

# Cup of Coffee: Joe Cleary

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## August 4, 1945, Griffith Stadium, Washington, D.C.

You have to feel for Ossie Bluege. The third-year Washington manager has his Senators on a six-game win streak and prior to that afternoon's doubleheader with Boston (the fourth of five-straight twin bills due to earlier rainouts), his veteran team trails first-place Detroit by only three games.

However, the team's always-frugal ownership rewards Bluege and his over-achieving, but pitching-strapped team, by activating Bert Shepard, the Senators' one-legged batting practice pitcher back in September, and signing Joe Cleary, a right-handed pitcher, who three weeks ago quit on his Chattanooga Lookout teammates in a pique, returning to his Yonkers, New York, home.

Bluege, a noted "old school" player and manager, has probably read in the newspapers three days earlier where team owner Calvin Griffith agreed to give Cleary a trial with the team because "Cleary's mother is the hospital and the veteran pitcher needed a job."

*There are bad debuts and then there is Joe Cleary's and it gets ugly real quick.*

Following an unexpected two-hit shutout win by the Senators' Wally Holborow in the first game, Washington now could move to within two games of the Tigers, an eventual 3-2 loser to the Chicago White Sox.



## Major League Debut

August 4, 1945

Boston Red Sox at Washington Senators  
Griffith Stadium, Washington, D.C.

Boston	AB.	H.	O.	A.	Wash.	AB.	H.	O.	A.
Lake.ss	4	2	3	2	Case.lf	5	1	1	1
LaF't.3b	4	2	1	2	Myatt.2b	2	2	2	0
McB'e.1b	6	3	5	1	V'ahn.2b	2	1	2	0
M'k'ch.cf	6	2	2	0	Lewis.rf	5	1	3	0
Camilli.lf	3	0	6	0	Kuhel.1b	2	2	4	1
Culson.lf	1	0	1	0	Zardon.cf	3	1	3	0
Fox.rf	4	1	2	0	Clift.3b	1	0	0	1
N's'e.2b	2	0	1	3	Layne.3b	2	1	1	2
Garb'k.c	4	2	6	0	B'ks.lb.cf	4	3	6	0
Ferriss.p	3	0	0	4	Torres.ss	5	0	0	2
					Guerra.c	5	1	5	0
					Ul'ch.p	1	0	0	0
					Cleary.p	0	0	0	0
					Shep'd.p	3	0	0	2

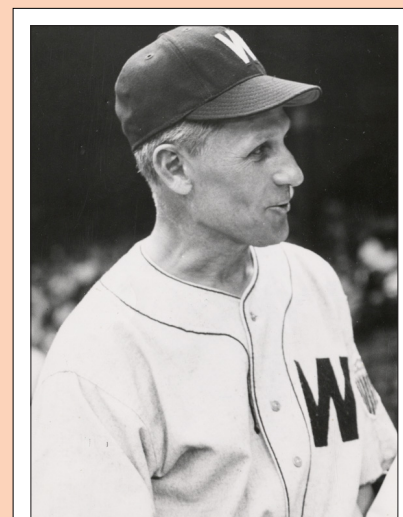
Totals	37	12	27	12	Totals	40	13	27	11
Boston	101	120	100	15	Washington	011	001	001	4

Runs—Lake (4), LaForest (3), McBride, Metkovich, Camilli, Fox, Newsome (2), Garbark, Ferriss, Case, Lewis, Clift, Layne. Errors—Myatt, Newsome, Case, Binks. Runs batted in—La Forest (2), Guerra (2), Clift, McBride (7), Metkovich, Fox Garbark (2), Lake, Case. Two-base hits—Lake, LaForest, McBride. Three-base hit—McBride. Stolen base—LaForest. Sacrifice—Garbark. Double plays—Kuhel (unassisted), Layne to Binks, Lake to Newsome to McBride, Torres to Vaughn to Binks. Left on bases—Boston, 8; Washington, 14. Bases on balls—Off Ferriss, 4; off Ullrich, 7; off Cleary, 3; off Shepard, 1. Struck out—By Ferriss, 4; by Ullrich, 1; by Cleary, 1; by Shepard, 2. Hits—Off Ullrich, 4 in 3½ innings; off Cleary, 5 in ½ inning; off Shepard, 3 in 5½ innings. Hit by pitcher—By Ferriss (Clift), by Shepard (Fox). Wild pitch—Cleary. Passed ball—Guerra. Losing pitcher—Ullrich. Umpires—Messrs. Passarella, McGowan and Rommel. Time, 2:24. Attendance, 13,035

In the nightcap, there is one out in the top of the fourth inning and Boston's Tom McBride stands at third base following a bases-clearing triple, giving the visiting Red Sox a 6-2 lead. The announced crowd of 13,035 is probably mostly silent as Bluege makes his way to the mound to relieve Sandy Ullrich and await the arrival of his team's newest acquisition, Cleary, a 26-year-old Army veteran.

