



## Introduction

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**W**hat is this book all about? It's a blend of Cincinnati baseball's rich Opening Day history and some of the local and national historical events in America that surrounded, and occasionally directly impacted, those 150 years of Opening Days from 1869 to 2019. I wrote it because of my love for Opening Day and all the tradition and hoopla that has made Opening Day Cincinnati's most beloved institution.

My love affair with Opening Day began in the 1960s. I took part in my first Opening Day in 1967, when I was 10 years old. As a young boy, one of six children growing up in post-World War II Cincinnati, Reds baseball was what we did from April through September. We spent many summer evenings listening to the play-by-play on WSAI and later on the "50 watt, clear channel voice" of the Reds, WLW. The rest of our free time was spent playing baseball or dreaming of games in which we drove in the winning run. From October through February, we would rifle through the sports section of the Cincinnati Enquirer each morning to see if there was any news from the "hot stove league" about possible trades of players. We also wanted to make sure we were aware of any significant news about the players, such as whether they suffered any injuries during the off-season that would impact the next season. With the optimism of youth, we were perpetually certain that the team's record in the coming season would be better than the previous one. But until the first pitch was thrown, we waited anxiously for Opening Day.

When Opening Day arrived, we would scour the entire paper to read about the buildup to the big game. The Enquirer often had special supplements devoted to the opening of the season, and various columnists—not just the sports columnists—would cover the events leading up to and surrounding the game. The editorial page contained cartoons and opinion pieces about this annual rite of spring.

Opening Day has always been a special day for the people of Cincinnati despite what might be going on in the world around us. A few years ago, my close friends and former Cincinnatians

**“Opening day is a state of mind,  
a rite of spring, a happening, unique in Cincinnati  
because only in Cincinnati does the home team  
open at home every year.”**

*Enquirer* columnist Jim Montgomery, April 8, 1985

Joan and Doug Raftery suggested that I chronicle my Opening Day experiences in a book. They knew our family had religiously attended Opening Day, much as Joan’s family had carried out their decades-long love affair with the Wisconsin Badgers. With their encouragement, I started writing my recollections, but before long I could tell my draft was missing something.

That something was how Opening Day was sometimes interwoven with historical events of the day. To satisfy my curiosity, I scoured newspaper archives to learn if anything significant was reported about the city or the world on Opening Day. I went all the way back to 1869, when the Reds played their first professional game. In my research, I primarily consulted the *Enquirer*, as it is the only daily paper that has existed in Cincinnati throughout the club’s 150-history. I wanted to find out what the headlines said on Opening Day during those 150 years. Was Opening Day affected by Prohibition, wars, the Depression, or local events such as Ohio River floods? Were there other interesting historical events that I remembered from school that coincided with Opening Day? Were fans filling the ballpark on every Opening Day? Did anything else affect the pageantry surrounding Opening Day?

What I have discovered in my research is that the one constant in Cincinnati since 1869 has been baseball and, in particular, the unique spectacle that is Opening Day. Whatever else was happening in the city or the world

in a given year, Cincinnatians enthusiastically celebrated the first day of the baseball season—that one special day when hope springs eternal. I have learned that the game is secondary to the affection people show for each other, the tradition, the city, and the Reds on the one special day that transforms our town.

This book describes the history of Opening Day traditions and some of the interesting historical events and customs that help place the opener in context. For a more detailed description of the actual games that took place on Opening Day, I recommend *Redleg Journal: Year by Year and Day by Day with the Cincinnati Reds Since 1866* by Greg Rhodes and John Snyder. Another great resource is *Opening Day: Celebrating Cincinnati’s Baseball Holiday* by John Erardi and Greg Rhodes. I thank all three of these authors and the *Enquirer* for the enjoyment and information they have provided to me, first as a fan and, later, as the writer of this book.

As any Cincinnati baseball fan knows, sometimes our team wins and sometimes it loses, but what really counts is what brings us together on that one day every year—the day when we celebrate baseball, the arrival of spring, and the storied tradition of the Cincinnati Reds. We gather together to celebrate and to hear those words that are music to every fan’s ears: “Play ball!”