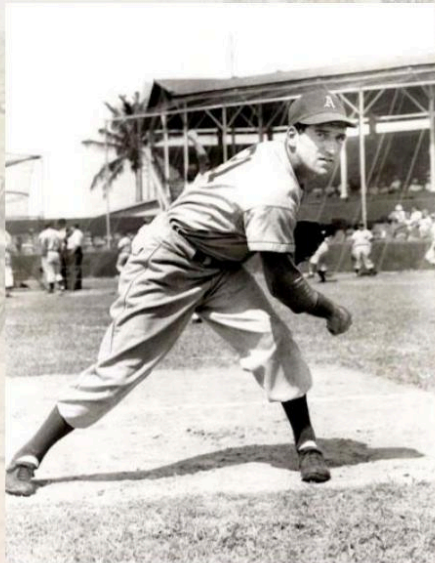


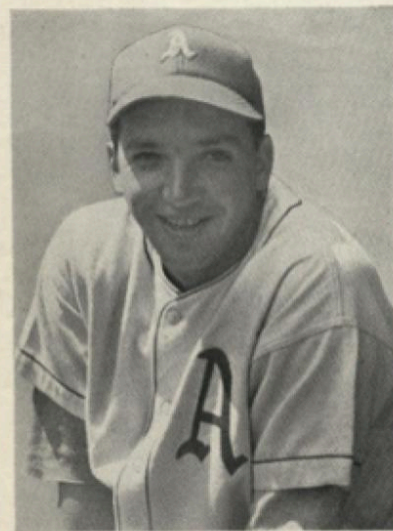
## Who was Better: Marchildon or Fowler?

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Dick Fowler and Phil Marchildon were Ontario-born pitchers who became famous with the Toronto Maple Leafs of the International League, and later were teammates for seven years with the Philadelphia Athletics between 1941 and 1949.



Phil Marchildon



DICK FOWLER

Dick Fowler

Marchildon pitched nine years in the major leagues, Fowler ten. Marchildon had a career record of 68 wins and 75 losses. Fowler won 66 and lost 79. Marchildon was at his best in 1942 and 1947, winning 17 and 19 games respectively. Fowler won 15 games in 1948 and again in 1949. He also pitched a no-hitter.

Although they were roommates and remained close friends off the field, the two men were quite different. Marchildon, who was almost 27 when he made his big-league debut in September of 1940, was eight years older than Fowler. Fowler was just 20 when he joined the Athletics a year later.

Marchildon was five feet, ten and a half inches tall; Fowler was six inches taller at six-four and a half. Originally a tall, skinny kid, he grew to 215 pounds.

In the minor leagues, Marchildon could simply overpower opposing batters. Once he was facing major league hitters, though, sheer speed was not enough. Phil's wildness and lack of finesse made for a rough beginning in the big leagues.

Marchildon made his debut against Washington on September 22, 1940, in the second game of a doubleheader, giving up one run in the first inning on a double and a single. In the second inning, Washington loaded the bases with one out but Marchildon got the next two batters on a pop-up and a ground ball. In the third inning, the first two batters singled, and Jimmy Bloodworth followed with a home run. Phil's tally for three innings was five runs on six hits and three walks.

A week later, he pitched a complete game at Boston that was called after eight innings. The A's lost 4 to 1 and Phil's lack of command on the mound was demonstrated by nine stolen bases, including a triple steal in the sixth inning.

Marchildon was a strong pitcher with a moving fast ball, but he was also wild on the mound. All through his career, Phil gave up bases on balls in abundance, an average of five per nine innings. He also allowed an average of eight hits per nine innings. Not counting errors behind him, Marchildon had to deal with an average of 13 base runners per game.

Dick Fowler was remarkably similar. Throughout his career, Dick gave up an average of nine hits and four walks per game, also allowing at least 13 base runners per nine innings.

Fowler's first brush with baseball history came on the last day of the 1941 season. It was Sunday, September 28<sup>th</sup>, and there were 10,268 spectators

in Shibe Park to watch a doubleheader against the Boston Red Sox. The big attraction was Ted Williams, 23-year-old left fielder of the Red Sox, who was trying to become the first .400 hitter since George Sisler in 1922.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, Williams had been batting .413, but over the next ten games he fell into a slump in which he made just eight hits in 30 at bats. Before the season's final day, Ted's average was .3996.

Boston manager Joe Cronin told Williams that if he sat out the two games his average would be rounded up to .400, but Williams wasn't interested in a rounded .400. He was determined to play - and did he ever!

