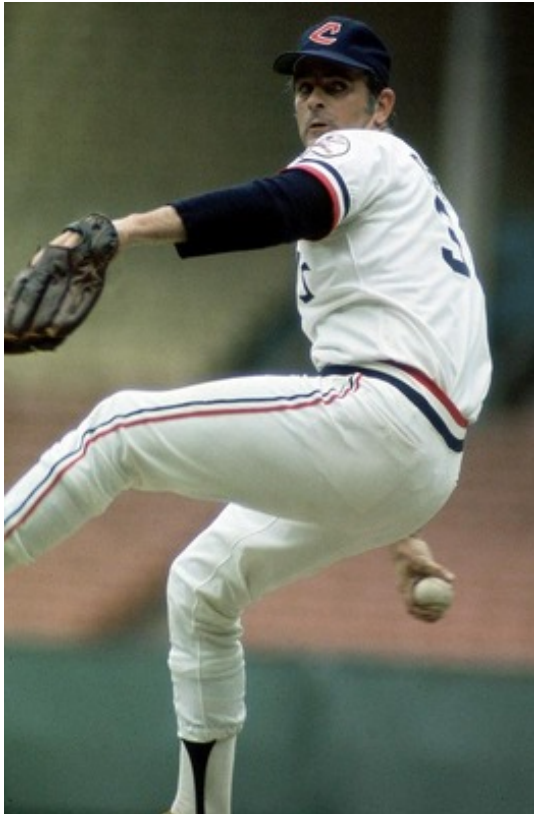


This is one installment in a team effort by The Cleveland Fan, highlighting the top local sports figures by jersey number. Please weigh in with your thoughts, in the Boards. As David Letterman would say, "For entertainment purposes only; please, no wagering."

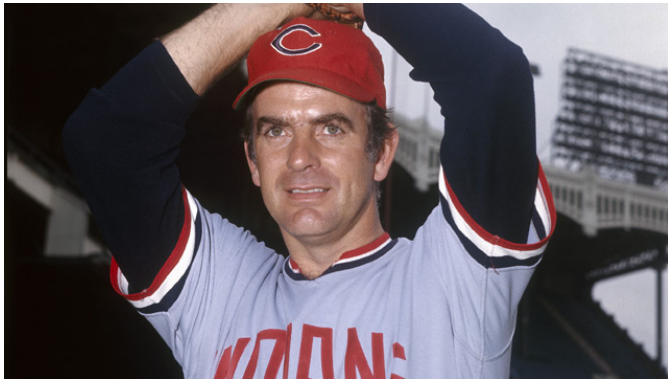


Gaylord Perry pitched less than four of his 22 big league seasons for the Indians, but while he was here, he was the best player in town, and that's more than enough to make him the best ever #36 in Cleveland sports history. As we'll detail later, the competition for top honors at #36 was long on mediocrity and short on stardom, but Perry's record in Cleveland would stand up well regardless of the number on his back.

As a 300-game winner and a Hall of Famer, Gaylord Perry's place in baseball history would be assured even without the controversies that marked his career almost from the time he became a regular in the rotation of the San Francisco Giants in the mid-60's. Perry will always be best known as the master of the spitter...or the greaseball pitch. For two decades, Perry threw the wet one, a pitch that baffled hitters, enraged opposing managers, confused umpires and inspired various rules changes and interpretations by league officials.

In Cleveland, Perry won the first of his two Cy Young Awards, but he also earned a ticket out of town when he proved unable to coexist with manager Frank Robinson in 1975. Perry was the epitome of durability, his 303 career complete games perhaps more impressive than his 314

victories. He played for eight different teams, but the majority of his career was with the Giants, for ten years, and with the Indians and Rangers for four years each.



[Gaylord Perry](#) grew up on a North Carolina farm, the son of a semi-pro baseball player. He and his [older brother Jim](#) were both star athletes in high school, and Jim preceded Gaylord into professional baseball. Jim signed with the Indians organization in 1956, and went on to amass 215 major league victories, mostly with Minnesota. Gaylord was all-state as a two-way end in football, and he turned down many college basketball scholarships after averaging almost 30 points and 20 rebounds in his three-year high school hoops career.

Perry came up through the Giants farm system, and after four years in the minors, caught on with the Giants major league staff for the 1962 season. He moved up and down to AAA during the 1962 and 1963 seasons, but didn't put it all together until the team traded for a pitcher named Bob Shaw after the '63 campaign. Shaw taught Gaylord Perry how to throw a spitter, and a Hall of Fame career took off.

Perry went 12-11 with the Giants in 1964, and after a down year in '65 (8-12), he would win at least 15 games for ten consecutive seasons, counting his time in Cleveland, with three 20+ win seasons in that span. And the more he won, the louder the complaints about his spitter became.

Acquitting the Spitter

Although Perry would admit, on and off, that he threw the illegal pitch, going so far as to publish a memoir called *Me and the Spitter; An Autobiographical Confession* in the middle of his career in 1974, he was never so much as ejected from a game for throwing it until he was 44 years old, and in his 21st season in the majors. Many other pitchers threw spitters in those years, but nobody else seemed to have as much fun with it, or garner as much notoriety for it.



