

SUNDAY BASEBALL TIDBITS

DECEMBER 2020

Baseball tidbits newsletter – interesting and random stuff, fodder for bar bets.

Jayson Stark is a brilliant baseball writer. A few cool items from him:

Trevor Bauer, Roger Clemens and Zack Greinke are the only pitchers to hit free agency after a season with an era below 2.00. Bauer is the only free agent ever to have an era south of 2.00 and a WHIP under 1.00.

Is JT Realmuto worth it? Leads all catchers, over his last two seasons in Philadelphia, in slugging (.493), hard-hit percentage (45.6), runs scored (92), hits (148), extra-base hits (64) and RBIs (83), most runners thrown out stealing (48-of-112) and caught-stealing percentage over at least 75 attempts (42.9 percent).

Only three players in baseball have had an average exit velocity of at least 88 miles per hour as a hitter and an average sprint speed of at least 28 feet per second as a runner in each of the last six seasons (since 2015). Two of them are Mike Trout and Christian Yelich. The other? Right. It's J.T. Realmuto.

How does George Springer rank as a power hitting lead-off man? Since 1920 he ranks only behind Mookie Betts, Alfonso Soriano and Charlie Blackmon in slugging pct and OPS. That's ahead of Wade Boggs, Rickey Henderson, Derek Jeter, Craig Biggio and Tim Lincecum.

DJ LeMahieu hit .364 this year for the Yankees. He once hit .348 for the Rockies in 2016. And here's the complete list of qualifying hitters who batted .348 or better in each league over the last 75 years:

DJ LeMahieu (2016 NL, 2020 AL)

John Olerud (1993 AL, 1998 NL)

How many batting champs have ever had that high an average heading into free agency? It's a short list. There's LeMahieu this year — and Andres Galarraga in 1993. And that's all. Galarraga batted .370 for the Rockies back then, became a free agent and headed right back to Colorado.

How many players have ever hit free agency after finishing first in their league in both batting average and on-base percentage? Once again, it won't take long to run through the list. There's LeMahieu — and Tim Lincecum in 1986.

How good an offensive season did Marcel Ozuna have in Atlanta? If he kept up pace it would have been 49 HR

151 RBIs

103 runs

208 hits

103 walks

38 doubles

.338/.432/.636

That is Babe Ruth territory appreciating it was a 60 game season.

From MLB.com, some strong offensive seasons remembered

Josh Donaldson, 2015 Toronto .939 OPS, 41 home runs

Cal Ripken Jr 1991 - Ripken became the first shortstop to compile at least 30 homers, 200 hits and 40 doubles in a single season. He led baseball in total bases, while also winning All-Star Game MVP honors, the Home Run Derby and his second AL MVP Award.

Carl Yastrzemski, 1967 Triple Crown season (.326 average, 44 homers, 121 RBIs). Over the final two games, with everything on the line, Yaz went 7-for-8 and he won the gold glove.

Babe Ruth in 1920 (of course 1927 with 60 HRs was special) the Sultan of Swat hit 54. He outhomered every other AL *team*. No one had ever hit 30 HRs in a season. Ruth's resulting 225 [OPS+](#) is pure insanity. With a .376/.532/.847 slash line, Ruth led the league in runs (158), homers, RBIs (135), walks (150), on-base percentage and slugging percentage. The slugging percentage stood as a Major League record until 2001.

Shoeless Joe Jackson, 1911 hits (233) and batting average (.408). doubles (45), stolen bases (41), on-base percentage (.468, which led the Majors that season) and OPS (1.058) in 147 games. He finished fourth in the MVP vote and was the runner-up for the batting title behind Ty Cobb, who hit .419.

George Brett, 1980. He chased .400, batting over .400 on September 19 before winding up at .390. pretty good year though. .390, which led the Majors, as did his .454 on-base percentage and his .664 slugging percentage and his 1.118 OPS. Brett also put together a 30-game hitting streak that season, a Royals record that stood until 2019, when Whit Merrifield set the new mark at 31 games. Brett also had 33 doubles in 1980 with 24 home runs and 118 RBIs enroute to winning the AL MVP Award.