Dick Fowler was the starting pitcher for the first game. In the second inning, Williams singled to right. In the fifth inning he hit a 400-foot home run over the fence in center field. Fowler was finished at the end of the fifth inning, but Williams had barely started. Ted went four for five in the first game and had a single and a double in the second game, finishing the day with a batting average of .406. In the past 103 years, Ted Williams is the only player to bat .400.

There was nothing to suggest that Dick Fowler would write his own page in history four years later. After three years of military service, spent in Canada on compassionate grounds because of a son being treated for cancer, Dick rejoined the Athletics on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945.

Manager Connie Mack put him to work right away. He pitched three innings in relief on September 1<sup>st</sup>, and 1 and two thirds innings on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Two days later, Don Black started against the White Sox. After two innings, Chicago was leading 7-0. Fowler came out for the third inning and finished the game, yielding 13 hits and eight runs. The final score was 15 to 6.

Four days later, Fowler made his first start since 1942 against the St. Louis Browns, the defending American League Champions. The St. Louis pitcher, a 30-year-old Texan named John "Ox" Miller, was also making his first start of the year.

For eight innings the two men went toe to toe. Fowler doubled with two out in the third, but the next batter grounded to second. In the fifth, Dick Siebert led off with a single, but Miller retired the next three batters. The Athletics had a walk and a single in the seventh but still couldn't score. Meanwhile, Fowler was quietly setting down the Browns, inning after inning: four walks but no hits.

STLA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
PHIA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	0	

St. Louis Browns				Philadelphia Athletics					
Byrnes cf	3	0	0	0	Smith lf	4	0	0	0
Finney 1b	3	0	0	0	Peck rf	4	1	1	0
Moore rf	2	0	0	0	Hall 2b	3	0	1	1
Laabs lf	3	0	0	0	Estalella cf	3	0	0	0
Christman 3b	3	0	0	0	Siebert 1b	3	0	2	0
Stephens ss	2	0	0	0	Kell 3b	3	0	0	0
Mancuso c	3	0	0	0	Rosar c	3	0	0	0
Gutteridge 2b	2	0	0	0	Brancato ss	3	0	0	0
Miller p	3	0	0	0	Fowler p	3	0	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>

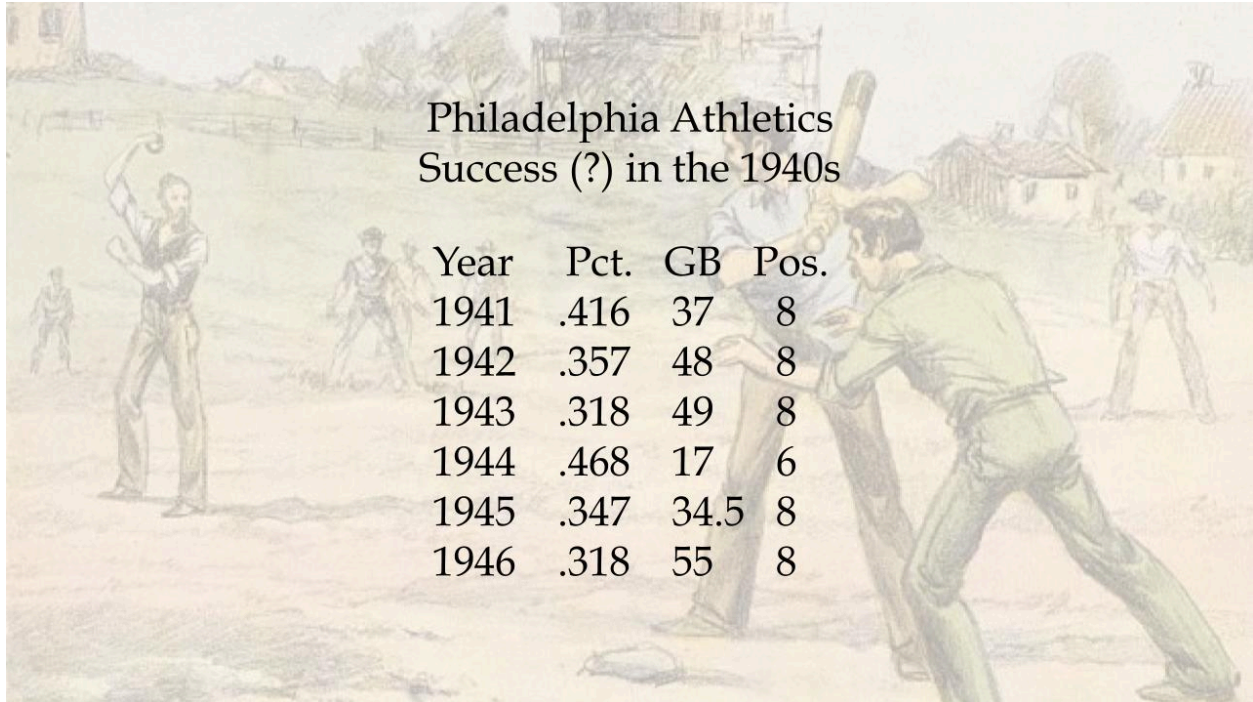
		St. Louis Browns							
Miller L(0-1)		8	5	1	1	1	1	0	30
		Philadelphia Athletics							
Fowler W(1-0)		9	0	0	0	4	6	0	29

