



Tommy John

One of Major League Baseball's best ever pitchers also has his name associated with a medical procedure forever linked to baseball arm injuries.

Tommy pitched in the majors from the age of 20 to the age of 46! Over that time, he won 288 career games, the 7th highest total among southpaws in history. Only Roger Clemens has won more games and is not in the Hall of Fame. Tommy succeeded with guile, placement and changes of speed instead of a blazing fastball. His curveball and sinking fastball were his best pitches and allowed him to get many groundball outs and double plays. In fact, John is the career leader in double plays induced with 605, a full 30% more double play balls than the #2 pitcher on the all-time list.

In his 26 season career, he played the Cleveland Indians, Chicago White Sox, Los Angeles Dodgers, New York Yankees, California Angles and Oakland A's. He won 20+ games in a season 3 times, was a 4-time all-star and finished 2nd in Cy Young Award voting twice. He is 20th all-time in innings pitched with 4,710 and a third innings pitched, eight in starts with 700 and 26th in shutouts with 46.

Of course, the back half of Tommy's career almost never happened but made him a household name today for "Tommy John Surgery". In a game in 1974, Tommy felt his pitching arm go numb after a pitch. After much time and many examinations, he was discovered to have blown out his ulnar collateral ligament in his elbow. Dr. Frank Jobe did pioneering surgery on Tommy and transplanted a ligament from his other wrist into his elbow. No player had ever had the fortitude to have this done; not only did Tommy have the procedure done, he returned to pitch again, a feat believed to be impossible. Did he ever return! Tommy won 164 games after the surgery compared to 124 before the surgery. Today's pitchers owe both Dr. Jobe and Tommy for their careers due to Dr. Jobe's skill and Tommy's belief in himself that he could return to pitching. If Tommy had not worked hard in rehab to make the surgery a success, perhaps today's pitchers careers would be over when they got a UCL injury.

In 1976, John won the Hutch Award given to the player who best exemplifies the fighting spirit and competitive desire of Fred Hutchinson by persevering through adversity. In 1981, he was awarded the Lou Gehrig Memorial Award for the player who best exhibits the character and integrity of Lou Gehrig on & off the field.

Tommy is now a top motivational speaker.