

September 21 in Sports History Features First 'Monday Night Football' Game; Cards Pitcher Paul 'Daffy' Dean No-Hitter

by Staff Report

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This Day in Sports History: September 21

The date carries a strong St. Louis baseball connection. On Sept. 21, 1934, rookie Paul “Daffy” Dean threw a no-hitter as the Cardinals defeated the Brooklyn Dodgers 3-0 in the second game of a doubleheader at Ebbets Field. It completed an extraordinary day for the Dean brothers: Dizzy Dean had opened the twin bill with a three-hit shutout.

Paul struck out six and helped his own cause with a double and an RBI. The performance became one of the enduring stories from the Cardinals' championship season. St. Louis went on to win the National League pennant and then defeated the Detroit Tigers in a seven-game World Series, with the Dean brothers central to the club's pitching strength.

September 21 is best remembered in American sports for the night football became a weekly prime-time television event. In 1970, the Cleveland Browns beat the New York Jets 31-21 at Cleveland Municipal Stadium in the first regular-season game of ABC's "Monday Night Football." The result itself was secondary to what began that evening: a national appointment that put the NFL before a huge audience every week, blended sports with entertainment and helped make televised football a centerpiece of American culture. Browns running back Leroy Kelly scored twice, including on an 82-yard run, and Cleveland forced Jets quarterback Joe Namath into three interceptions. More than a half-century later, the original telecast remains one of the most important turning points in the relationship between sports and television.

In 1955, Rocky Marciano closed his professional career in the most fitting way possible: with another victory. Marciano recovered from a second-round knockdown and stopped Archie Moore in the ninth round at Yankee Stadium to retain the world heavyweight championship. Moore, a famed light heavyweight champion and one of boxing's great punchers, had given Marciano a serious early test. But Marciano's relentless pressure eventually prevailed. The win was the 49th of his career, and he retired the next year without a loss. His 49-0 record became a lasting standard in heavyweight boxing, while the bout also marked the final title defense of a champion whose hard-charging style made him one of the sport's most recognizable figures.

Baseball history took a dramatic turn on Sept. 21, 1964, when Cincinnati Reds rookie Chico Ruiz stole home to beat the Philadelphia Phillies 1-0 at Connie Mack Stadium. Ruiz made his daring move with two outs in the sixth inning and Frank Robinson at the plate. The run stood up, and the loss began what became known as the Phillies' "Fateful Fold." Philadelphia had entered the night with a 6 1/2-game National League lead and only 12 games remaining. The club then lost 10 straight, opening the door for the Cardinals to capture the pennant. The moment is remembered not simply for a rare straight steal of home, but because one bold play became the first chapter of one of baseball's most famous late-season collapses.

Six years later, the Browns and Jets made their place in history on the inaugural Monday night broadcast. The game arrived during the first season after the AFL-NFL merger, giving the new, unified league a showcase designed for a national audience. ABC executive Roone Arledge and NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle had helped create a package that was more than an extra game on the schedule. Its distinct booth, halftime

features and prime-time setting changed how professional football was presented. For fans in the St. Louis area and across the country, Monday night soon became part of the rhythm of the fall sports calendar.

On Sept. 21, 2001, baseball provided a different kind of national moment. Ten days after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the New York Mets hosted the Atlanta Braves at Shea Stadium in the first major sporting event in New York City after the attacks. With the Mets trailing 2-1 in the eighth inning, Mike Piazza hit a two-run home run off Steve Karsay to left-center field. New York won 3-2. The home run did not erase the grief of the preceding days, but it gave a shaken crowd of more than 41,000 a brief release and has remained one of the most emotional moments in Mets history. Piazza's game-winning swing showed how a sporting event can carry significance far beyond the standings.

Seven years later, another New York baseball landmark reached its final day. The Yankees defeated the Baltimore Orioles 7-3 on Sept. 21, 2008, in the last game at the original Yankee Stadium. Mariano Rivera pitched a perfect ninth inning and recorded the final out in the ballpark that had opened in 1923. Derek Jeter addressed the crowd afterward, marking the end of an 85-year run for a venue that hosted generations of Yankees stars, numerous World Series games, historic boxing matches and other major events. The Yankees moved across the street to a new stadium in 2009, but the final game at the old ballpark underscored how a sports building can become part of a city's shared memory.

From the Dean brothers' doubleheader dominance to Marciano's unbeaten farewell, from Ruiz's audacious steal to the launch of "Monday Night Football," Sept. 21 has produced moments that changed seasons, careers and the way fans experience sports. Its history also shows the range of athletic competition: games can create legends, reshape a league's future, preserve a stadium's legacy or offer a community a needed moment of unity.