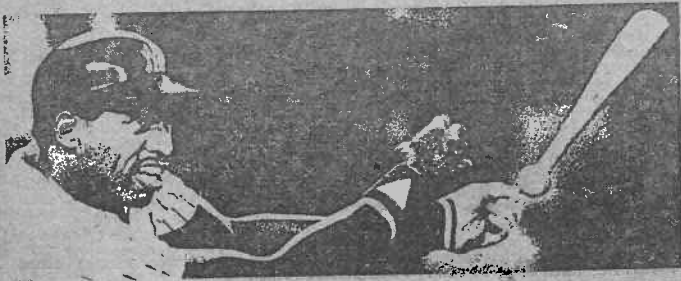
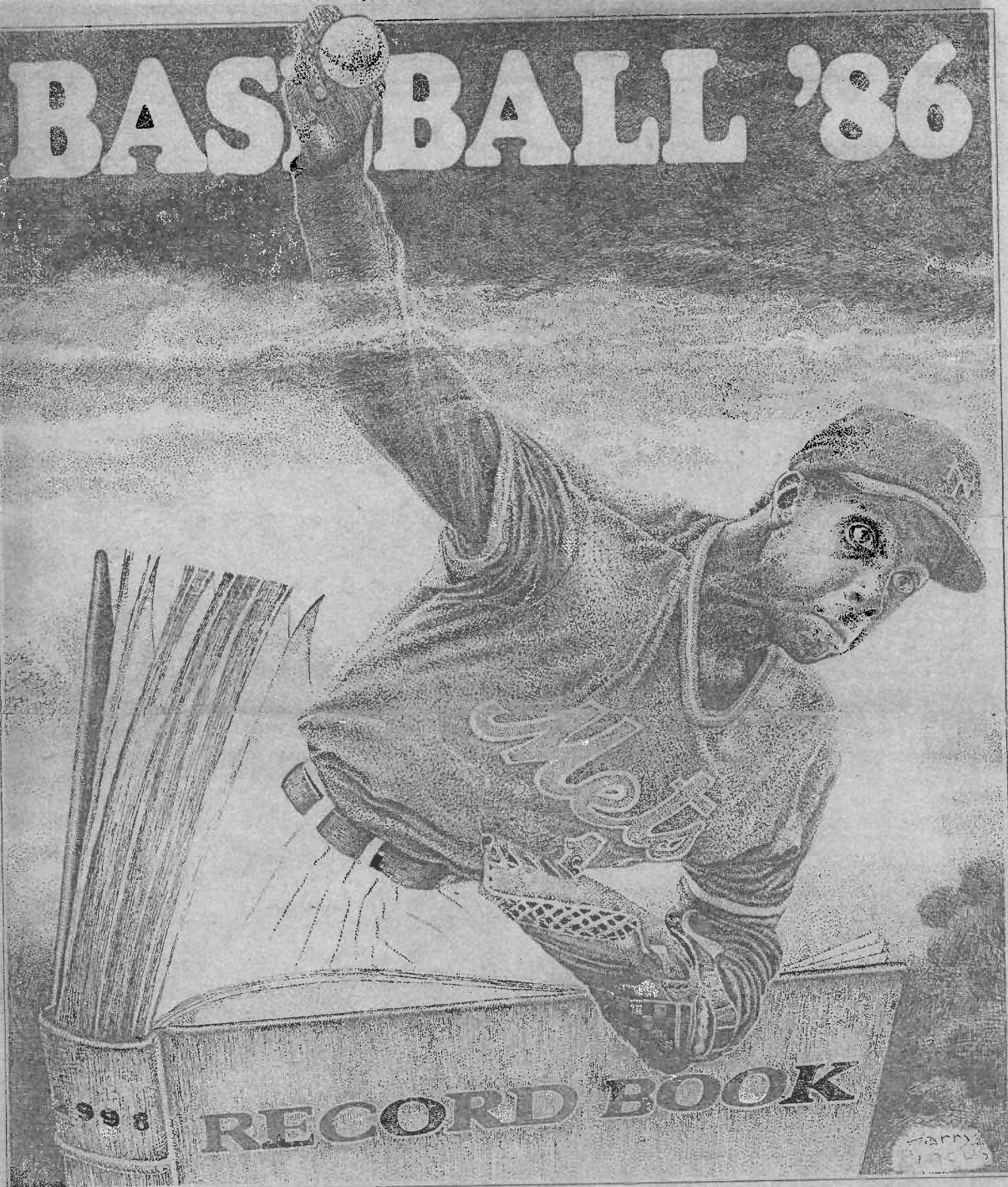


# BASBALL '86



The day Doc wins 300

Winfield: Yankee pride

The modern dream team

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# OC AT 300:

**NEW YORK**  
**Aug. 5, 1998**

**I**T WAS AS if all the years had collided now in The K Korner, the noise exploding into baseball's most famous section of stands like a Dwight Gooden fastball, noise that had started back in 1984, when The Doctor was 19. He is not 19 anymore. He is 33 years old, and the fastball has some gray to it, like Gooden's hair, and there is some thickness to the middle, some bulge to the jowls that is not all chewing tobacco. But yesterday, as he faced former teammate Shawn Abner in front of 55,000 at Shea, it was as if Dwight Gooden had stayed a teenager forever, as though the Ks hanging over the facing of the upper deck were a new idea.