September 9, 1945: Philadelphia 1, St. Louis 0

In the St. Louis ninth, Miller flied out to left, center fielder Milt Byrnes walked, and Lou Finney grounded into a double play to end the inning. The Athletics came to bat in the bottom of the ninth. Right fielder Hal Peck tripled off the right field wall. Second baseman Irvin Hall was the next batter. Third base coach Al Simmons said, "Look for a ball above the waist and let's get out of here." Hall hit the first pitch over second base to give the Athletics a 1-0 victory. Dick Fowler became the first Canadian to pitch a no-hitter, and the first pitcher to throw one since Bob Feller in 1940.

There was justice for "Ox" Miller: He started two more games in 1945, beating the Red Sox 4-1 and the Yankees 4-3 in 10 innings.

In judging the abilities of Marchildon and Fowler, we must remember that the Philadelphia Athletics of the 1940s were a very bad team. They were last when Marchildon joined them, they were still last when Fowler arrived, and they were never close to the leaders. Their end-of-season deficit reached 55 games in 1946.



### Philadelphia Athletics Success (?) in the 1940s

Year	Pct.	GB	Pos.
1941	.416	37	8
1942	.357	48	8
1943	.318	49	8
1944	.468	17	6
1945	.347	34.5	8
1946	.318	55	8

Things changed in 1947, however. Marchildon won 19 games and Fowler 12, as the A's finished in fifth place.

There are serious misconceptions about Marchildon's success in 1947. For a long time, Marchildon and others claimed that Manager Mack had denied him a chance to win 20 games so that Mack could avoid a consequential salary increase for the right-hander.

The fact is that between September 1<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, Marchildon started seven games—an average of every four days. He was still pitching regularly. He won three and lost two in that span. His 19<sup>th</sup> win came on Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, the second-last day of the season, at Yankee Stadium in New York. Phil pitched 10 innings and faced 44 batters, beating the Yankees 2-1 despite giving up seven walks and six hits.

Sunday was the last day of the season, and Marchildon offered to pitch from the bullpen if needed. Lou Brissie, a rookie left-hander, made his major league debut for the Athletics. Marchildon was indeed in the bullpen in case there was a chance for him to come on in relief and get his 20<sup>th</sup> win.

It was not to be. The Athletics scored first, with a pair in the second inning, but the Yankees went ahead 3-2 in the third inning and added two more to win 5-2. Marchildon could only sit and watch.

In 1948 the A's finished fourth, as Fowler went 15-8 and Marchildon 9-15. Fowler won 15 again in 1949, while Marchildon went 3-11. By that time, Marchildon was 36 years old, Fowler 28.

Phil Marchildon had to overcome the effects of nine months in a German prisoner of war camp when his plane was shot down in August of 1944. He lost 40 pounds during his ordeal, and the experience affected both his nerves and his pitching.

Phil and Dick remained close friends after baseball. Dick's wife Joyce told me, "Phil and Irene are saints. How they stood by us and gave us strength when our son was being treated at a cancer centre near Buffalo. They drove down from Toronto on weekends and took him out for dinner."



The record shows that Marchildon and Fowler worked better when they worked together. In the pre-television days of the 1940s, major league teams played a lot of doubleheaders. In 1947, the Athletics played 30 of them, a total of 60 games, more than one third of their schedule.

In fact, Philadelphia played 118 doubleheaders during a four-year period when Marchildon and Fowler were at their best. I was surprised, then, that Phil and Dick pitched only 10 doubleheaders together, because the results were better than average when they teamed up on the same day. While the team's winning percentage over those four years was .432, the Athletics posted a .550 record when Phil and Dick pitched on the same day.

In Phil's great year of 1947, Marchildon and Fowler started four doubleheaders, and the Athletics swept three of them. If Connie Mack had paired them more often, his team might have had more success.

The two Canadians pitched a doubleheader for the last time on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1948, at Washington. Fowler won the first game 9-6, Marchildon the second with a 3-0 three-hitter.

After the game the Athletics boarded a train for Boston. Getting into his sleeper berth, Phil Marchildon could not know that he would never win another game.