One has to wonder what Bluege is thinking when he hands the ball to a player who three weeks earlier had quit on his Chattanooga teammates. Pennant race be damned, Bluege may have thought as he hands the baseball to the team's 11th pitcher of the season. Bluege retreats to the safety of the Senators' dugout before the proverbial roof gave way.

George "Catfish" Metkovich, welcomes Cleary to the majors with an RBI Single scoring McBride. Next Dolph Camilli walks before Pete Fox singles, scoring Metkovich. Following a wild pitch he walks Skeeter Newsome. Bob Garbark then singles home both Camilli and Fox. After striking out Dave Ferriss, the opposing pitcher, Eddie Lake singles to score Newsome, Ty LaForest walks to load the bases. Tom McBride, who tripled earlier in the inning, drives a bases clearing double making it 14-2 and probably clearing Griffith Stadium of most of the games' fans.



Ossie Bluege  
Manager, Washington Senators

## Joe Cleary [2 of 2]:

It becomes apparent that Bluege has finally had enough and is so disgusted that he breaks with the usual baseball protocol and relieves Cleary by simply signaling from the team's bench.

"I look over at the dugout and I see Bluege waving at me," says Cleary later. "He's got one leg on the step of the dugout and he's waving at me to come out."

"No manager takes his pitcher out that way. You go to the mound. You don't embarrass him."

"So, I stood there rubbing the ball and waiting. Finally, the umpire came over and said, 'Son, I think you better go,' so I left."



**Bert Shepard**  
1947 St. Louis Browns

Wounded and taken prisoner in World War II, Bert Shepard remains the only major leaguer to have played in the major leagues on an artificial leg ... released by the Senators after the 1946 season, Shepard signs with the St. Louis Browns in April 1947 ... in seven minor league seasons, both pre-and-post war, the lefty is 23-31 ... in 1942, he is 9-13 with a 4.45 ERA for the LaCrosse Redhawks ... has 161 strikeouts in 172 innings.

When Shepard comes in from the bullpen, Cleary stomps off the mound and confronts Bluege in the dugout where Senator players have to step in to prevent them from hitting each other. While all of this is going on, Shepard strikes out Metkovich to end the inning.

Shepard will finish the game, allowing Boston one run on three hits in 5 1/3 innings. A fighter pilot with the 55th Fighter Group in Europe, Shepard, flying a P-38, sustains serious injuries when he is shot down on May 21, 1944, while flying his 34th mission, losing his right leg in the process and spending time as a POW.

"Being a left-handed pitcher and a left-handed hitter," Shepard says years later, "the right leg was the ideal one to lose."

For Shepard, his appearance that afternoon will be the only one in his major league career.

The next morning, Cleary is sold to the Buffalo Bisons of the International League, Detroit's top farm club. It will take Cleary 12 days to report to the Bisons.

Two days after Cleary's and Shepard's debut, the armed forces of the United States detonates an atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima, hastening the end of a World War that for the United States, began on December 7, 1941, when the empire of Japan, without a declaration of war, attacked the still neutral United States at Pearl Harbor



**Joe Cleary**  
1944 Chattanooga Lookouts

Chattanooga's opening day starter, Cleary responds with a seven-hit shutout of Nashville 4-0 ... is 6-14 with a 6.96 ERA in 33 games for the Lookouts ... in mid-June, Cleary tells manager Scrapy Moore that his nerves are giving him problems and that he is leaving to go to his parents house in New York ... he later changes his mind and remains with the team ... during his time with the Lookouts, regional newspapers credit Cleary with being in the Army during the invasions of (1) North Africa, (2) Guadalcanal, (3) Sicily and (4) Italy and he was discharged on account of (1) Malaria, (2) a nervous disorder or (3) being wounded.

Born on December 3, 1918, in Cork, Ireland, Joseph Christopher Cleary still holds the distinction of being the last native of Ireland to play in the major leagues and the major league record for having the highest ERA (189.00) of any pitcher who retired at least one batter.

Back in New York, Cleary clerks briefly on Wall Street before buying a bar on the West Side. Cleary is 85 years old when he dies on June 3, 2004 in Yonkers, New York.

Bert Robert Shepard dies in his sleep at a nursing home in Highland, San Bernardino County, California. The left-handed pitcher with a 1.69 major league career ERA is 11 days shy of his 88th birthday.