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METS

**PERFECT
SEASON**

A **Game-by-Game Analysis** of
the **Greatest Wins** in Mets History



HOWIE KARPIN

FOREWORD BY **DAVID WRIGHT**

162-0

A METS PERFECT SEASON

HOWIE KARPIN



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CONTENTS

FOREWORD <i>BY DAVID WRIGHT</i>	v
INTRODUCTION	viii
MARCH/APRIL	1
MAY	43
JUNE	79
JULY	119
AUGUST	159
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER	197
POSTSEASON	243
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	261
REFERENCES	264

FOREWORD

Just the thought of going through an undefeated baseball season boggles the mind because the chances of finishing with a record of 162–0 are infinitesimal.

The Mets established a club record in 1986, when the eventual World Champions won 108 regular-season games.

That falls 54 games short of an undefeated season, yet that’s considered one of the best single-season win totals in baseball history.

The nature of the game—the grind of a 162-game season—does not lend itself to team perfection as it does in the National Football League or college football.

There have been undefeated teams in both pro and college football, but not in baseball. Nor is it likely to ever happen. But within the boundaries of this book, it does happen to the Mets.

In nearly 50 years of existence, the New York Mets have provided many memorable regular-season moments.

The Mets are reknowned for their remarkable run to the World Championship in 1969, when they were 100–1 longshots going into the season. It’s the regular season that the fans thoroughly enjoyed, as they “lived” and never really “died” as the Mets became the talk of the town.

In the final six weeks of the 1973 season, the Mets made a miraculous run to the National League’s East Division title and came up one game short of a second World Series title.

The 1986 World Championship season’s bookmark moment came in Game 6 of the World Series against the Boston Red Sox. The Mets rose like a phoenix when they were down to their last out and rallied to win a game that ended with Bill Buckner’s infamous error at

first base. That year, the Mets rolled through the National League's regular season, providing the franchise with a plethora of memorable games.

Baseball's regular season is like no other.

There's the grind of playing nearly every day over six months. Some games, you just don't have it. No matter how hard you push yourself, no matter if you execute every baseball skill correctly, you can still come up on the short end.

You can't run out the clock in baseball, but you can run out of time. In this instance, time is the calendar.

The 162-game schedule pans out over a period of 180 days, from April to October.

As the games dwindle down to a precious few, you're racing the calendar.

In this book, time is no problem.

The history of the Mets was thoroughly researched to put together a mythical, undefeated season.

Of course, even in real life, you need the players to be successful, so throughout the course of the book, you'll be reminded of those who helped set the course of franchise history.

Marquee names like Tom Seaver, Jerry Koosman, Cleon Jones, Tommie Agee, Bud Harrelson, Tug McGraw, Donn Clendenon, Rusty Staub, Darryl Strawberry, Dwight Gooden, Keith Hernandez, Ron Darling, Gary Carter, Mookie Wilson, Len Dykstra, Al Leiter, John Franco, Mike Piazza and Jose Reyes are all prominently mentioned.

We can't forget the "lesser known" Mets who made huge contributions.

Those who come to mind include Jerry Grote, Ed Kranepool, Al Weis, Ron Swoboda, Wayne Garrett, Ed Charles, John Milner, Lee Mazzilli, Ray Knight, Wally Backman, Tim Teufel, Sid Fernandez, Jesse Orosco, Robin Ventura, John Olerud and Edgardo Alfonzo.

Some of the all-time greats have spent some time in a Mets uniform, including Willie Mays, Warren Spahn, Richie Ashburn, Nolan Ryan, Rickey Henderson and Pedro Martinez.

Lest we forget some of the managers including Gil Hodges, Yogi Berra, Dave Johnson, Bobby Valentine and Willie Randolph.

Maybe I get a mention as well.

As you go through the season, enjoy the memories of some great Met games.

—David Wright

INTRODUCTION

Baseball has always been a passion in my life. I wasn't blessed with the talent to be an active participant on the field or in the front office, but I've been fortunate to be around the game since 1980.

While I religiously follow today's baseball, I've always enjoyed looking back at baseball's past. Browsing the old box scores or reading some of the newspaper accounts from past games was a labor of love as I was putting this book together.

I've covered the New York Mets as a reporter for the past 30 years and for the past 12, I have been an official scorer who has worked games at Shea Stadium, and presently, Citi Field.

In 2011, the Mets will be participating in their 50th year of existence as a member of the National League. They've provided not only their loyal fans, but baseball fans everywhere, with a rich history of memorable games and events.