Once more, they were begging for Gooden heat at Shea, begging for a strikeout. Only this strikeout would be a little different. It would produce win No. 300.

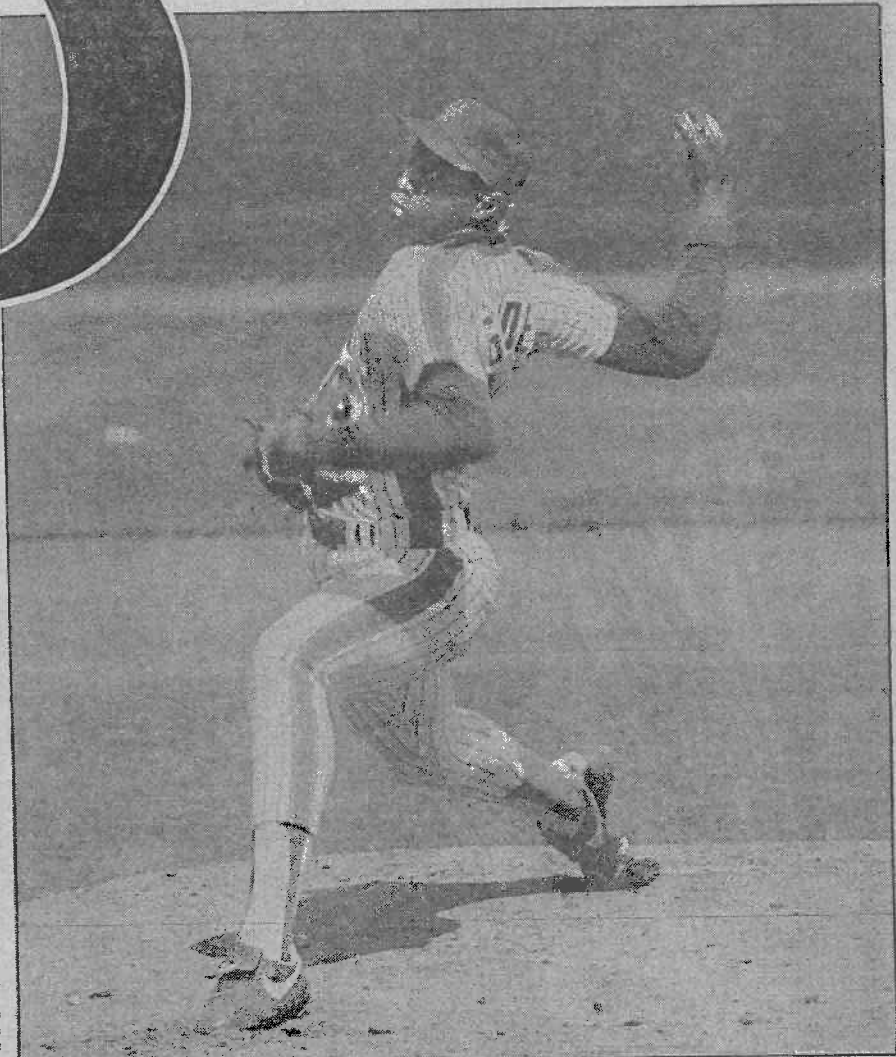
It was the top of the ninth. The Mets led the Los Angeles Dodgers, 4-2. The bases were loaded. Abner at the plate. Abner: Gooden's teammate for 11 seasons and three world championships with the Mets. Abner: NL MVP three seasons running. Abner: the man who signed that staggering \$25-million, five-year contract with the Dodgers last winter. Abner: the hitter known as "the right-handed Mattingly."

Gooden vs. Abner. One strike from 300.

"I never thought about taking him out," Met manager Wally Backman would say afterward. "It's the same now as when Doc and I started out back in the '80s: You walk to the mound like you're going to take him out, you might as well paint a bulls-eye on your bleedin' butt."

"He's the only 33-year-old in history who wins his 300th and has you wondering what the heck took him so long," Mets president and general manager Tom Seaver would say from the other side of Backman's office. It had been 13 years and one day since Seaver had won his 300th "Dwight probably will win 450 or so before he's done. I look at him sometimes and think to myself that I worked a different job."