Rod Carew, 1977 he hit .388 Carew won not only the sixth batting title of his career, but also his first (and only) AL MVP Award as he also led the Majors in on-base percentage (.449), OPS (1.091) and runs (128). More than in any other season of his career, Carew's five-tool skillset all came together for 162 games, as he set career highs in hits, homers (14), triples (16) and slugging percentage (.570), while also stealing 23 bases.

Ty Cobb, 1911. Cobb posted the five best seasons for Tigers hitters in terms of bWAR, but his 1911 campaign stands out for his .419 average, 127 RBIs and 196 OPS+, earning him the Chalmers Award, the short-lived predecessor to the AL MVP Award. He had nearly twice as many games with three or more hits (29) as hitless games (17), and he didn't go hitless in consecutive games until the final week of the season. Cobb led the league in average, runs, hits, doubles, triples, RBIs, slugging percentage and stolen bases.

Frank Thomas, 1994 only played 113 games .353 average, 38 home runs and 101 RBIs. Thomas topped the AL with 106 runs, 109 walks, a .487 on-base percentage, a .729 slugging percentage, a 1.217 OPS and a 212 OPS+. Thomas' OBP, OPS and slugging percentage still stand as single-season franchise records. Thomas won his second straight AL MVP Award

Mike Trout, 2016 .315/.441/.550 slash line with 29 homers, 100 RBIs and 30 stolen bases. He also led the league with 123 runs scored

Jimmie Foxx, 1932 Foxx earned his first of three career AL MVP Awards in '32 after leading the league in home runs (58), RBIs (169), runs scored (151) and slugging percentage (.749) over 154 games. The only thing standing between Foxx and the Triple Crown in '32 was Red Sox first baseman Dale Alexander, who finished with a batting average three points higher than Foxx at .367. Foxx's 10.1 offensive bWAR for the '32 season remains the club record. He came back to win the triple crown the next year.

Ken Griffey Jr., 1997 MVP led the AL with 56 homers, 147 RBIs, 125 runs scored and a .646 slugging percentage in 157 games, while adding 15 stolen bases for good measure. Griffey hit .304 with a .382 on-base percentage as well as providing Gold Glove defense. It's hard to top the 165 OPS+ (though Griffey did so twice, at 171 in '93 and '94), or equal the 56 bombs (though Griffey did just that the following year in '98). But for the whole package, Griffey was in peak form in '97 in leading Seattle to just its second AL West title and its first 90-win season.

Juan Gonzalez, 1996 MVP Gonzalez had a .314/.368/.643 slash line with 47 home runs and 144 RBIs. He also hit five home runs in four games in the AL Division Series against the Yankees.

Hank Aaron, 1959 400 total bases, a number that still hasn't been matched in franchise history. He hit .355 with 39 homers, a 1.037 OPS and 182 OPS+. No other Brave has ever hit .350 with 35 homers in a season.

Giancarlo Stanton, 2017 paced the Majors in home runs (59), RBIs (132), slugging percentage (.631) and OPS+ (169). His monster season earned him the NL MVP Award, the only one ever won by a Marlins player. Stanton was an All-Star, Silver Slugger and a Gold Glove finalist. Playing in 159 games, he had a slash line of .281/.376/.631 while scoring 123 runs

Bryce Harper, 2015. Harper did it all in 2015, winning unanimous NL MVP honors at only 22 years old. He paced the Majors in home runs (42) and runs scored (118), and he led the NL in on-base percentage (.460), slugging percentage (.649), OPS (1.109) and OPS+ (198) over 153 games. His .330 batting average and 172 hits were career highs. Harper holds the single-season franchise records in offensive bWAR (9.1), OBP, OPS+, at-bats per home run (12.4), walks (130) and times on base (301). That season, he earned his first Silver Slugger Award and his third All-Star selection.

Mike Schmidt, 1980 Schmidt slashed .286/.380/.624 with 48 home runs, 121 RBIs, a 1.004 OPS and a 171 OPS+. He won the NL MVP Award. He won Gold Glove and Silver Slugger Awards. He made the NL All-Star team. He also earned World Series MVP honors, helping the Phillies win their first championship in franchise history.