Many all-time great players have worn the Mets uniform. While there are those who were great while wearing the white jersey with the blue pinstripes and 'METS' in script across the chest on an upward slant, some players had a singular moment in the sun and they get to share the marquee.

From the very first season in 1962 to the miraculous championship year of 1969, to a second world title in 1986, right up until a new era at Citi Field, the Mets have put together a glorious history in their own right.

There are many famous moments from the first 49 years that are spotlighted within these pages, but the less memorable moments get their due as well. This book highlights all those moments and more. I hope that you enjoy the read as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

MARCH/APRIL



No Mets pitcher has ever thrown a no-hitter, but Tom Seaver came close. Seaver talks to reporters in the locker room after he threw a one-hitter against the Chicago Cubs in 1969.

Agbayani's Pinch Grand Slam Ends it Tokyo

Benny Agbayani's pinch-hit grand slam in the top of the 11th inning gave the Mets a 5-1 victory over the Chicago Cubs in a regular-season game that was played at the Tokyo Dome in Japan.

Some 55,000 fans were on hand to watch the Mets stage a two-out rally in the 11th that led to the deciding blow off Cubs pitcher Danny Young, who was making his major league debut.

Todd Zeile started the rally with a two-out single. Walks to Rey Ordonez and Melvin Mora followed. Agbayani then drove one over the 406-foot sign in center field to snap a 1-1 tie and earn him the replica of a shogun helmet, which is a tradition in Japan that goes to the star of the game.

The Mets took a 1-0 lead in the top of the fifth inning (the Mets were the designated road team) off Cubs starter Kyle Farnsworth. Zeile and Ordonez led off with back-to-back walks. Mets pitcher Rick Reed sacrificed the runners to second and third base. Rickey Henderson's sacrifice fly then drove in the first run.

The Cubs answered with an unearned run in the fifth off Reed and the game remained 1-1 until the 11th.

Afterward, the humble Agbayani downplayed his heroics.

"It's only one game," he said. "It's not like I did it for 50 games."

At a Glance

WP: Cook (1-0)

HR: Agbayani (1)

Key stat: Reed 8 IP, 1 unearned run

Castillo Comes Through in the Clutch

Mets backup catcher Alberto Castillo was sitting around for nearly four-and-a-half hours when he finally got the call.

Castillo delivered a pinch-hit, walk-off RBI single with two out in the bottom of the 14th inning to give the Mets a thrilling 1–0 win over the Philadelphia Phillies at Shea Stadium before a crowd of 49,142.

Castillo was the only position player left on the bench, so manager Bobby Valentine used him to bat for pitcher Turk Wendell.

With runners on first and third base and two outs in the 14th, Phillies reliever Ricky Bottalico threw a 3–2 fastball and Castillo delivered the game-winning single to right to score Brian McRae from second base.

At a Glance

WP: Wendell (1–0)

Key stat: Six Mets pitchers combine for 14 scoreless innings

Afterward, Castillo said getting the count full worked in his favor.

“He (Bottalico) paid for it,” Castillo said. “I think he was getting too tired.”

Both starting pitchers were brilliant. Curt Schilling threw eight scoreless innings while striking out nine for the Phillies. Right-hander Bobby Jones put up six scoreless innings on his pitching line.

The Phillies had a major threat in the top of the eighth. With runners on first and third against Mets reliever Greg McMichael, Mike Lieberthal lined out to third. Valentine replaced McMichael with lefty Dennis Cook, who got out of it when he struck out Rico Brogna, a former Met.

Castillo was not known for his hitting, but he stood out on this day.

“I believe I can be a good hitter,” he said, “but sometimes I try to do too much.”

This time, it was just enough.

New Faces Don't Shine, But They Bring a Win

The Mets debuted four new players but it was the incumbents who did the damage. Left-handed pitcher Al Leiter allowed just an unearned run in six innings of work and Edgardo Alfonzo had three hits in a 6–2 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates at Shea Stadium.

A crowd of 53,734 watched first baseman Mo Vaughn and second baseman Roberto Alomar make their debuts with the Mets. Left fielder Roger Cedeno and right fielder Jeromy Burnitz were back for their second tour. Cedeno played for the Mets in 1999 and Burnitz in 1993–94. The foursome was a combined 2-for-17 with three RBIs.

Vaughn was 0-for-5 for the first time to begin a season since 2000.

“As long as you win the game, that’s the bottom line,” the 6-foot-1, 225-pound Vaughn said.

