

King Carl Hubbell

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as told to

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John P. Carmichael

"King Carl" Hubbell was one of the most efficient lefthanders in the majors, and to prove it the records show he won 253 and lost 154 in sixteen years with the New York Giants. Born at Carthage, Missouri, on June 22, 1903, he started his baseball career with Cushing, Oklahoma, in 1923. Hubbell mastered the screwball to the point where it was compared to the fadeaway of the immortal Christy Mathewson.

As far as control and "stuff" is concerned, I never had any more in my life than for that All-Star game in 1934. I can remember Frankie Frisch coming off the field behind me at the end of the third inning, grunting to Bill Terry: "I could play second base fifteen more years behind that guy. He doesn't need any help. He does it all by himself." Then we hit the bench, and Terry slapped me on the arm and said, "That's pitching, boy!" and Gabby Hartnett let his mask fall down and yelled at the American League dugout, "We gotta look at that all season," and I was pretty happy.

But I never was a strikeout pitcher like Bob Feller or "Dizzy" Dan or "Dazzy" Vance. My style of pitching was to make the other team hit the ball, but on the ground. It was as big a surprise to me to strike out all those fellows as it probably was to them. Before the game, Gabby Hartnett and I went down the lineup...Charlie Gehringer, Heinie Manush, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx, Al Simmons, Joe Cronin, Bill Dickey and Lefty Gomez. There probably wasn't a pitcher they'd ever faced that they hadn't belted one off him somewhere, sometime. We couldn't discuss weaknesses...they didn't have any, except Gomez. Finally Gabby said, "We'll waste everything except the screwball. Get that over, but keep your fastball and hook outside. We can't let 'em hit in the air." So that's the way we started. I knew I had only three innings to work and could bear down on every pitch.

They talk about those All-Star Games being exhibition affairs, and maybe they are, but I've seen very few players in my life who didn't want to win, no matter whom they were playing or what for. If I'm playing cards for pennies, I want to win. How can you feel any other way? Besides, there were 50,000 fans or more there, and they wanted to see the best you've got. There was an obligation to the people, as well as to ourselves, to go all out. I can recall walking out to the hill in the Polo Grounds that day and looking around the stands and thinking to myself, "Hub, they want to see what you've got."

Gehringer was first up and Hartnett called for a waste ball just so I'd get the feel of the first pitch. It was a little too close, and Charlie singled. Down from one of the stands came a yell, "Take him out!"

I had to laugh. Terry took a couple of steps off first and hollered, "That's all right," and there was Manush at the plate. If I recollect rightly, I got two strikes on him, but then he refused to swing any more, and I lost him. He walked. This time Terry and Frankie Frisch and "Pie" Traynor and Travis Jackson all came over to the mound and began worrying. "Are you all right?" Bill asked me. I assured him I was. I could hear more than one voice now from the stands, "Take him out before it's too late."

Well, I could imagine how they felt with two on, nobody out and Ruth at bat. To strike him out was the last thought in my mind. The thing was to make him hit on the ground. He wasn't too fast, as you know, and he'd be a cinch to double. He never took the bat off his shoulder. You could have pushed me over

with your little finger. I fed him three straight screwballs, all over the plate, after wasting a fastball, and he stood there. I can see him looking at the umpire on "You're out," and he wasn't mad. He just didn't believe it, and Hartnett was laughing when he threw the ball back.

So up came Gehrig. He was a sharp hitter. You could double him, too, now and then, if the ball was hit hard and straight at an infielder. That's what we hoped he'd do, at best.

Striking out Ruth and Gehrig in succession was too big an order. But, by golly, he fanned...and on four pitches. He swung at the last screwball, and you should have heard that crowd. I felt a lot easier then, and even when Gehring and Manush pulled a double steal and got to third and second, with Foxx up, I looked down at Hartnett and caught the screwball sign, and Jimmy missed. We were really trying to strike Foxx out, with two already gone, and Gabby didn't bother to waste any pitches. I threw three more screwballs, and he went down swinging. We had set down the side on twelve pitches, and then Frisch hit a homer in our half of the first, and we were ahead.

It was funny, when I thought of it afterward, how Ruth and Gehrig looked as they stood there. The Babe must have been waiting for me to get the ball up a little so he could get his bat under it. He always was trying for that one big shot at the stands, and anything around his knees, especially a twisting ball, didn't let him get any leverage. Gehrig apparently decided to take one swing at least, and he beat down at the pitch, figuring to take a chance on being doubled up if he could get a piece of the ball. He whispered something to Foxx as Jim got up from the batter's circle, and while I didn't hear it, I found out later he said, "You might as well cut...it won't get any higher." At least Foxx wasted no time.

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