Robin Yount, 1982 He led the Majors in slugging percentage, hits, total bases and doubles, and finished third in the AL in batting average and triples. He hit 29 home runs with 114 RBIs -- marks that stood as career highs when his 20-year career was over -- while winning a Gold Glove Award at shortstop. MVP.

Rogers Hornsby, 1924 Cardinals. Hornsby's 1924 season was one for the ages. Along with his record-setting .424 average, the feisty second baseman posted a league-leading .507 on-base percentage and slugged a league-leading .696. He was also the NL leader or co-leader in hits (227), runs (121), doubles (43), OPS+ (222), total bases (373) and so on. He posted a 12.1 bWAR, which is the highest single-season WAR for a position player in Cardinals history. That season saw the Hall of Famer go hitless in just 24 games out of the 143 he appeared in and never more than two days in a row.

Rogers Hornsby, 1929 Cubs. The Cubs acquired Hornsby in the midst of his prime from the Boston Braves for five players and \$200,000. Then, the Hall of Famer turned in a performance in 1929 that remains the single-season club record for WAR by a position player via both FanGraphs (11.1) and Baseball-Reference (10.4). In 156 games, Hornsby racked up 229 hits and scored 156 runs -- both single-season franchise records to this day. The second baseman logged a .380/.459/.679 slash line to go along with 39 home runs, 47 doubles, eight triples and 149 RBIs. Hornsby also drew 87 walks and struck out just 65 times. His work helped power the Cubs to the World Series and netted the Hall of Famer the NL MVP Award.

Honus Wagner, 1908. Wagner led the Majors in hits (201), doubles (39), RBIs (109), stolen bases (53), total bases (308) and all three triple-slash categories (.354 average, .415 on-base percentage, .542 slugging percentage). He led the NL with 19 triples. Over the 151 games Wagner played in '08, he had a 205 OPS+, meaning his adjusted OPS was 105 percent better than the league-average mark. And he did all that at the age of 34, while playing shortstop for a team that went 98-56.

Joe Morgan, 1975. Morgan batted .327 and led the Majors in OPS (.974), OPS+ (169) and walks (132) while notching 67 stolen bases as the Reds went on to win their first World Series since '40. Besides being a no-brainer for the NL All-Star team, Morgan also won a Gold Glove. (he backed it up the next year hitting .320 with 60 steals.

Luis Gonzalez, 2001. Gonzalez slugged 57 homers and drove home 142 runs while posting a slash line of .325/.429/.688 and a 174 OPS+. His performance earned him a starting role in the All-Star Game and he also won the Home Run Derby.

Tony Gwynn, 1987. batted .370/.447/.511 with a league-leading 218 hits. He won a Gold Glove and a Silver Slugger Award. He swiped 56 bases and smacked 13 triples. Gwynn's 8.6 bWAR was tops in the NL and is the best mark in Padres history.

Larry Walker, 1997. Walker led the NL in home runs (49), on-base percentage (.452), slugging percentage (.720), OPS (1.172) and total bases (409). Oh yeah, Walker also won an NL Gold Glove Award for his play in right field. It was good enough to earn him the '97 NL MVP Award, making him the only MVP in club history.

Joe Pasnanski of The Athletic has begun a countdown of the 100 players not in the HOF that should be considered. I've edited his comments and pulled out some old timers for space. Do you feel any of these guys deserves to be in?

Juan Alberto González Vázquez
Texas—Detroit—Cleveland—Kansas City, 1989-2005

A two-time most valuable player, Juan Gone was one of his era's most fearsome hitters. He hit 40 or more home runs five times. He loved driving in runs, famously saying "I concentrate more when I see men on base."

Fredric Michael (Fred) Lynn

Boston—California—Baltimore—Detroit—San Diego, 1974-1990

Among the most joyous players of his day, he became the first player in Major League history to win the Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player Awards in the same year. Went after fly balls with wild abandon, often crashing into walls. Hit the only grand slam in All-Star Game history. His stats dropped when he moved to the Angels and he missed a lot of games with injuries.