The Mets didn’t exactly pound the Pirates. Six of their nine hits were of the “bloop” variety, but it was enough to get the job done.

The Mets scored three runs in the second inning off starter Ron Villone on three “soft” hits, a walk and a hit batsman.

Mets center fielder Jay Payton took the Pirates’ lefty deep in the fourth inning with a solo shot for a 4–1 lead.

David Weathers and Armando Benitez gave the Mets three scoreless innings in relief of Leiter, who was pleased to get off on the right foot.

“All the expectation and anticipation for this year is very high,” Leiter said, “not only for all the fans but for all the guys in the clubhouse.”

At a Glance

WP: Leiter (1–0)

HR: Payton (1)

Key stat: Alfonzo 3-for-4



Mets Make It a Whitewash in Miami

The Mets pounded out 17 hits en route to a 13–0 thrashing of the Marlins at Dolphin Stadium before a crowd of 13,720.

David Wright and Ryan Church each had a home run and three hits while Carlos Beltran had three doubles, although one should have been ruled a home run.

David Wright, right, and Ryan Church, left, combined for two home runs and six hits in a 13–0 win over the Florida Marlins on April 2, 2008.

The television replay rule was not yet in effect so Beltran's blast was never reviewed. However, the second-base umpire who was closest to the play, Rick Reed, thought it was a home run. (The other three umpires eventually overruled Reed.)

"That's why I believe in the replay," Beltran said. "You could have at least one a game for each team. Right now, it didn't mean anything because we were ahead by five runs. But what if we were losing by two runs or one run? That can cost a game."

At a Glance

WP: Perez (1-0)

HR: Church (1), Wright (1)

Key stat: Wright 3-for-5, 3 RBIs;
Beltran 3 doubles

(Major League Baseball instituted the "instant replay rule" on Aug. 28, 2008.)

Oliver Perez gave the Mets six scoreless innings for the win.

"I'd like to bottle that and put it away," Mets manager Willie Randolph said. "(Perez) was awesome tonight. He was in a zone and threw his off speed pitches where he wanted. All his pitches looked crisp. He stayed in his rhythm and didn't freelance like he can do."

The Mets took a 3-0 lead in the second inning on an RBI from Carlos Delgado, followed by a two-run homer by Church.

Wright's three-run homer was the big blow in a five-run sixth inning that blew the game wide open.

"I feel good at the plate and you've got to take advantage of it when you feel that way," Wright said. "This can be a fickle game."

3B David Wright

David Wright has been the Mets' starting third baseman since he made his major league debut on July 21, 2004.

Wright is a five-time All-Star, two-time Gold Glove winner and a two-time National League Silver Slugger award winner.

The Norfolk, Va., native is one of 34 players who have joined the "30-30" club (30 home runs and 30 stolen bases in the same season).

Wright accomplished the feat during the 2007 season, when he hit 30 home runs and had 34 stolen bases.

The 28-year-old third baseman tied Mike Piazza's club mark of 124 RBIs during the 2008 season and he became the club's all-time leader in doubles when he passed Ed Kranepool's total of 225 early in the 2010 season.

On April 13, 2009, Wright had the first Mets hit at Citi Field—a first-inning double—and he hit the first Mets home run in the fifth inning—a three-run shot off the Padres' Walter Silva.

Ventura's Homer Ends Hex at 'the Ted'

Robin Ventura's second two-run home run of the game in the top of the 10th inning lifted the Mets past the Atlanta Braves 6-4 before a crowd of 42,117 at Turner Field.

The Mets came into the game having lost 18 of 21 at "the Ted."

With two outs in the 10th, Ventura took Kerry Ligtenberg's fastball and deposited it into the bleachers in right field for a two-run lead. Tsuyoshi Shinjo, who was on first base with his first major league hit, scored ahead of Ventura. (Shinjo made his major league debut as a pinch runner in the eighth inning when he ran for Benny Agbayani.)

It was a battle of southpaws as Al Leiter took the mound for the Mets against Tom Glavine. Leiter tossed seven solid innings, allowing two runs on six hits. After the game, Leiter reflected on the Mets' inability to consistently win games at Turner Field.

"You don't want to fall into, 'How are they going to win this?'" Leiter said. "We've had some pretty wacky ways of losing here."

Ventura's two-run homer in the eighth (also with Shinjo on first) off Braves reliever John Rocker snapped a 2-2 tie.

