

**2016 SABR Jack Kavanagh Memorial Youth Baseball Research Award
College Division**

**The Original Babe and the Hall of Fame
By Justin Woodard**

Charles Adams, later known as Babe Adams, displayed loyalty to the Pittsburgh Pirates that would be very surprising to witness in baseball today. Adams was born in Tipton, Indiana, and it is said that a childhood injury to his left hand caused him to develop his skills as a right handed hurler by throwing rocks at rabbits and tree stumps. Apart from an ill-fated first season with the Cardinals he spent his entire career with the Pittsburgh Pirates (Freedman). However, spending the vast majority of one's career with a single team does not guarantee a spot in the Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame. What allows a player to be enshrined in Cooperstown is being one of the most skilled players in baseball history. Babe Adams is a skilled player who deserves a spot in the plaque room inside of Cooperstown, not only because he achieved two milestones, one that has yet to be replicated and another would not be repeated for nearly a century. In addition to those milestones he had a great career, is arguably the most accurate pitcher in baseball history, and his discharge from the league was unjust after demonstrating perseverance and loyalty to the Pirates.

Babe Adams began his career in St. Louis with the Cardinals where he pitched in a few unimpressive starts and would eventually be demoted to Louisville in 1906. The following year of 1907 he would be sold to Denver. It would not be until 1909 when Babe Adams would play in his official rookie season, which would also mark the start of his career with the Pittsburgh Pirates. This would also be the year Adams would achieve a milestone that would not be recreated for nearly a century (Swaine).

The Pirates would win the World Series in 1909 with the help an outstanding pitching staff which included future hall of famer Vic Willis, and other greats of the day Howie Camitz, Lefty Leifield, Nick Maddox, Deacon Phillippe, and Sam Leever (Swaine). Despite these great pitching names none of them were the starting pitcher for game one of the 1909 World Series; that accolade would belong to Adams. After a rough start giving up a run in the first inning, he would go on to pitch eight innings of shutout baseball giving the Pirates the game one victory.

Adams was able to shine over Vic Willis, a future hall of famer, but what makes this story truly courageous is that Adams did not know he would be starting game one. He was sitting on the bench laughing and joking with teammates an hour before receiving the starting spot in the game one rotation (Williams). The headline of a plaque that says "Young Unsuspecting Rookie Shuts down Tigers in 1909 World Series" would correspond well with the bat Willie Mays used to hit his 600th homerun or an image decorating Madison Bumgarner as the 2014 World Series Most Valuable Player.

His next start would be in game five where his performance was not as strong as game one, but the Pirates won regardless. Then, Adams would go on to pitch in game seven of the World Series on two days rest, and he would shutout the Tigers for his third victory of the series (Richter). Adam's game seven start and victory, marked the first time a rookie pitcher ever started and won a game seven. It would be ninety-three years before this feat would be replicated by John Lackey

of the Los Angeles Angels in 2002. Of course Lackey's five innings pitched and one earned run pale in comparison to Adam's complete game shutout of hall of famer Ty Cobb's Detroit Tigers (Kull). In addition, Adams was the first and only rookie pitcher to win three games in the World Series, which helps to cement his place among the greats as he is in an exclusive club by himself. These two rare accolades make for an outstanding story that would coincide with the many great tales of heroism in baseball enshrined in Cooperstown. All these accomplishments occurred in his rookie year, so it is possible to argue that Adams was a simple flash in the pan who only had one shining moment in his career; however, he did not become the most accurate pitcher in baseball history simply by having one fleeting moment of excellence.

If someone wanted to see if Babe Adams simply had one excellent moment in his career then they would have to examine his career statistics and other highlights. One such career highlight that demonstrates Babe Adams's skill is the game he pitched on July 17, 1914 against Rube Marquard. The two adversaries both pitched the distance in a game that was played with twelve extra innings, a twenty-one inning game, and making this feat more unbelievable was the fact that Adams did not issue a single walk (Featured). This is something not every run of the mill pitcher would be able to accomplish. Adams may have lost this game, but losing was not a normal part of his career as twice in his career he reached twenty win seasons, won seventeen games two other seasons, and won 18 games another season. All these wins he obtained would add up to a total of 194 career wins and 140 losses (Freedman). Adam's win loss record may not seem that impressive, but it is important to keep in mind the Pirates organization struggled in the decade following the 1909 World Series win. This meant that despite having seasons with an ERA of about 2.50 Adams was still only managing to finish seasons with slightly more wins than losses (Swaine). This is why compared to other hall of fame pitchers such as Whitey Ford and Cy Young, Adams's career win total seems miniscule, as those two pitchers have much more wins than Adams ("Career Leaders and Records for Wins").

Another important statistic for Adams is disputed due to multiple reliable sources that give different values for the career number of walks Adams allowed per nine innings pitched. For this paper we will examine the largest value found, 1.29 walks per nine innings pitched (Swaine). In order to put into context how impressive this number is it is important to note that the career walks per nine innings pitched of legendary pitcher Cy Young was a low 1.49 (Bases on Balls). The Baseball Hall of Fame writes about him on their website, "Cy Young left a legacy as a pitcher that is unlikely to ever be matched. The right-hander won 511 games during his tenure in baseball, almost 100 more than any other pitcher in history." Of course it is unlikely that Young's performance will ever be replicated due to new restrictions on pitch counts and the number of innings pitched, but he did not win over 511 games by being an average pitcher. If Babe Adams is able to challenge and beat Cy Young in a statistical category, then it is a safe bet Adams is a pitcher who is at the pinnacle of the sport and deserves a plaque in the Hall of Fame. After all, Adams is not simply avoiding walks, but by looking at his Walks Hits per Innings Pitched or WHIP, which was at a low 1.092, it is easy to see he was not giving up hits either. Once again it is clear that this is a very impressive stat as comparing it to Cy Young's WHIP of 1.129, Adam's WHIP is still lower (Reference WHIP). Over half of the pitchers ahead of Babe Adams are hall of famers or very likely future hall of famers. Therefore Adams is statistically similar to other hall of fame pitchers and ahead of Cy Young with regards to WHIP (Reference WHIP). The idea that Adams is able to outshine the pitcher with the most wins in baseball history proves that he is a great player deserving of Hall of Fame status.

