

# Who Is Derek Jeter?



By  
Gail Herman

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By Gail Herman  
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For Jeff, a Yankee and Jeter fan. And for Sam, a Jeter fan—GH

To Rhia, for the support—AT

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# Contents

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[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Who Is Derek Jeter?](#)

[Always a Yankee](#)

[Major League Dreams](#)

[High-School Challenges](#)

[Waiting and Wondering](#)

[On His Own](#)

[Taking on the Minors](#)

[Starting at Short](#)

[World Series Magic](#)

[Tragedy and Triumph](#)

[A New Chapter](#)

[Timelines](#)

[Bibliography](#)

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## Who Is Derek Jeter?

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On April 2, 1996, Major League Baseball's Opening Day, the New York Yankees faced the Cleveland Indians. Once, the Yankees had been the top ball club in the country. They were a dynasty, with World Series titles. But the Yankees hadn't won a championship in eighteen years. They hadn't won the American League pennant since 1981. Maybe this would be the start of a championship season at last.

Today they were playing at Cleveland's Jacobs Field, and the score was tied, 0–0, in the top of the second. The Yankees had two men on base. New York fans grew excited.

But now there were two outs. Could the Yankees still score? Twenty-one-year-old Derek Jeter stepped to the plate. And he . . . struck out.



Derek was the first Yankees rookie to start at shortstop on Opening Day in more than thirty years. *Why Derek?* some fans wondered. *Why now?* He'd had a poor spring training. They doubted his strength at bat and on the field. It seemed they might be right.

Derek told himself it was okay. This was just a game like any other. He tried not to be nervous. But it was hard. He was young and inexperienced. An April Fool's snowstorm had pushed the game back a day. The wait made it even harder. But Derek was determined to make a difference.

In the fifth inning, he got a second chance at bat.

Derek took two pitches, both balls. Then he saw a high fastball. He swung. *Crack!* The ball sailed high into the left-field stands. A home run!

Two innings later, Derek made an over-the-shoulder, one-handed catch. He stranded a man on base to leave the Indians scoreless. The Yankees wound up winning 7-1.

Any doubts about Derek Jeter vanished. For the Yankees, it was the start of a championship season. And for Derek Jeter, it was the start of an amazing major league career. By the time Derek retired, he had won five World Series titles, five Gold Gloves, five Silver Sluggers, Rookie of the Year, and a slew of other awards. He'd been a Yankee for almost half his life. And before he was a Yankee, he was a Yankees fan. Surely the biggest Yankees fan from Kalamazoo, Michigan.