Atlanta tied the game 4-4 in the bottom of the eighth on a Rafael Furcal RBI double and an RBI single from "noted Met killer" Brian Jordan.

"A lot of things are going to happen in a Mets and Braves game," Mets third baseman Edgardo Alfonzo said. "They're going to be tight games, they're going to be close games. That's why you have to prepare for that. That's the way it's been the last couple of years. It's been exciting."

The Mets took a 2-0 lead in the first inning off the future Met on a two-run homer by Mike

Mets	AB	R	H	RBI
Agbayani lf	1	0	0	0
Shinjo pr-lf	1	2	1	0
Alfonzo 2b	5	1	1	0
Ventura 3b	5	2	2	4
Piazza c	5	1	1	2
Zeile 3b	3	0	1	0
Payton cf	3	0	1	0
Hamilton rf	3	0	0	0
Perez rf	1	0	0	0
Ordonez ss	3	0	0	0
Leiter p	3	0	0	0
Franco p	0	0	0	0
Wendell p	0	0	0	0
Cook p	0	0	0	0
Harris ph	1	0	0	0
Benitez p	0	0	0	0
Totals	34	6	7	6

Braves	AB	R	H	RBI
Furcal ss	5	2	2	1
Veras 2b	4	0	0	0
A Jones cf	5	0	1	0
C Jones 3b	4	0	2	1
Jordan rf	4	0	1	1
Lopez c	4	1	1	1
Surhoff lf	4	0	1	0
Helms 1b	3	0	0	0
Rocker p	0	0	0	0
Abbott ph	1	0	0	0
Ligtenberg p	0	0	0	0
Glavine p	2	0	0	0
Martinez 1b	2	1	1	0
Totals	38	4	9	4

NYM	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	-	6	7	0
ATL	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	-	4	9	0

Mets	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Leiter	7	6	2	2	0	6
Franco	0	2	2	2	0	0
Wendell	1	1	0	0	0	0
Cook W (1-0)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Benitez S (1)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	10	9	4	4	0	7

Braves	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Glavine	7.1	3	3	3	6	2
Rocker	1.2	2	1	1	0	2
Ligtenberg L (0-1)	1	2	2	2	0	1
Totals	10	7	6	6	6	5

DP—New York; Atlanta 2. 2B—New York Alfonzo; Atlanta Surhoff, Furcal. HR—New York Ventura 2 (1,2), Piazza (1); Atlanta Lopez (1). HBP—Atlanta Veras. LOB—New York 4; Atlanta 5. SB—Atlanta C Jones. Attendance: 42,117.

2B Edgardo Alfonzo

Edgardo Alfonzo was one of the Mets' best hitters during the late 1990s and into the early 2000s.

The native of Venezuela played eight seasons with the Mets and ranks in the club's all-time top 10 lists in 15 offensive categories.

Alfonzo set a club record when he went 6-for-6 against the Astros in Houston (see Aug. 30, 1999).

During the 2000 National League Championship Series against St. Louis, Alfonzo batted .444 with eight hits and four RBIs.

In the 1999 National League division series vs. Arizona, Alfonzo hit two home runs in Game 1, including a grand slam, and drove in a club-record-tying five runs.

The versatile Alfonzo played third and second base during his Mets tenure. He is the Mets' all-time leader in several postseason categories, including games played, hits, doubles, RBIs and runs scored.

Piazza. Atlanta got one back in the first and then tied the game in the seventh on a solo home run by Javy Lopez.

In a mild surprise, Ventura batted third against the left-hander Glavine, ahead of Piazza. Ventura had batted third only five times the previous season.

"Robin's batting third to get Glavine out of his rhythm before he gets to Mike," Mets manager Bobby Valentine said.

Shinjo not only recorded his first big-league hit, he made a nice catch on a Dave Martinez liner to left field to send the game into extra innings.

Coming into the game, the Mets' numbers at Turner Field were staggering. Since the Braves began play at their new ballpark in 1997, the Mets were 6-21, including 0-6 in 1998.

An extra-inning win at Turner Field was a good start toward turning things around in Atlanta.

"They're a good team and they know we're a good team," Valentine said. "We're starting to mold the character of this team again."

Kent Takes Advantage of Windy Wrigley

All you had to say about this one was: “The wind was blowing out at Wrigley.”

The Mets beat the Cubs 12–8 thanks to Jeff Kent’s four-hit day, but it was also a game in which Dwight Gooden gave up seven runs (five earned) on 11 hits in 5 ²/₃ innings, yet got a win. The 1985 National League Cy Young Award winner also made it a memorable day for one Tuffy Rhodes, a career minor leaguer who hit three home runs off Gooden.