The 300th did not come easy yesterday against the Dodgers and 37-year-old Fernando Valenzuela, a member of The 300 Club since 1996. Gooden had coasted through most of the game, striking out eight in the first eight innings. The two Dodger runs, unearned, came in the third on shortstop Kevin Elster's throwing error. But, Darryl Strawberry hit career homer No. 435, a three-run parking lot job in the fourth. Gooden



**HEATING UP:** Fourteen seasons after winning Rookie of the Year, Dwight Gooden can still smoke 'em.

VINCENT RIEHL DAILY NEWS

doubled home another run in the fifth and, by the sixth, a familiar celebration had begun in The K Korner.

"The rest of us hear cheers," says Strawberry. "The Doc, he's always heard jet engines at this ballpark."

In the ninth, however, Gooden faltered with two outs. He walked Pete Rose Jr. to start the inning, hit cleanup man Jose Canseco, then walked shortstop Mariano Duncan, the comebacking Dodger shortstop who missed the 1997 season after rotator-cuff surgery. Bases loaded.

Dodger manager Pete Rose Sr. made the move to Abner, who had been expected to miss this Mets-Dodgers series because of a wrist injury.

"Pete said, 'You wanna take a shot at your old buddy?'" said Abner. "I said sure. Hell, Dwight makes your wrist feel bad even when it's well."

"When I saw Shawn at the bat rack," said Gooden, "I was hoping Wally would leave me in. I'd always wondered what it would be like to face him in a game, you know, with the money on the table."

In the first Mets-Dodgers series, in June, the Dodgers had missed Gooden, who'd pitched the last game of the Mets-Giants series in San Jose the Sunday before his team left for LA.

As he stepped into the batter's box, Abner tipped his hat to Gooden and shouted, "Good luck, oldtimer." Gooden offered a little bow.

And, with the count 2-2, The Doctor reached back across 15 big-league seasons, across five Cy Young Awards, and threw Abner a fastball that had no gray to it, none at all. Up. And in. Abner swung and missed. Gooden had the 300th win, against just 140 losses.

Catcher Barry Lyons got to Gooden first, lifting him into the air. Elster was next. Strawberry, Gooden's best friend on the team since the beginning, joined the celebration from first base, his posi-



**MIKE LUPICA**

# FOREVER YOUNG

L. PREVIEW

tion since July 4. The scoreboard just showed one letter: "K." The sound system at Shea played Bob Dylan's "Forever Young." The ovation at Shea, for once, drowned out the sound of an incoming Air Canada jet.

A microphone was brought to home plate. Gooden stepped to the microphone. The crowd noise at Shea got louder. Gooden finally waved them into silence.

"This moment means a great deal to me, for a lot of reasons," he said. "I'm proud to join Tom Seaver as someone who's won 300. I'm proud that I was able to get a great player, and a guy I'll always think of as my friend, Shawn Abner, for the last out. And I'm most proud that No. 300 came here at Shea, where I've been lucky enough to pitch in front of the best fans in baseball for my entire career. And where I promise you I will finish my career, as long as the Mets are willing."

The 10-year contract Gooden signed back in 1989 finishes up at the end of this season and there had been some speculation that Gooden, for the first time in his career, might try free agency. He and Seaver engaged in that highly public feud last fall when Seaver dismissed Tucker Ashford as Mets manager after the team was swept by the San Jose Giants in the NL Championship Series. But Seaver appeased Gooden by hiring Backman as manager, and clearly, on the day Gooden joined Seaver in The 300 Club, all was well between The Doctor and the man known to Met fans as Boss Seaver.

At the microphone, Gooden finally turned and gave a formal military salute toward The K Korner.

"It is nice to know," he said, "that you all up there are still crazy — about me — after all these years."

In the clubhouse, a cake with "300" written on top was wheeled in. And finally, Gooden sat in front of his locker and talked about where this event ranked in a career filled with so many luminous events.

