



The Greatest Phillies Clubs of All Time

Ken Bingham

Introduction

Pleasure.

Pain.

Pleasure. Pain.

Pleasure. Pain. Pain. Pain.

That's the life of a Phillies fan. Or at least it's been my life with them.

From the very beginning, which for me came as early as 1964, I continuously set myself up for disappointment. I can't help myself. I just believe in them so much. And I mean really, REALLY believe. I think that every single season is going to be remarkable.

No. Scratch that.

I think that every single game is going to be remarkable, to the tune of going undefeated: 162 and 0. Okay, perhaps 161 and 0. I can understand the occasional rainout.

This kind of belief system is the only rationalization I have for how upset I get with every loss that the team suffers.

Scratch that again.

I get upset every time we walk a batter, let in a run, strike out with a runner

in scoring position. Sometimes, we don't even have to make a mistake for me to go into agony. All it takes is Brad Lidge to stroll onto the field with a one-run lead, a bad call at first base, a two-strike count. Hell, I've been known to come unglued when we've got the bases loaded, nobody out. Sometimes Ryan Howard will connect with that long drive to deep right field, and sometimes we get the strikeout, popout, long flyout scenario. Every Phillies fan knows what bases loaded, nobody out means. Strikeout, popout, long, long flyout.

Pleasure. Pain. Pleasure. Pain. Pleasure. Pain.

I learned it from my father. A diehard Phillies fan.

My first Phillies memory is inextricably tied to him. It was 1964 (I'm sure any true-blooded Phillies fan just shuddered—sorry). I was only four years old and swimming my little arms and legs off at a lake in Montgomery County Park. At one point, I stopped thrashing about and looked around me. What I saw was frightening. Just moments ago, I'd been surrounded by fellow bathers. Now the lake stood empty.

Did everyone disappear? Had I crossed some dimensional time barrier? I swiveled my head and found that everyone was up on the beach, huddled around their transistor radios. I quickly transitioned from fear to curiosity, and moved on out to find them listening to the melodious sounds of By Saam as he called Jim Bunning's perfect game.

Now, mind you, I had no idea what a perfect game was. But I understood emotion. I could read the tension, feel the excitement, could sense it building until it exploded into the joyous elation of baseball glory. "These aren't just

any Phillies club,” my father told me on the way home. “These are the 1964 Phils. And they’re going to do something special this year.”

Most of you know how this turned out. You wouldn’t have even casually thumbed through this book and gotten this far without knowing how this turned out.

After the heartache of that season, my father sat me on his knee and apologized. That’s right, apologized. He wanted to tell me he was sorry for bringing me up as a Phillies fan. This team would tear my heart out. My next clear recollection of the Phillies came on a soft summer’s night in 1971. I was hanging out at my cousin Louie’s house, all of 11 years old and excited about staying up late now that school was out. We’d just come in from a game of kick the wickie (same as kick the can, only without the can), and found the dining room empty.

When we’d gone outside, my family, his family, a cousin’s family, and a neighbor’s family had been hunkered around the kitchen table, drinking shots of Sambuca and eating my grandmother’s fried pizza. They’d been laughing about things we couldn’t understand, telling stories about events we didn’t even want to understand, and, more than anything else, having a great time.

We found them huddled around my grandmom’s 12-inch black-and-white, taking in Rick Wise’s no-hit bid. I sat beside them and watched a club that had languished in the cellar for the past seven years suddenly become national news, thanks to this hero who strapped on the cape and was willing to carry the entire city on his broad shoulders.

I begged my father to buy me a Rick Wise jersey, a Rick Wise hat, a Rick

Wise ball, bat and glove. And, of course, a Rick Wise cape. Less than a year after the greatest pitching performance I had ever seen, the Phillies jettisoned their star to the St. Louis Cardinals.

Pleasure. Pain. Pleasure. Pain.

I wasn't happy. How could I be? Who the hell was this Steve Carlton, and how the hell could he ever dethrone Rick The Man?

The next year was probably the most stunning of my Phillies life. I can distinctly remember sitting on the edge of the bed in my brother's room, where we had the best radio reception, listening to each and every pitch that Steve Carlton threw. When he pitched for these last-place Phillies, they suddenly became a major league contender. And the national press started paying attention. The Phils had landed.