At a Glance

WP: Gooden (1–0)

HR: Vizcaino (1), Hundley (1), Kent (1)

Key stat: Kent 4-for-5, HR, 2 RBIs

A crowd of 38,413 that included first lady Hillary Clinton watched the teams put up 20 runs on 30 hits against eight different pitchers.

Rhodes came up in the sixth inning against Mets left-hander Eric Hillman with a chance at a fourth consecutive home run, but he walked. The Cubs center fielder and leadoff batter completed his career day with a single off Mets closer John Franco in the ninth.

“We made him a legend,” Mets manager Dallas Green said.

With the game tied at two in the fourth inning, the Mets scored four times to take a lead they would never relinquish.

Kent led off the inning with a home run off Cubs starter Mike Morgan. Ryan Thompson doubled in two more and Jose Vizcaino completed the scoring with a sacrifice fly that gave the Mets a 6–2 lead.

Rhodes’ third home run in the fifth inning helped narrow the gap, but Hillman, Mike Maddux and Franco combined for 3 ¹/₃ effective innings out of the bullpen to nail down the win.

Seaver's Second Stint Starts Strong

Hall of Fame pitcher Tom Seaver made this walk many times before, but as he left the bullpen in right field to begin his second tour of duty with the Mets, a crowd of 51,054 came to its feet for a memorable standing ovation.

After a five-and-a-half year stint with the Cincinnati Reds, Seaver tossed six shutout innings in his first game back to lead the Mets to a 2-0 win over the Philadelphia Phillies and Steve Carlton at Shea Stadium.

On June 15, 1977, the popular right-hander was dealt to the Reds in exchange for Pat Zachry, second baseman Doug Flynn and outfielders Steve Henderson and Dan Norman.

Earlier that year, Seaver criticized Mets chairman of the board, M. Donald Grant, for not trying to improve the team. *New York Daily News* columnist Dick Young wrote a piece that said Seaver was jealous of former Mets pitcher Nolan Ryan and the amount of money he was making with the California Angels, while invoking the names of both spouses.

"That Young column was the straw that broke the back," Seaver said to Bill Madden of the *Daily News* in an interview nearly 30 years later. So "The Franchise" was gone, but in December 1982, the Reds traded Seaver back to the Mets for pitcher Charlie Puleo, outfielder Lloyd McClendon and a third player.

There was a heightened sense of excitement that day at Shea and the matchup of the two future Hall of Famers did not disappoint. Carlton matched Seaver zero for zero for six innings, but the left-hander faltered in the seventh as the Mets broke through.

<p>At a Glance</p> <p>WP: Sisk (1-0)</p> <p>Key stat: Seaver and Sisk combine for shutout</p>
--

Mike Howard's RBI single scored the first run and the second run came courtesy of a Brian Giles sacrifice fly.

Seaver did not qualify for the win, but it didn't matter. It was a successful return to the place where he made his name as a three-time Cy Young Award winner.

"It was a very emotional day," the Mets' first Hall of Famer said. "It was great to be back, but so emotional I still felt it for two innings."

Rookie Doug Sisk (who had less than nine innings of big-league experience) relieved Seaver to toss three adventurous, but scoreless, innings for his first win in the majors.

After the game, Phillies second baseman and future Hall of Famer Joe Morgan offered this view of the veteran right-hander.

“He’s (Seaver) smarter,” Morgan said. “He knew everybody was coming back from spring training, anxious and jumping, he fed us a lot of slower speeds, and guys kept swinging at bad pitches.”

Seaver’s first inning was right out of a movie as he faced two future Hall of Famers (and one who arguably should be in). “Tom Terrific” struck out the leadoff batter, Pete Rose, but walked Morgan, who moved to second on Seaver’s throwing error. Seaver came back to retire Gary Matthews on a 4–3 ground-out and then got future Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt to fly out to left.

In the seventh, Dave Kingman, who struck out in his other three at-bats, singled to left. George Foster followed with a single to right to put runners at first and second with nobody out. The game turned with the next batter.

Hubie Brooks was instructed to sacrifice, but he put down such a good bunt toward third that he was able to reach safely to load the bases.

“He was supposed to sacrifice,” Mets manager George Bamberger said, “but he made a perfect bunt.”

Brooks admitted he wasn’t looking for a hit.

