

# The Best Opening Day Ever

By Pete Jedick

**B**igger doesn't necessarily mean better. Nice things sometimes *do* come in small packages. But the Cleveland Indians' 19-inning, 7-5 loss to the Boston Red Sox in last year's home opener is the grand exception. The longest game (6½ hours) in team history is my personal favorite.

For all you fans who failed to attend, left early or just plain forgot the vital details, I'd like to run it by you again. And, in the spirit of the Academy Awards, I've listed the winning performers in a number of diverse categories.

The envelopes, please:

**Best Pitching Effort/Old-Timer Category:** Former Indians star Mel Harder, the greatest living pitcher not in the Hall of Fame, for throwing out the first ball.

**Worst Pitching Effort/Hometown Category:** Tribe starter Dennis Cook. Exotic dancer Lulu Divine ran onto the field and kissed Cook before he even began his windup, taking the left-hander's mind completely out of the game. Red Sox hitters knocked him around for 4 runs in 2⅓ innings.

**Best Pitching Effort/Group Category:** The Indians' bullpen. Six relievers combined to shut out the Sox for the next 14 innings and keep the Tribe in the game. It set the pattern for the rest of the season.

**Most Fickle Fans:** The 50,000-plus who left before the game's exciting finish. What began as the largest crowd to see a major-

league game since 1988 — 65,813 — dwindled to less than 15,000.

**Most Overused Arms:** The eight Boston pitchers who tried to stop the Tribe from battling back. We tied the score 5-5 in the seventh and threatened almost every inning thereafter.

**Craziest Statistics:** 133 at-bats, 34 hits, 12 runs, 19 innings. A veritable feast.

**Finest Hometown Promotion:** To the guy a few rows down who spent most of the first six innings making out with his girlfriend. When a couple of Indians officials approached him, he expected to be thrown out. Instead, he was named "Tribe VIP Fan of the Game" and awarded a pair of binoculars and tickets.

**Dumbest Hometown Promotion:** Free Indians calendars that were recycled into paper airplanes, peppering the playing field.

**Strangest Supporting Cast:** Cleveland's weather. The game started in the spring (warm and wet), continued through the summer (hot and sunny) and ended in the fall (cold and damp).

**Most Surprising Player/Hometown Category:** No contest. Cleveland first baseman Paul Sorrento played as if it were the first game of the World Series. A last-minute acquisition from the Minnesota Twins, Sorrento was everywhere, digging out poor throws, diving for grounders, snagging line

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ILLUSTRATION BY WILLIAM NEFF

# Indians

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drives and turning double plays. His glove kept the Tribe in the game as much as the bullpen.

**Most Surprising Player/Opposing Team:** The Red Sox's huge designated hitter Jack Clark. His mini-bat looked more suited to Wiffle ball and provided about as much power. (He was 1-for-7.)

**Most Creative T-Shirt:** "Herb Score for President," worn by a schoolteacher working the charity concession stand.

**Biggest Mistake On The Field:** Trying to break the tie game, Indians manager Mike Hargrove pinch-hit speedster Alex Cole for third baseman Brook Jacoby to lead off the eighth. Cole struck out and Jacoby was replaced first by Tony Perezchica and then by

*Pete Jedick, a Cleveland firefighter and writer, is the author of a book on League Park.*



utility infielder Dave Rohde. The move came back to haunt Hargrove as Rohde's bat failed in two crucial situations.

**Biggest Mistake In The Stands:** A couple of young fans tried to cheer on their heroes by jumping on top of the Indians' dugout in the 14th inning. They were escorted away by the security guards.

**Most Overheard Word:** "Gateway."

**Best Musical Score:** "Splish-splash, I'm taking a bath," which shirtless bleacher fans were rocking to between innings.

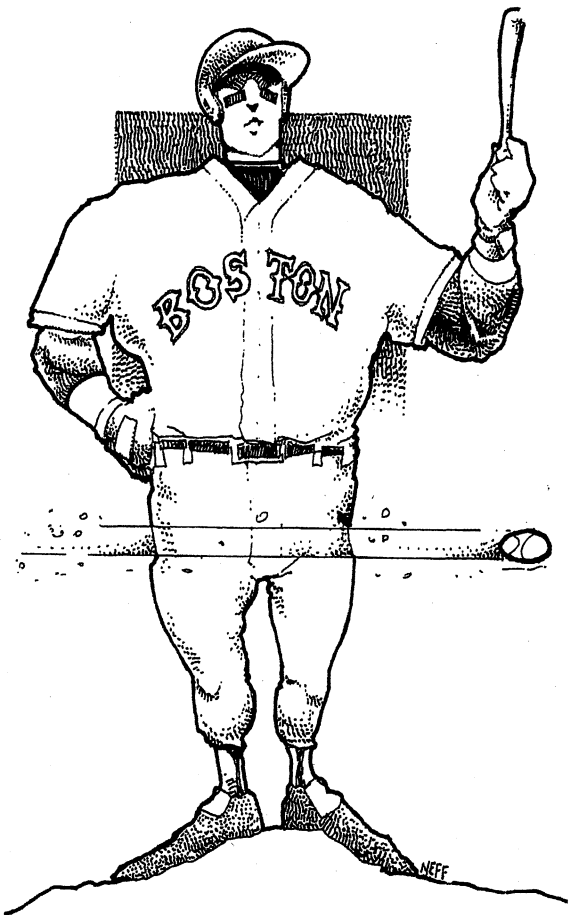
**Top Cameo Appearance:** WJW Channel 8's investigative reporter Carl Monday waiting in the hot dog line. Just standing behind him made me wonder if my stadium mustard was authentic.

**Most Desperate Act By A Fan:** Awarded to myself. After the 15th inning I cut in front of a guy who was busy counting his money to snare the last slice of pizza in the Stadium.

**Hometown Hero:** All-Star second baseman Carlos Baerga, who went 6-for-9.

**Opposing Team Goat:** Red Sox catcher Tony Pena, who wore the collar, going 0-for-7.

**Most Memorable Quote:** In the 17th inning, the ump called Indians outfielder Mark Whiten and catcher Sandy



ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM NEFF

Alomar out on strikes. This prompted a kid behind me to yell, "You suck, ump. You're worse than my father."

**Most Evil Villain/Opposing Team:** Red Sox replacement shortstop Tim Lincecum. First, he misplayed a grounder in the bottom of the 18th to almost give the game to the Indians. Then he came back in the 19th to poke a two-run homer off tired reliever Eric

Bell for a 7-5 Sox lead.

**Most Unlikely Cheer/Hometown Fans:** Fighting back in the bottom of the 19th, Sorrento doubled with one out. Alomar flied out and then the fans were on their feet chanting "ROH-DE, ROH-DE" for an unknown utility infielder.

Unfortunately, he grounded out to second to end the game.



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