



Bob Feller: Ace of the Greatest Generation

John Sickels

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Baseball is woven into American culture and history to the point where myth and reality blend, making it difficult at best to distinguish between the two. Rarely is this more apparent than in the life and times of Bob Feller, one of the greatest pitchers in the history of the game.

From his childhood during the Great Depression in rural Iowa, Feller lived storybook experiences that seemed to foretell his unparalleled ascent to big league stardom. His father structured everything to help young Bob realize his potential as a baseball player, including building a farmland "field of dreams" expressly for young Bob's diamond education.

But Feller's professional life in baseball was far from the near-mythic quality of his childhood. Feller became a controversial figure from the moment he signed his first professional contract. Battling with owners, the press, and fellow players, Feller alienated and charmed them by turns, reflecting the complex motivations of a man aware of his own prodigious talent and opportunities. Feller was both an unabashed patriot who enlisted in the Navy the day after Pearl Harbor and a remarkably successful businessman who organized lucrative winter barnstorming tours. His unquestioned position as one of the first players to advocate integrating the game was complicated by his combative relationship with Jackie Robinson. As a result, Feller's contribution to the game has been the subject of both positive and negative interpretation. John Sickels has produced the first balanced, historical portrait of this controversial player whose commitment and talent inspired his teammates and whose outspoken opinions just as frequently exasperated them.

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