“I wasn’t trying to be cute and beat it out,” he said. “I just wanted one good pitch, and got it. Once I hit the ball, I didn’t even know where it went.”

Howard didn’t waste any time as he drove the first pitch from Carlton into left field to score Kingman. Giles lined to Rose and Foster was able to tag and score the second run.

When it was over, Seaver’s line was “Tom Terrific”: six innings pitched, three hits, no runs, one walk and five strikeouts.

Rose, who struck out twice, marveled at his ex-teammate’s performance.

“I don’t remember the last time I struck out twice in a game,” Rose said. “I only missed two pitches all spring.”

Doc's Debut Good Enough for a Win

Ever since Dwight Eugene "Doc" Gooden was the fifth overall selection of the 1982 draft, the Mets anxiously awaited his entrance into the major leagues.

It didn't take long as Gooden spent two seasons in the minors, where he led the Class A Carolina League in wins, strikeouts and ERA while playing for the Lynchburg Mets in 1983. Doc had 300 strikeouts in 191 innings and won 19 games, which reaffirmed manager Dave Johnson's conviction that the 19-year-old right-hander was ready for the majors.

Gooden's first major league game was a success as he tossed five innings of one-run ball to earn the victory in the Mets' 3-2 win over the Astros before 18,925 at the Houston Astrodome.

"He's got the most live arm I've seen in a long time," said Astros first baseman and future Met Ray Knight. "His fastball explodes just like Nolan Ryan's."

The Mets were going to be cautious with Gooden, who became the third-youngest pitcher in franchise history. (Jerry Hinsley in 1964 and Jim Bethke in 1965 were a few months younger.)

"We had him at 81 pitches and that's enough," Johnson said. "Win or lose, it's positive, and that's what we wanted."

All along, the plan was for Doc to pitch in the environmentally controlled Astrodome.

"The Astrodome is awesome," Gooden said before the game. "I never saw anything like it."

Gooden took to the Astrodome mound right away as he set down the first three hitters, including his first big-league strikeout of the third Astros hitter, Dickie Thon.

The young right-hander gave up his first hit to Alan Ashby in the third inning and his first run in the fifth on a RBI single by Bill Doran.

The Mets scored a run in the second inning on Darryl Strawberry's home run (a 400-foot blast to center field) off Astros starter Bob Knepper. They added two more runs in the fifth inning on Mookie Wilson's two-run double.

The Astros narrowed the gap and completed the scoring with a run off Mets reliever Dick Tidrow in the sixth. Knight's RBI single scored one run, but on the same play, Mets left fielder George Foster threw out Jose Cruz at the

At a Glance

WP: Gooden (1-0)

HR: Strawberry (2)

Key stat: Gooden allows one run in five innings

plate to cut down the potential tying run.

After Tidrow, the Mets bullpen nailed down the victory.

Doug Sisk tossed a scoreless seventh inning while Jesse Orosco pitched scoreless ball over the final two for the save.

Gooden's first pitching line: five innings pitched, one run, three hits, two walks and five strikeouts.

"I'm satisfied," Gooden said after the game. "Five is good enough. Now, I hope to build it up."

Knepper had always given the Mets trouble but they touched up the left-hander for seven hits and three runs in five innings of work.

Gooden would go on to capture the 1984 National League Rookie of the Year Award while setting a new rookie record for strikeouts. Doc ended up fanning 276 hitters to shatter Cleveland Indians rookie pitcher Herb Score's previous mark of 245 set in 1955. (See: 9/12/1984)

April 7, 1970

Mets Win Opening Game of the Season for the First Time

It would take nine years and one remarkable World Championship before the Mets would win the first game of a season.

Donn Clendenon's pinch-hit, two-run single in the top of the eleventh inning gave the Mets a 5-3 win over the Pirates at Forbes Field before a crowd of 34,249.

Mike Jorgensen led off the 11th with a single. An error by Pirates catcher Jerry May put runners on first and second base with no one out. After a sacrifice bunt moved up the runners, Mets manager Gil Hodges sent up Clendenon to bat for Ken Boswell, who was originally sent up to hit for pitcher Ron Taylor.

The Mets' first baseman drove reliever Joe Gibbon's first pitch into center field for two runs and a 5-3 lead.

Ron Taylor got the win with two scoreless innings in relief while Tug McGraw retired the Pirates in the bottom of the eleventh for the save.

Kranepool's Crush Lifts Mets in a Pinch

The Mets were down to their final out when manager Joe Torre looked down the bench and eyed a familiar number.