Rocco Domenico (Rocky) Colavito

Cleveland—Detroit—Kansas City—Chicago White Sox—Los Angeles—New York Yankees, 1955-1968

Beloved star fashioned his game after his hero [Joe DiMaggio](#) and hit 374 home runs in career. Had one of the greatest right-field arms in the history of baseball. Cleveland fans never quite got over the team trading him to Detroit in 1960. Colavito's 374 home runs ranked him 15th when he retired. But he was basically done at age 31, which is why he has never gotten much Hall of Fame consideration.

Albert Jojuan Belle

Cleveland—Chicago White Sox—Baltimore, 1989-2000

The most feared hitter of his day, he powered Cleveland's titanic lineup throughout the mid-1990s. Only player in baseball history to hit 50 homers and 50 doubles in the same season. An intimidating presence, he knocked the cover off the ball for a decade. Had some huge seasons in the 90's but hated writers and they hated him.

Fernando Valenzuela Anguamea

Los Angeles—California—Baltimore—Philadelphia—San Diego—St. Louis, 1980-1997

Left-handed phenom who inspired a national case of "Fernandomania," as a rookie in 1981. Threw eight shutouts in 25 starts and won the Cy Young Award and Rookie of the Year. Inspired a whole generation of Latino fans to embrace baseball. declined rapidly after age 27, which is why he has received minimal Hall of Fame support. You could still make a good Hall of Fame larger-than-baseball argument for him based on the enormous impact he had on the game.

Darrell Wayne Evans

Atlanta—San Francisco—Detroit, 1969-1989

Howdy was the epitome of the underrated player, he did little things — walked a lot, played good defense at multiple positions, etc. — and big things, like swat 414 home runs. He was a character who claimed to have seen an unidentified flying object during his playing days, earning him a second nickname: UFO. He retired 20th on the all-time home run list, 29th in times on base and 49th in RBIs. Everybody just missed how good a player he was.

Steven Patrick (Steve) Garvey
Los Angeles Dodgers—San Diego, 1969-87

Captain America played in 1,207 consecutive games for the Los Angeles Dodgers, the National League record. Had Popeye forearms and a charismatic smile, cracked 200 hits in six different seasons and won four Gold Glove awards. One of the most iconic players of his time. Posnanski argues that Garvey was famous and had lots of RBIs but his lifetime stats don't match up with HOF credentials.

David Gene (Dave) Parker
Pittsburgh—Cincinnati—Oakland—Milwaukee—California—Toronto, 1973-1991

There was nothing the Cobra could not do. He was called the next [Clemente](#) before he even got started, and then for five years lived up to the comparison: He hit, ran, slugged, threw like nobody in the game. After his career veered off-course, he returned as a pure slugger and received MVP votes even as he approached 40 years old. In five year stretch he hit .321 with a MVP and top 3 three times. Drug problems don't help his cause.

Frank Oliver Howard
Los Angeles—Washington—Texas—Detroit, 1958-1973

Hondo was one of the great sluggers in the history of baseball. He was a giant of a man and despite playing in an era dominated by pitchers and playing his home games in cavernous ballparks, he hit more home runs than any player in baseball from 1967-71.

Frank Howard had several nicknames. The Washington Monument. The Capital Punisher. But the main one was Hondo, which he picked up after his Rookie of the Year season; he reminded his teammates of a John Wayne character with the same name. Howard was 6-foot-7, 255 pounds and was an All-American basketball player at Ohio State; he was good enough to drafted by the NBA's Philadelphia Warriors. But he chose baseball and hit 80 home runs his first two minor-league seasons and then won Rookie of the Year. At that point, people thought Hondo might challenge Babe Ruth's home run record.

Two things happened, though. Well, three things happened if you count Roger Maris actually breaking Ruth's record in 1961. But with Howard, the two things that happened were 1) He struck out so much that the Dodgers lost faith and platooned him before dealing him to Washington and 2) The 1960s turned out to be the worst decade for offense since the end of Deadball.

