

Community Comment – September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016

By Jon Sapper

### The End of the Baseball Season

The boys of summer are wrapping up another riveting season of major league baseball. The exciting pennant races divert our attention from mundane routines and even the placid among us start yelling at the TV in either encouragement or disdain about what has just happened on the ballfield.

When you're a kid, professional ballplayers are larger than life and it was no different with me. Willie Mays, Juan Marichal, Willie McCovey, Tom Haller, Gaylord Perry and the Alou brothers; I can still remember the line-up for the San Francisco Giants. The dreaded Dodgers with Sandy Koufax and his 100 mile per hour fastball was the nemesis of any staunch Giants fan. Even though Koufax had that blistering fastball, Marichal's high kick windup, that all little leaguers tried to emulate, shut down most opposing batters, most of the time. Major league pitchers were iconic to little kids and true Giants fans placed Marichal and Gaylord Perry at the top. And, where major league pitchers today are pulled from a game after they have pitched six or seven innings for fear of them getting too tired or risking injury, Marichal and Perry each pitched an entire game that lasted 16 innings. As amazing as that may sound, that wasn't a major league record.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1920, the Boston Braves played the Brooklyn Dodgers at Braves Field. What started out as a possible short game because of threatening rain, ended at darkness 26 innings later with the score tied 1 to 1. Even more unbelievable, is that both pitchers pitched the entire 26 innings. By some accounts, the Braves pitcher, Joe Oeschger's 21 consecutive scoreless innings was a greater feat than Joe Dimaggio's 56 game hitting streak or Pete Rose's 4,256 career hits. Oeschger ended the 26 innings only giving up 9 hits, 4 walks and striking out 7. After the game, he said, "I got a little tired". I would imagine so.

Joe Oeschger finished his 12 season major league career with the New York Giants and after retiring from professional baseball, became a P.E. teacher in San Francisco for 27 years. Back in those days professional ball players didn't get paid much so they had to do something else after their playing days.

I can safely say, that what still stands today as the longest major league game ever played, will never be matched where two pitchers pitch the entire game. Many baseball historians say it may be the most amazing game ever played.

And, the stamina it took for Joe Oeschger to pitch all 26 innings must have been developed when working on their family's dairy ranch and with his two brothers, attending Ferndale High School.

Now you know the rest of the story.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.