Ed Kranepool slammed a ninth-inning, walk-off, two-run homer off Stan Bahnsen to give the Mets a thrilling 6-5 win over the Expos before a crowd of 7,259 at Shea Stadium.

"He's the best left-handed pinch-hitter I've ever seen," Torre said. "He'd been in the locker room swinging a bat because it was warm in there. So I looked at him and he took off his baseball cap, reached for his helmet and walked up to the plate."

The Mets trailed 5-2 in the eighth inning when Lee Mazzilli hit a two-run homer off Expos starter Rudy May to narrow the gap to one run.

Bahnsen replaced May with one out and one on in the bottom of the ninth and got Tim Foli to fly out to left for the second out.

Kranepool drove Bahnsen's second pitch high over the wall in right field and the Mets had an exciting come-from-behind win.

The Mets' No. 7 certainly made his 70th career pinch-hit count.

"The pressure is always on the hitter," Kranepool said. "You also can't be selective because if you wait for your best pitch, you might miss it, anyway. So you have to be aggressive."

Pitcher Mardie Cornejo, who was making his major league debut, was the winner in relief.

At a Glance

WP: Cornejo (1-0)

HR: S.Henderson (1), Mazzilli (1),
Kranepool (1)

Key stat: Cornejo 2 IP, 2 hits

Carter's First Game as a Met One to Remember

They couldn't have written a better script in Hollywood for Gary Carter's first game in a Mets uniform.

The Mets acquired Carter from Montreal in December of 1984 as part of a five-player blockbuster trade. The Expos got third baseman Hubie Brooks, catcher Mike Fitzgerald, outfielder Herm Winningham and promising pitcher Floyd Youmans.

It was labeled the "biggest trade in Mets history" since 1977, when they sent superstar pitcher Tom Seaver to the Reds. This time, they received the superstar and it paid immediate dividends.

A Shea Stadium crowd of 46,781 that included Vice President George H.W. Bush for half of the game saw Carter slam a one-out, walk-off home run in the bottom of the 10th off former Met Neil Allen to give the Mets a thrilling 6-5 win over the St. Louis Cardinals.

"It was a storybook ending all right," Mets manager Dave Johnson said afterward.

The game-time temperature was 42 degrees, but the game was hotly contested throughout.

At a Glance

WP: Gorman (1-0)

HR: Carter (1), Foster (1)

Key stat: Carter hits game-winning homer

After Bush threw the ceremonial first pitch to Carter, Mets starting pitcher Dwight Gooden, who would go on to win the 1985 National League Cy Young Award, retired the Cardinals in order in the first inning. The Mets' offense then did its part, scoring twice in the bottom half of the inning. Keith

Hernandez's RBI single and a bases-loaded walk to Howard Johnson gave the Mets a 2-0 lead.

It wasn't all good for Carter in his initial game in Queens. In his first Mets' at-bat in the first inning, he was plunked on the elbow by a Joaquin Andujar fastball.

"It scared me at first," Carter said, "I had no feeling in my arm."

Carter stayed in the game and committed a passed ball in the third inning that enabled the Cards to tie the game 2-2.

"I just flat out missed the ball," the future Hall of Famer said afterward.

April 9, 1985

Mets 6, Cardinals 5 (10 innings)

In his second at-bat, Carter took a called third strike and then, in the fourth, he bounced into a force-out. Finally, in the sixth inning, the 6-foot-2 catcher lined a hit into center field and slid hard into second base for a double. When he got up, Carter pumped his fist in an emotional show of relief.

The Cardinals got even in the ninth inning, when Mets reliever Doug Sisk walked Jack Clark on a 3-1 pitch with the bases loaded.

The Mets had the bases loaded and two outs in the bottom of the ninth against Allen, but Mookie Wilson flied out to center to end the threat.

Left-hander Tom Gorman, who got the win, sat the Cards down in order in the top of the 10th. The Mets had Keith Hernandez, Carter and John Christensen (in for Darryl Strawberry, who was injured earlier in the game) ready to bat in the bottom half.

After Hernandez struck out to start the inning, Carter took a breaking ball from Allen for a strike. Carter looked for a second curveball and guessed right as he hit what Allen would later call a “good pitch” over the wall in left field and into the bullpen for a dramatic victory.

“There aren’t enough words to describe what I feel,” Carter said after the game. “What a beginning. Passed ball. Strikeout. Andujar steals a base. But the result at the end was outstanding.”

