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With 250th win, Moyer joined select group of Phillies

By Rich Westcott

For The Inquirer

When Jamie Moyer recorded his 250th career win recently, he not only became the 46th major-league pitcher to win at least that many games, but he also added his name to a highly select group of pitchers with Phillies connections who rank at the top of the list of big league winners.

Moyer is the 10th pitcher who has worn a Phillies uniform to win 250 or more games. In so doing, the 46-year-old lefthander joined a group that includes some of the greatest pitchers in baseball history.

Of the other nine hurlers on the list, some had long careers with the Phillies. Some played just briefly with the Phils and have names that only the most ardent history buff would recognize. And some performed much of their careers before the pitching mound was moved back to 60 feet, 6 inches in 1893.

As would be expected, the Big Three of Phillies pitching - Grover Cleveland Alexander, Robin Roberts and Steve Carlton - are on the list. So are Jim Kaat and Ferguson Jenkins. Rounding out the list are Gus Weyhing, Tim Keefe, Kid Nichols and Eppa Rixey, all hurlers from the distant past. All except Weyhing and Kaat are members of the Baseball Hall of Fame.

In terms of career victories, the biggest winner is Alexander, with 373 wins. Nichols is next with 361, followed by Keefe (342) and Carlton (329). Roberts (286), Jenkins (284), Kaat (283), Rixey (266), and Weyhing (264) complete the list.

Of this group, Carlton spent the longest time with the Phillies, toeing the rubber for 15 seasons from 1972 to 1986. Overall, he pitched from 1965 to 1988. A four-time Cy Young Award winner with the Phillies and winner of 20 or more games in five seasons, he is the team's all-time leader with 241 victories.

No particular goals

Roberts, whose 19-year career went to 1966, worked in 14 seasons (1948-61) with the Phillies, compiling 234 wins. He won 20 or more games six years in a row, including 28 in 1952 when he won the first of two National League pitcher of the year awards. At one point, Roberts pitched 28 consecutive complete games.

"When I was pitching," Roberts recalled, "you never gave too much thought to numbers. You didn't have any particular goals. You just wanted to keep pitching.

"I do remember, though, when I won my 191st game. That put me one ahead of Alexander as the club's all-time leader. They didn't make a big deal of it, but it was something that I was made aware of. When I won my 200th, it was a nice round figure, so that attracted some attention. Later, when I passed Burleigh Grimes, who had 270 wins, he was at the game. Otherwise, the numbers didn't mean much."

Alexander won 190 games as a Phillies pitcher from 1911 through 1917. He topped 30 wins in three consecutive seasons, including 33 in 1916 when he completed 38 games. That year, Alexander - whose 20-year career ended back with the Phillies in 1930 - hurled an astounding 16 shutouts.

Rixey, who toiled in 21 big league seasons before retiring in 1933, had an eight-year run with the Phils, starting as a rookie in 1912. In that period, he posted 87 wins, including 22 in 1916.

Among the others, none spent long periods with the Phillies. In four seasons as a Phillie, Weyhing (1892-95) won 71 games, 32 of which came in 1892, early in a 14-year career that stretched from 1887 to 1901. Keefe (1891-92) won 32 with the Phils while working overall from 1880 to 1893. Kaat (1976-79) came next with 27 wins in the midst of a 25-year career that went from 1959 to 1983.

Nichols (1905-06) ended a 15-year career that began in 1890 with 10 Phillies wins. Jenkins (1965-66) registered just two wins in Philadelphia before going on to a 19-year career that reached to 1983.

Stay in the moment

Having been a rookie in 1986, Moyer was pitching in his 23d big league season when he became the oldest moundman to reach the 250 level. Moyer won 216 games after he was 30 years old. Thirty-nine of his victories have come with the Phillies, whom he joined in mid-2006.

Winning 250 or more games is, of course, no easy feat. Many factors contribute to the process, not the least of which is the mental approach.

"You need to concentrate on the moment and not be driven by what you did last week," said Kaat, who pitched in the most career games (898) of any of the 10 Phillies hurlers. "I was aware of what winning so many games meant, but I tried not to be overly focused on the number of wins I had. I wasn't going to let myself become obsessed with it.

"But you need to start enough games and pitch enough innings," Kaat added. "Jamie is the poster boy for that. And you have to train and be physically prepared. As you get older, that's a

constant battle."

The Phillies' top 10 form an unusual group laced with many special footnotes:

Alexander, Roberts, and Carlton all pitched Phillies teams to pennants.

Alexander hurled the Phillies to their only World Series win in the club's first 97 years.

Over a six-year period, Roberts was the starting pitcher in five All-Star Games.

Carlton won 27 games in 1972 for a last-place team that captured only 59 during the entire season.

Rixey was traded to the Cincinnati Reds in a 1920 deal that brought the Phillies outfielder Earle "Greasy" Neale, who many years later led the Eagles to two of their three NFL championships.

Nichols once pitched three complete games in three days. (Take that, you pitch-counters).

Weyhing's nickname was "Rubber Arm Gas" because he almost always finished what he started.

Keefe won 32 or more games six years in a row.

Before joining the Phillies, Kaat changed his motion to a no-windup delivery and pitched nine more years.

Along with John Hernstein and Adolfo Phillips, Jenkins was sent to the Chicago Cubs for aging pitchers Larry Jackson and Bob Buhl in one of the Phillies' worst trades.

Special place in history

With the recent addition of Randy Johnson, there are 24 pitchers who have won 300 or more major-league games. With pitch counts, six-inning starters, five-man rotations, relievers of every stripe, and complete games having gone the way of the Pontiac, it's possible that no more pitchers will reach that milestone.

For that matter, it will not be easy for future pitchers to make it to 250 wins.

All of which makes Moyer's accomplishment that much more significant. With his landmark win, the Souderton graduate has reached a level that is reserved for a small but elite group of pitchers who have a special place in baseball history.

Rich Westcott is the author of 19 books, including "Winningest Pitchers: Baseball's 300-Game Winners."

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