Only three years later, Dave Cash arrived and after he helped turn a game-winning double play, fervently announced, "Yes we can!" Larry Bowa asked him, "Who you talking to, man?" To which Cash responded, "Anyone who'll listen, man. Anyone who'll listen."

Well, I listened, every single night, as the Phils continued to get better and better until, come the summer of 1977, they really did seem like the best team on the planet. Spirits were high in Philadelphia that summer. The Red & Blue were everywhere. People wore caps, jerseys, and smiles. They spent money freely. They spoke well of their city. Our economy went up. Way up. And then it happened.

With a large, ninth-inning lead at home against the Dodgers, the Phils found

a way to turn the pages back to 1964. I still cringe, as I'm sure many of you do, when I think back on Black Friday. It was the first time I ever questioned the existence of God. And, from what happened to the state of the Philadelphia Spirit, God had indeed left town.

Pleasure. Pain. Pleasure. Pain. Pain pain pain pain.

We won the division for the third year in a row the next season, but the city's heart wasn't in it, and, after a lackluster defeat to the improved Dodgers in the playoffs, no one was shocked. The surprising thing was actually watching Tug McGraw cry after the final defeat. Hadn't he known before the last pitch? Hadn't he known before the season?

This was Philadelphia. You don't win in Philadelphia.

Finally, 1980 came to wash all those tears away, but for me it was just another reminder that the Phillies hated me. Personally. That was the year I moved to Florida, the Phillies won, had a parade, and mocked me from two thousand miles away.

Pleasure. PAIN!

For me, 1983 was a footnote. Yes, we won the division again. And, yes, we made it to the World Series, but the team was made up of several players from the Big Red Machine, our rivals through the mid-seventies.

The Phillies, more than anything else, had been a family. We loved them.

And we cheered adamantly against anyone who pledged to defeat them.

Now we had to open up our arms to our enemies? We did, and we cheered, but it wasn't with the same fervor.

In contrast, we welcomed the 1993 team as immediate members of the family. In many ways, this made manager Jim Fregosi's decision to bring Mitch Williams into the deciding game of the World Series pardonable. He'd been our man for the ninth the entire year; he was the one who had gotten us this far, and though he might lose the game, you don't humiliate him in front of the entire baseball world by sitting him down. Better he lose it by his own hand.

We all know the rest. Mitchie Poo let up a three-run homer and the Phils went to the showers again.

Pleasure. Pain.

Years later, with my son, a strapping lad of six, I watched as the 2006 Phils barely missed a Wild Card bid for the second year running. My boy put his head down and began to weep. I stroked his back as he kept saying, "But we looked so good all year," and "How could it be over just like that?" and some other such idioms the likes of which many Phillies fans have repeated over and over again. I lifted his chin, looked him in the eye and, like my father before me, apologized to him for the very fact that I'd doomed him to grow up a Phillies fan. Nothing but pleasure, then pain.

Then something very strange happened. In 2007, the Fightin' Phils forgot the playbook. They actually turned around the 1964 curse when they marched back from a seven-game deficit with only 17 to play. Okay, they lost in the division series afterward, but we all felt it: this was the dawn of a new era.

The very next year, they actually took the World Series title, and as I put my son to bed that night, he told me I was wrong. I didn't understand.

He kissed me on the cheek and said that there was nothing to be sorry about. There never was. Being a Phillies fan is great. And, perhaps for the first time since I ambled up onto that beach back in 1964 to listen to Jim Bunning toss those last few pitches in that Father's Day perfect game, I knew he was right.

This book, which collects and compares the greatest teams in all the vast history of our fair Phillies town, is set to celebrate that fact. However, it certainly doesn't claim to be all-inclusive. I for one hope it becomes incomplete within the very next year. In fact, I already know this to be true. I've crunched all the stats, done the comparisons and contrasts, run the numbers against the Pythagorean formula, and come to the undeniable statistical conclusion that the Phillies are going to go 162 and 0 this season.

I have absolutely no doubt.