Many of the players in the Hall of Fame such as Hank Aaron, Jackie Robinson, Lou Gehrig, and Mordecai Brown have inspiring stories of overcoming hardship, and Adams has a similar story of his own. The 1916 season was a disappointing one for Adams as he only managed to obtain two wins and, as a result, was unceremoniously dumped by the Pirates. The disappointing season was often attributed to the 21 inning game against Rube Marquard, but it was more likely due to his 258 yearly inning pitching schedule between 1910 and 1915 (Babe). He made the decision to recuperate his arm for the rest of the 1916 season instead of playing in the Minor Leagues. The 1917 season would be the turning point for Babe Adams as he won twenty games with the Hutchison Minor League team, showing his arm was not worn down. The following season he would move up to Kansas City in the American Association and would hold an ERA of 1.36, fourteen wins, and three loses (Babe). Before the season with Kansas City was finished, Adams's contract was purchased by the Pittsburgh Pirates and he finished the season in the majors with an ERA of 1.19 along with two complete games pitched. After the 1918 season Babe had secured his spot back in the majors and also his spot as a starter in the Pirates' pitching rotation. The following season Adams would renew his position as one of the top pitchers in the league with a dominating performance in the 1919 campaign. That season he would win seventeen games, boast an ERA of 1.98, and walk only twenty-three batters in 263 innings, demonstrating his perseverance to return to the majors. During Adams's remarkable 1919 season he was thirty-seven years old. Most pitchers at this age have retired or are considering it. The fact that he was able to continue pitching at such an age shows a remarkable commitment to keeping his body in the proper condition and persevering through the rough patches a thirty-seven year old undoubtedly has. Also, his extremely low number of walks relates back to the idea of him being the most accurate pitcher in baseball history (Swaine).

It can be difficult to compare players across the years due differences in play styles, game speed, and technology available, but to get an idea of how Adams would compare to a modern day pitcher we will now look at Madison Bumgarner. In the 2015 season, Bumgarner walked thirty-nine batters in 218 innings pitched. The discrepancy between thirty-nine batters and Adam's total of twenty-three in 1919 is not a large one but the difference in workload helps to highlight a difference in accuracy. Adams pitched more innings and allowed fewer walks while Bumgarner pitched fewer innings and gave up more free passes. The difference in restrictions on pitch count does not even come into consideration since Adams pitched more innings and allowed less walks, showing a commitment to accuracy and consistency not replicated today (Madison Bumgarner Player Page).

Despite his atmospheric rise in the 1909 World Series, amazing accuracy, and will to fight his way back to the majors, there is still one moment that is most likely keeping Babe Adams from reaching Cooperstown. Babe Adams was released by the Pirates on the grounds that he was the leader of a movement that was supposed to relieve Fred C. Clarke of his position of assistant manager and vice president of the Pirates organization. The Pirates, under the leadership of Bill McKechnie, captured the 1925 World Series title, but that year Clarke, who had previously managed from 1897 to 1915, returned to the Pirates organization as vice president and major stockholder of the organization. Due to his original role as manager and his stockholding position, Clarke would eventually promote himself to assistant manager and begin interfering with McKechnie; this is the point Adams created trouble for himself and the other players in the movement who supported McKechnie (3 Exiled). It is reported that Adams once answered a question in an interview by responding with, "The manager should manage and no one else

should interfere,” a seemingly harmless statement that Clarke took exception to (Swaine). It is unlikely that Adams was released due to this one statement, but it is more likely the issue had been building over time and this was the final spark that set off a reaction that would end in Adams’s release from the Pirates. While his ERA of 5.42 in 1925 and ERA of 6.14 in 1926 did certainly not help his case. However, when Adams was finally released in 1926 he was forty-four years old. This is past the general age of retirement for the majority of professional athletes, and helps to demonstrate a longevity that Adams possessed that many other athletes in sports do not possess.

It is a travesty to think Adams was fired for supporting his manager after spending twenty years giving all his pitching wins to the Pirates. His quick release from the Pirates set a stigma at the end of his career because he did not part with the MLB on what would be considered good terms. It is difficult to know for certain what is preventing Adams from reaching the Hall of Fame but the fact that his career had a negative ending is most likely leaving voters with a sour taste in their mouth despite the fact that his release was unfair.

Babe Adams’s baseball career spanned over twenty years. Despite this lengthy tenure he has been unable to reach the Baseball Hall of Fame. He is the most accurate pitcher of the modern era, demonstrating more accuracy than great pitchers such as Cy Young and Madison Bumgarner. His meteoric rise during the 1909 World Series would set milestones that would not be replicated for nearly a century, yet he does still not have a spot in Cooperstown. It is time this changed. Despite his release from the Pirates, Adams set a standard for loyalty, accuracy, and consistency that is rarely replicated in baseball.

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