At spring training in 1950, Marchildon was sold to Buffalo of the International League. He was released after five games. He got one last chance with the Boston Red Sox. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1950, at Fenway Park, Phil replaced Mel Parnell against the Cleveland Indians in the first inning. It was 5-0 Cleveland when Marchildon came in. He retired the next two batters to end the inning.

In the second inning, Gene Bearden led off with a triple. Marchildon retired Ray Boone on a ground ball before Joe Gordon drove in Bearden with a fly ball to right. Marchildon walked the next two batters and was replaced by Willard Nixon. That was the end of an illustrious career.

Phil returned to Toronto and became an ordinary working man until he retired at 65. He died in 1997 at the age of 83.

Of all the players I met or corresponded with while broadcasting Detroit Tigers games for five years and writing two books about Canadian big leaguers, Dick Fowler is one player I wish that I had met. He died in 1972 at the age of 51, long before I began the research that led to my books, *Canada's Baseball Legends* and *Over the Fence is Out!*

I did visit Oneonta to speak with Dick's wife and his daughter Candice, and later to his grandson Khalid Ballouli, who became a pitcher in the Milwaukee Brewers farm system.

I also spoke with many of Dick Fowler's former teammates. They all said he was a tough competitor. Catcher Buddy Rosar recalled the day Connie Mack sent his son Earl to the mound to take Dick out of a close game. "Dad said to take you out." "Tell him I'm not coming out," Fowler replied and finished the game. Rosar said Dick was like that every game; he never wanted to come out.

Birdie Tebbetts, a catcher and later manager, told me, "Dick was a well above average major league pitcher. When you are better than your team, it's tough to pitch against the top teams."

Teammates described Dick Fowler as a gentleman, kind and courageous, who pitched through the pain of bursitis for many years. First baseman Gordon Goldsberry told me, "I talked to Dick on the mound several times when he had tears in his eyes from the pain."

Fowler pitched through pain because it was his only way of supporting his family, including paying the bills for a son who was treated for cancer for many years.

When he retired as a pitcher, Dick settled in Oneonta, New York, where he worked in men's wear at a department store, and later as a night clerk at a hotel. His daughter Candice told me that when he worked the Saturday night shift, he would make pancakes for her before going to church in the morning.

Fowler was admitted to hospital in April of 1972 with kidney and liver disease. He died three weeks later at the age of 51.

Both Marchildon and Fowler played in an era of low wages. All the money went to the owners who had the players trapped in one-year contracts that reserved their services on a continuous basis. Salaries between five and ten thousand dollars a year were the norm, with exceptional players earning as much as twenty thousand dollars.

Robert Murphy, a labour lawyer, formed the Baseball Guild in 1946, at a time when the Mexican League was luring players with multi-year contracts and higher salaries. Max Lanier, a St. Louis Cardinals pitcher, was reported to have accepted \$50,000 over three years. Baseball Commissioner Happy Chandler said that any player who played in Mexico would be banned in America.

The Baseball Guild announced that a strike would take place on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1946, in Pittsburgh, where the Pirates were scheduled to play the New York Giants. The Pirates met behind closed doors for two hours. Veteran players, earning up to \$10,000 a year, feared for the loss of their livelihood and pressured the others to vote against the strike. Resistance collapsed and the owners' grip remained iron-clad until Marvin Miller changed baseball forever.

One result was that the players had no pension plan. When Marchildon and Fowler retired they had to adjust to life as ordinary working men.



## Better?

	Yrs	W	L	ERA	WHIP	WAR
Marchildon	9	68	75	3.93	1.456	10.6
Fowler	10	66	79	4.11	1.493	7.9 *

\* (No-hitter)

So, who was better, Marchildon or Fowler? In my opinion, it is not possible to say that either was better than the other. The only possible conclusion is that they were equals.

One possible basis for comparison would be what they did in head-to-head competition. But because they were teammates in Philadelphia, that never happened in the major leagues. Phil Marchildon's SABR biography, however, points out that during the war Canadian military men were allowed to play sports in civilian leagues. In the summer of 1943, Dick Fowler pitched for Number Two District Depot in the Toronto Congress Services League. [Phil Marchildon](#) was in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and he played for Trenton Air Force base in the same league.

The two Canadian pitchers faced each other on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1943, at Maple Leaf Stadium in Toronto, in a benefit game for the British War Victims' Fund. Not surprisingly, the game was a pitchers' duel. Marchildon had a no-hitter until Fowler led off the sixth inning with a double. The game was called after 11 innings with the score tied, 2-2.

The only time Phil Marchildon and Dick Fowler pitched against each other, then, the game ended in a tie: Equals!



Jim Shearon in his 1947 Philadelphia Athletics shirt

Jim Shearon  
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