

BASEBALL'S APRIL FOOL

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

I have heard some of the smartest men in baseball, in discussions of pitchers, swear that left-handed pitchers are a breed apart. And Dizzy Dean, Lefty Gomez and others are testimony to that fact. Include in the category the Pennsylvanian who gave southpaws that reputation to begin with--Rube Waddell. Waddell, who had as much natural talent on the mound as any pitcher who ever lived! On any given day he was the equal of any pitcher of his time or any time. When Grantland Rice asked Connie Mack to name the greatest pitcher of his 60 years, Mack said--"That's simple. It was Rube Waddell! He was as fast as Walter Johnson and had control and curves like Mathewson and Alexander. But for speed--and curves, both--Waddell was the best". Waddell was big and he was loose on the mound. He was known to pitch to great hitters like Larry Lajoie or Ty Cobb--put one in waist high and they'd be swinging when the catcher pulled the ball out of the dirt. He made them miss by a foot. Waddell's trouble was that he had too many sidelines. He took days off for fishing, or to chase fire engines, or to play marbles with the kids, or act as a drum major in a town band or wrestle with alligators or tend bar. When he pitched, though, it was perfection. He was born in Bradford, Pennsylvania and pitched for four major league clubs, and Punxsutawney, among others in the minor leagues. The day he hit the Athletics was midseason, and he shutout Baltimore on two hits, 2 to 0. From midseason on, he won 23 games. He once struck out a side on nine pitched balls. In 1904 it was estimated that he struck out 343

hitters although they didn't keep too many records--but they called that a record. It's a cinch he had more, but that never changed until Feller struck out 348 45 years later. Mack finally sold Waddell to the Browns and he kept them in the pennant. The first time he faced the A's, he won 5 to 2--didn't give a hit after the third and fanned the side in the ninth. There are many legends about Rube Waddell, Bradford, Pennsylvania's Hall of Famer. He often beckoned his outfielders to sit down--then he'd strike out the side. It is a shame that marbles and firemen and kids meant as much to him as baseball, and that they didn't keep records at the turn of the century, or Waddell's name would be even brighter in the books. Suffice it to say, what brilliant pitching exploits have been recorded by the early experts and record books were enough to put him into the Baseball Hall of Fame. His antics gave rise to the legend that left-handed pitchers are just a breed apart. Certainly, George Edward (The Rube) Waddell of Bradford, was one of them. Curiously enough, he saved another legend for his last moment. The Pennsylvania pitching fool of baseball died in 1914--on April Fool's Day.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.