire decided to give Cy a rest and to try out some new pitchers from the minor leagues. Cy finished the year with a career total of 497 wins.

In early October, another benefit for the Union Hospital was planned. Cy, being a good neighbor and always willing to help, agreed to pitch again to support the hospital. This time he pitched four strong innings without allowing a run.

Besides helping the Union Hospital raise money, Cy kept busy trying to save the Peoli post office. There had been talk that the office

CY AND HIS CHICKENS

In December 1909, Cy showed off his Rhode Island Reds at a fair in Youngstown, Ohio. Cy had raised chickens for many years and was asked to put them on display. He was not the only baseball player expected to be there: Honus Wagner, still with the Pittsburgh Pirates, entered his Plymouth Rock chickens, and Nap Lajoie, Cy’s teammate in Cleveland, was to bring his Leghorns. All the chickens were known to be excellent for laying eggs that the farmers could sell to their local markets. The fair organizers hoped to attract a big crowd because of the three great Major League stars scheduled to appear.

would be closed because so few people lived in the area, and it did not make sense to keep it open. Cy and forty other men signed a letter and sent it to Washington, D.C., asking the government to keep the post office from closing. They knew that Peoli was a very small town, but if there was no post office, the people would have to go to Newcomerstown, much too far to walk. The letter must have worked, because the office stayed open for many years.

Even with all those things to do, Cy still found time to work on the farm until the start of spring training. The 1910 season was going to be different for him, since the Naps were bringing up some young players from the minor leagues, and they were not expected to contend for the pennant. One thing was for sure, though: Cy would have his chance to win his 500th game.

DID YOU KNOW?

When forty-one-year-old Cy pitched his no-hitter in 1908, he was the oldest pitcher in the major leagues to do so. His record would last an amazing eighty-two years until 1990, when forty-three-year-old Nolan Ryan threw a no-hitter for the Texas Rangers.