George Herman Ruth, Jr. Biography

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George Herman Ruth, Jr.

George Herman Ruth, Jr. (1895-1948), American baseball player, was the sport's greatest celebrity and most enduring legend.

George Herman Ruth was born on February 6, 1895, in Baltimore, one of eight children of a saloonkeeper. Judged as incorrigible at the age of seven, Ruth was committed to the St. Mary's Industrial School for Boys, where he learned baseball from a sympathetic monk. His left-handed pitching brilliance prompted Jack Dunn of the Baltimore Orioles to adopt him in 1914 to secure his release. That same year Dunn sold him to the American League Boston Red Sox. Ruth pitched on championship teams in 1915 and 1916, but his hitting soon marked him as an outfielder. In 1919 his 29 home runs set a new record and heralded a new playing style. Baseball had been dominated by pitching and offense; by 1920 Ruth's long hits inaugurated the "big bang" style.

In 1920 Babe Ruth was sold to the New York Yankees for $100,000 and a $350,000 loan. This electrifying event enhanced his popularity. His feats and personality made him a national celebrity. An undisciplined, brawling wastrel, he earned and spent thousands of dollars. By 1930 he was paid $80,000 for a season, and his endorsement income usually exceeded his annual income.

Ruth led the Yankees to seven championships, including four World Series titles. He was the game's perennial home run champion, and the 60 he hit in 1927 set a record for the 154-game season (Roger Maris hit 61 home runs in 1961, but on the extended game schedule). His lifetime total of 714 home runs is second only to Hank Aaron's 755. With a .342 lifetime batting average for 22 seasons of play, many rate him the game's greatest player.

When his career ended in 1935, Ruth's reputation as being undisciplined frustrated his hopes of becoming a major league manager. In 1946 he became head of the Ford Motor Company's junior baseball program. He died in New York City on August 16, 1948.