



" Where O' Where Have All the Great Pitchers Gone? Where O' Where Can they Be ?"

Good question. Every night we turn on our TV's and it seems we see highlights of guys belting shots out of the park. Outside of Randy Johnson or Pedro Martinez, " Are there any pitchers who strike fear in the eyes of the hitters?" Sure Greg Maddux is a master at his craft, but hitters aren't afraid to step in the box against a guy who looks like your accountant. Gone are the Bob Gibson's, Don Drysdale's and Vida Blue's. In are Triple-A player's who might have made the roster as a fifth starter 20 years ago.

Former relief ace, Rich Gossage, says that in his day, pitchers intimidated hitters, now it's reversed. " Today the hitter intimidates the pitcher and it's backwards. Pitchers don't pitch inside, hitters are diving out over the plate, and that's why you're seeing all the homeruns, because hitters are extending their arms. Pitching inside is an art that's gone, we were taught as young pitchers to pitch in, establish in, and that outer half should be yours. Guys are afraid today, balls that are just a bit inside are knocking guys down because they're diving over the plate."

The McGwire-Sosa race is almost two years old now, everyone knows Big Mac belted 70, while Sosa slammed 66 home back in 1998. But ask yourself this, how many did each have last year? Exactly, I don't know either. In 1971, only 11 players had more than 30 homeruns. Last year, 45 players belted more than 30 and 13 had more than 40. Goose thinks the strike zone has been compromised, "the strike zone has shrunk down to a postage stamp. The pitching in the big leagues stinks, it's all watered down with expansion. The pitching is terrible, there's a lot of kids in the big leagues, that just don't belong in the big leagues now."

Gossage was a fierce relief pitcher in both the American and National leagues. He intimidated hitters like no one in his era. He was 6'4, over 225 pounds, with a wild wind-up that left him falling off the mound. In 1981, the Goose grew a Fu Manchu mustache that made him that much more the menacing figure. It must have worked: he finished the year with a 0.77 ERA. That year, the Yankees set the standard for the future of relief pitching. Ron Davis would come in and pitch two innings, and then turn the ball over to Gossage in the ninth. Oakland A's closer Dennis Eckersly built a Hall of Fame career on the blue print.

Eck would throw one inning and get the save. But the Goose remembers there were times when he would go three innings, "We used to come in with the bases loaded and nobody

out. Back then we were the bullpen, I was brought in with inherited runners, had to get out of that jam, then pitch two more innings. Today relievers come in the ninth inning with no one on. Eckersly would never had the stats, if he had not been used the way he was used. LaRussa really babied the heck out of him."

Yes, LONG gone are the days when pitchers threw the full nine innings. Last year's World Champion New York Yankees combined for four complete games. Randy Johnson was the only starting pitcher with more than 10 complete games. Catfish Hunter once had 30 in a year. One never tires of seeing a homerun, but seeing it done with such ease is what makes me ill. Bring back the old pitchers duels, Catfish Hunter vs. Jim Palmer, Tom Seaver vs. Don Sutton, well you get the idea.

Rich Gossage's book is called "The Goose is Loose" by Ballantine Books.

Article By The Rainman