After the game, Hernandez, the unofficial captain of this team, put the win in its proper perspective.

“It’s just one game,” Hernandez said, “but you get a good feeling.”

Despite the early April cold weather, Gooden gave up three earned runs in six innings and was in line for the win.

“It was tough gripping the ball,” Gooden said, “so I threw more breaking balls than usual. I threw extra pitches in the bullpen before the start of the game and I took extra warm-ups on the mound to stay warm.”

Following the game, Carter was asked about dealing with the pressure that results from increased expectations.

“Pressure comes from within,” he said. “Everybody’s picked us to win. I just want to help them get there.”



Grote's Heroics Too Late for a Win for Seaver

Jerry Grote led off the bottom of the 11th inning with a walk-off home run to give the Mets a 1-0 win over the Cincinnati Reds before 22,005 at Shea Stadium.

Mets starting pitcher Tom Seaver was brilliant as he tossed nine scoreless innings, giving up five hits while striking out 10.

"I had my best fastball since the middle of last summer," said Tom Terrific. "I kept telling myself it would be there one day. Today it was."

Jerry Grote's home run in the bottom of the 11th inning gave the Mets a 1-0 win over the Reds on April 11, 1971. Grote, a member of the Mets for parts of 12 seasons, was also known for his defensive play as a catcher.

April 11, 1971

Mets 1, Reds 0 (11 innings)

Reds pitchers combined to walk 12 batters, but the Mets couldn't capitalize on numerous chances. Cincy starting pitcher Greg Garrett walked seven in 5 ²/₃ innings while reliever Clay Carroll walked three in three innings.

The Mets stranded 13 runners through 10 innings, including leaving the bases loaded in the fifth and sixth innings.

In the 11th, Grote went to the plate against Reds losing pitcher Wayne Granger "looking for a first pitch fastball."

The fiery backstop got a fastball and drove it over the auxiliary scoreboard in left field for the only run of the game.

"It's got to be the first ball I ever hit out of the infield off the guy (Granger)," Grote said.

At a Glance

WP: McGraw (1-0)

HR: Grote (1)

Key stat: Seaver 9 IP, 5 hits, 10 Ks

April 11, 1962

First Game in Mets History

Tuesday, April 10, 1962, was the day that the Mets were scheduled to play their inaugural game in St. Louis. In what may have been an omen, the game was rained out and pushed back to Wednesday, April 11, as the Cardinals welcomed the club into the National League with an 11-4 thrashing before 16,147 at Busch Stadium.

The first game in team history provided a number of "firsts."

The Mets' first batter was center fielder and future Hall of Famer Richie Ashburn, who flied out to center.

Right fielder Gus Bell got the Mets' first hit, a single with one out in the second inning. Third baseman Charlie Neal's RBI single drove home Ashburn with the Mets' first run, while first baseman Gil Hodges hit the Mets' first home run off Cardinals right-hander Larry Jackson in the fourth inning.

On the "other side of the coin," Roger Craig was the Mets' first losing pitcher, but he recorded the first strike-out by a Mets pitcher when he fanned Cardinals catcher Gene Oliver in the third inning.

Prospect Leary Makes Quick Exit in Debut

It was billed as Tim Leary's major league debut, but the New York bullpen stole the show with seven solid innings as the Mets edged the Chicago Cubs 2-1 at Wrigley Field.

Leary, the Mets' first draft choice in 1979, started strong with a 1-2-3 first inning that included two strikeouts. It was after the second inning when the former UCLA product felt his arm tighten and had to be removed from the game.

"He felt some stiffness in the elbow during the second inning," Mets manager Joe Torre said. "He wanted to keep pitching, but we felt it best to take him out."

At a Glance

WP: Allen (1-0)

Key stat: Brooks 3-for-4

Mets lefty Pete Falcone replaced Leary and tossed five scoreless innings.

A crowd of 7,475 fans braved a game time temperature of 47 degrees to watch the teams remain scoreless through seven innings.

Dave Kingman's RBI single in the eighth inning snapped the scoreless tie, but the Cubs tied the game in their half on a bases-loaded walk to former Met Steve Henderson.

Hubie Brooks tripled off Cubs pitcher Rawly Eastwick to start the ninth and scored on Mike Cubble's sacrifice fly.

Mets closer Neil Allen, who was already in the game, pitched a scoreless ninth to earn the win.

Leary's career never lived up to its promise. The Santa Monica, Calif., native played for six more teams in a 13-year career and won a total of 78 games.