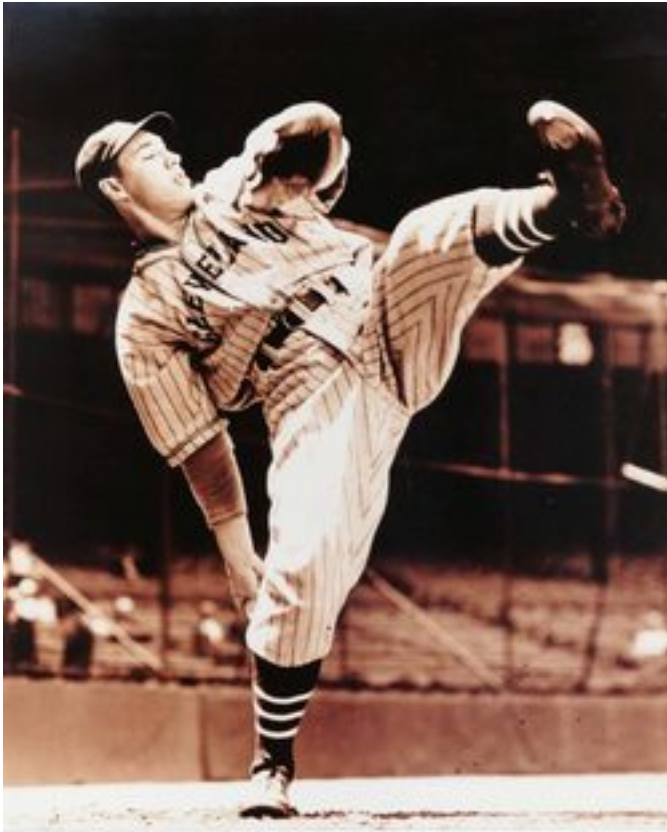


## "Goodbye Bob"

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, December 16 2010 8:00 PM - Last Updated Thursday, December 16 2010 8:15 PM

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A few years ago, as my eldest son and I were making our way into the ballpark for an Indians' game, we passed a giant bronze statue and my son (being the inquisitive type) asked who the man was who was pitching the ball. After informing the 2 ½ year old that it was Bob Feller, my son spent the better part of the game asking questions about "Bob"...perhaps because it was a name that he could say easily. While I spared him the stats and the details of Rapid Robert's life and career, he wouldn't stop asking me about "Bob" and why he was standing outside of the stadium. Eventually, he stopped asking questions and became fascinated by some other aspect going on during that summer evening.

On the way out of the park that night, my son passed by the statue again and said "Goodbye Bob...see you next time", setting what would become a precedent for a father and son for whenever we have passed by the RH pitcher, leg in the air, arm holding the ball, ready to make his delivery. Moments before entering the ballpark since that day, my son and I have always

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said our hellos to "Bob" and, after making our exit from the ballpark, we would be sure to say our farewells to the greatest Indians' player that ever lived, with a simple "Goodbye Bob".

Baseball being a game of fathers and sons and generational connections, the significance of those moments – brief and insignificant as they may be on the way in and out of the stadium – have been my greatest connection with Bob Feller, simply words passing through our mouths, honoring the player whose accomplishments on and off the baseball diamond merited a monument in his honor.

In light of his passing, much has been written and much will be written about the Iowa farmboy who had lightning in his right arm and whose life and opinions were never held from the public's gaze. The main source of my impressions of Feller are largely based on grainy photos and footage, parsing through lifeless numbers, and through the annual quotes that were attributed to him whenever a sportswriter approached Feller for his opinion on the Hall of Fame or steroids or whatever else was pertinent – with Feller never shying away from sharing his opinion.

That being said, Feller elicited different feelings among baseball fans and Clevelanders alike, largely dependent upon their interaction or knowledge with the baseball legend. To one generation, he was the high school phenom, "The Natural" who became the greatest RHP they'd ever seen, and (most importantly to Feller) a national war hero. To the next, he was a cantankerous former player, ready to tell anyone who would listen that he was a great baseball player and that today's players didn't stack up with his body of work. To the latest generation, he was most identifiable as that bronze statue in the plaza, which became more of a meeting place than a monument to his accomplishments.

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With the benefit of hindsight, the life cycle of Bob Feller looks to be emblematic of the arc of our fair city, how it perceives itself and how it attempts to change those perceptions by shouting from the rooftops, extolling itself and asking for an opportunity to show how unappreciated and misunderstood we really are in comparison to peers. Like Feller, Clevelanders remember the "glory days", but remain somewhat confused and fearful of an uncertain future while remaining eager to tell anyone who will listen to avoid conventional wisdom and statistics and base opinion of a man or of a city upon first-hand accounts or personal experience or research. Now that he has passed on and the obits are coming out with misty edges around them, attempting to get to the core of the man and the baseball player, I'm not going to pretend to make some grand pronouncement about the life of a man I know only through old photos, numbers, and cantankerous quotes.

Rather, though certainly not for the last time, as the tradition at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario will continue with my sons and I in perpetuity, let me say..."Goodbye Bob".