

SPORTING LEGENDS: LOU GEHRIG

SPORT: BASEBALL

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1925 - 1941

Henry Louis Gehrig (born Ludwig Heinrich Gehrig; June 19, 1903 - June 2, 1941) was a Major League first baseman who played his entire career for the New York Yankees. Alongside teammate Babe Ruth, Gehrig contributed to one of the greatest teams in baseball history, the 1927 Yankees.



Lou Gehrig was known as "The Iron Horse" for his durability. Between 1925 and 1939, he played in 2,130 consecutive games (a 14-year span) before missing a game due to his being stricken with a fatal neuromuscular disease called Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

It would later become known as "Lou Gehrig's Disease." His streak, once believed to be one of baseball's few unbreakable records, would stand until shortstop Cal Ripken Jr. of the Baltimore Orioles played in his 2,131st consecutive game on September 6, 1995.

Late in his career, Gehrig's hands were x-rayed, and they showed that he had suffered 17 distinct old and new fractures. It is a testament to his toughness; considering how battered his hands alone were, it is not difficult to imagine what condition the rest of Lou's body was in during his career.

Gehrig joined the Yankees mid-way through the 1923 season and made his debut on June 15, 1923 as a pinch hitter. Over his first two seasons, Gehrig would see limited playing time, playing in only 23 games, usually as a pinch hitter. He was not on the Yankees' 1923 World Series roster, however. In 1925, he batted 437 times for a very respectable .295 batting average with 20 home runs and 68 runs batted in.

Inarguably, 1926 was Gehrig's breakout season. He batted .313 with 47 doubles, an American League leading 20 triples, 16 home runs, and 112 runs-batted-in.

SPORTING LEGENDS: LOU GEHRIG

In that year's World Series against the St. Louis Cardinals, Gehrig hit .348 with two doubles and 4 RBI's. Still, the Cardinals took the championship, winning the best-of-seven series four games to three.

Lou Gehrig would not bat under .300 again until his last full season, 1938. He would have five seasons with more than 40 home runs and would lead the American League in RBI's five times (including 184 in 1931, a league record that stands to this day,) and established himself as a bonafide star in his own right despite playing in the omnipresent shadow of Babe Ruth.

From 1923-1934, the Yankees had what many consider the best offensive tandem in the history of baseball: George Herman "Babe" Ruth, Jr. and Henry Louis Gehrig. Long after their deaths, the duo still holds records for combined hitting between two teammates.



Both men were prominent figures in America's growing German community, but, outside of their prolific hitting, there were few, if any, similarities between the two men.

Babe Ruth had been raised in an orphanage (sent there by his father, who couldn't control him) was very outspoken, arrogant, and loved the lavish lifestyle his fame and money brought him.

By stark contrast, Lou Gehrig was a quiet man who doted on his parents. It was not uncommon for his wife or his parents to accompany him on road trips with the team. While Ruth would spend his free time at clubs socialising, Gehrig typically remained in the team's hotel. Lou Gehrig even went so far as to deny interviews to reporters he knew cheated on their wives, believing that any man who was unfaithful to his wife was beneath contempt.

On June 2, 1941, at the age of only 37, Henry Louis Gehrig died at his home in The Bronx neighborhood of Riverdale. The disease that robbed him of his life and baseball career would come to be known as "Lou Gehrig's Disease."

The Yankees dedicated a monument to Gehrig on July 6, 1941. It calls him "A man, a gentleman and a great ballplayer whose amazing record of 2,130 consecutive games should stand for all time."

SPORTING LEGENDS: LOU GEHRIG



Scott Burton's Final Thought

The life story of Lou Gehrig is extremely touching, and one which reminds us all of how we should never take what we have for granted, particularly our health.

He lived his life during an era where athletes were not only heroes to the fans, but also humble men who weren't just motivated by the monetary gain from their sport. It's a shame that many of today's stars don't share the same humility.

Gehrig's legacy will continue to live on, and not only because of his outstanding baseball achievements. The subsequent research that was undertaken to understand and combat his disease was an extremely valuable contribution to humanity.

I was also touched by Gehrig's inability to succumb to the corruption which was often connected to Major League Baseball during the 1930s. Many critics accused some Yankees stars of having associations with the Mafia, but they all respected Gehrig's loyalty to his family, to his team and to the city of New York itself.



Lou Gehrig was a true gentleman of the baseball game.