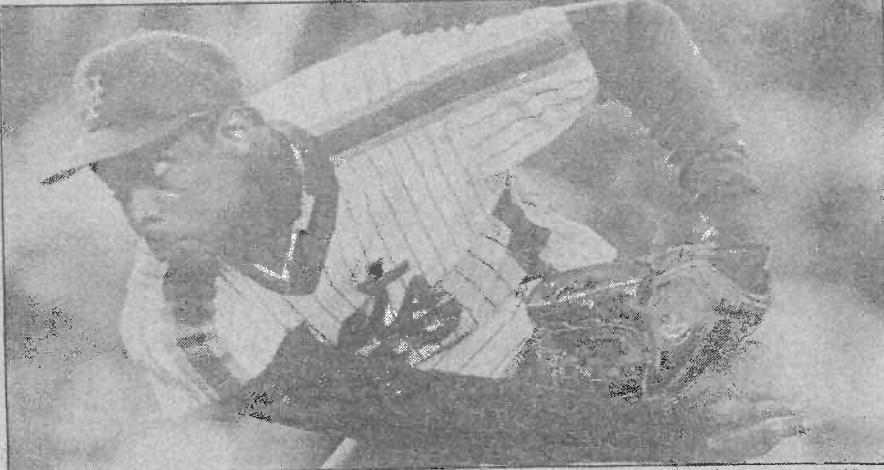
"You know," he said, "there was a time when I thought the fans would never really forgive me for the Mattingly homer." He was referring, of course, to what has been called the most dramatic World Series moment ever: Don Mattingly's three-run, bottom-of-the-ninth homer off Gooden at Yankee Stadium in Game 7 of the 1986 Subway Series.

Gooden had taken a no-hitter — and a 2-0 lead — into the bottom of the ninth that night. He walked Rickey Henderson and Henry Cotto and Mattingly's home run ended up in the first row of the upper deck.

**AFTER THAT**, Gooden talked about the Mets' World Series victory the next year, when Davey Johnson was still manager. And then the two World Series in the '90s under Ashford. And the Cy Youngs, and the Ks, over 2,800 of them already, and the home run off Jose Rijo that won the 1989 All-Star Game. Finally, it was time to go home.

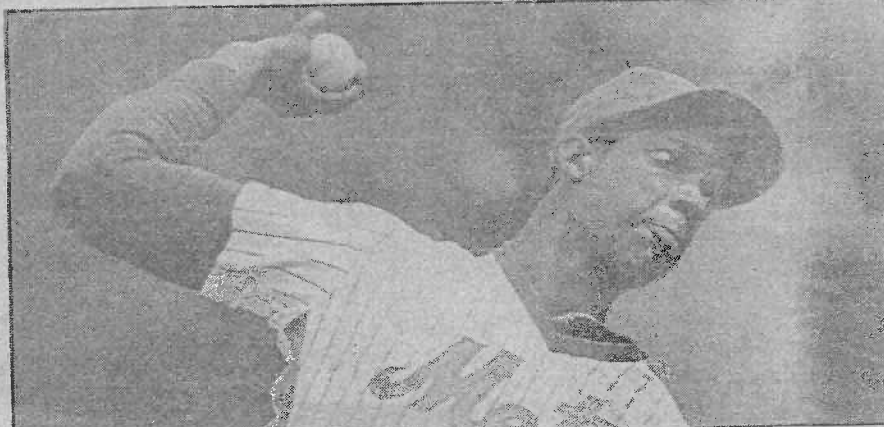
"Don't make me sound old in the papers tomorrow, guys," he said, putting an arm around the shoulder of Dwight Jr. "I think I've still got a few more Ks left in me. And you know I always said I'd pitch into the next century."

He left the clubhouse, the greatest baseball pitcher of this century, and maybe the next one. The Doc. Forever young.



**NEXT STOP, 400?:** Gooden burned Rose's Dodgers, paid homage to GM Tom Seaver and vowed to finish career in N.Y.

VINCENT RIEHL DAILY NEWS



**SPECIAL K:** The Doc releases inside fastball that shut door on Shawn Abner and opened door to The 300 Club.

AP



**THANKS FOR THE METMORY:** Having secured his latest claim to baseball immortality, Gooden acknowledges 55,000 roaring faithful. UPI

## THE ROAD TO 300

Year	G	IP	W	L	SO	ERA
1984	31	218	17	9	276	2.60
1985	35	277	24	4	268	1.53
1986	36	287	24	7	272	1.96
1987	37	297	20	11	275	2.77
1988	35	281	23	9	261	2.64
1989	35	281	22	10	268	2.16
1990	35	275	21	8	247	2.49
1991	36	290	21	10	264	2.42
1992	38	313	23	8	296	2.24
1993	34	273	19	10	220	2.74
1994	34	278	19	10	240	2.98
1995	32	265	18	9	222	2.51
1996	33	236	15	11	191	3.16
1997	35	264	23	7	199	2.20
1998	22	163	11	7	130	2.74
<b>Tot.</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>3998</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>3629</b>	<b>2.46</b>

*Projection provided by News stat analyst Patte Palmer*



**TIGER AND LYONS:** A tiring Gooden and catcher Barry Lyons discuss how to pitch Pete Rose Jr. in ninth. VINCENT RIEHL DAILY NEWS

DAILY NEWS, Sunday, April 6, 1998