We will come back to this theme plenty in this series — some of the best hitters not in the Hall of Fame are overlooked because their numbers were suppressed by the 1960s conditions, the high mounds, the enormous strike zones, etc. One way to sort of see through all that is to neutralize the hitters' numbers, which is to say to mathematically try to put the player in a neutral run-scoring environment.

If you neutralize Howard's numbers, you come up with him hitting .287/.368/.522 with 410 home runs, and he would have had two 50-homer seasons. He might have an MVP award. His Hall of Fame case would look significantly better. But that's the thing: Howard's Hall of Fame case demands looking deeper into his dominance as a hitter while still overlooking his deficiencies as a defensive player, and the voters have not shown an eagerness to do that. He only got six Hall of Fame votes his one year on the ballot.

Albert (Al) Oliver

Pittsburgh—Texas—Montreal—San Francisco—Philadelphia—Los Angeles—Toronto, 1968-1985

A pure hitting machine, he hit .303 over his 18-year-career with 2,743 hits and more than 500 doubles. Spent years as one of the cogs of Pittsburgh's famous Lumber Company. Led the league in batting average, hits, doubles and RBIs in 1982. Outspoken and fierce.

Let's assume for a moment that 3,000 hits is an automatic ticket to the Hall of Fame. I don't know that it is true, though everybody with 3,000 hits is in the Hall of Fame unless they have an off-the-field strike against them (steroids, gambling). But let's say it's true. In 1983, a 36-year-old Al Oliver hit .300 with a league-leading 38 doubles as he made the All-Star team. At season's end, he was just 454 hits shy of 3,000.

A year later, he hit .301 for two teams but only managed to get in 119 games. That pushed his hit total up to 2,676, just 324 hits shy of 3,000. He was turning 38 but was still not only a good but a very good hitter. You would have bet on him getting to 3,000.

But then his career took an ugly turn. He only managed to get into 96 games at age 38, and he hit just .252. And even though he was a force in the playoffs for Toronto (hitting .375 in the five-game series and inspiring Royals manager Dick Howser to design a special pitching plan to blunt his impact) there were no offers for him going forward. Years later, an arbitrator would rule that the owners colluded against Oliver and awarded him a cash settlement for lost wages in 1986. But what the arbitrator could not offer him were the at-bats. He finished 257 hits shy of 3,000.

Willie Larry Randolph

Pittsburgh—New York Yankees—Los Angeles—Oakland—Milwaukee—New York Mets, 1975-1992

A steady presence in the Bronx Zoo, he played excellent second-base defense, handled the bat about as well as anyone of his time, worked his way on base with regularity and was an elite base runner. Overshadowed by bigger personalities, but he was at the heart of the Yankees' success of the 1970s.

Willie Randolph walked a lot. Who knew? At the time, we saw him as a .275 or .280 hitter who would steal you some bases now and again. Don't get me wrong, that was good for a second

baseman in those days and he made six All-Star teams. But we didn't even notice that he walked almost twice as often as he struck out and that his outstanding .383 on-base percentage from 1978-87 was better than, among others, Don Mattingly, [Pete Rose](#), Jim Rice, Al Oliver, Eddie Murray and others with much higher batting averages than Randolph.

When you combine his high on-base percentage with some really great defense and base running, you find that Randolph's career WAR is in the 64- or 65-wins range, which is Hall of Fame level stuff. It is in the general range of clear-cut Hall of Famers like [Robbie Alomar](#), Craig Biggio and Ryne Sandberg and well above numerous others like Nellie Fox, Red Schoendienst, Bobby Doerr and Bill Mazeroski.

Another note--Frank White, the All-Star second baseman for Kansas City who is a contemporary of Randolph and has his own Hall of Fame case, one very similar to Mazeroski. White was the best defensive second baseman of his time (eight Gold Gloves) and offered some power and speed on offense. There is a strong movement in Kansas City to put White in the Hall of Fame. But Randolph's offensive advantages make him the better candidate.

William Lance Berkman

Houston—New York Yankees—St. Louis—Texas, 1999-2013

Slugging outfielder and first baseman who, in his prime, hit the ball about as hard as anybody of his hard-hitting era. Twice led the league in doubles and finished top five in the MVP balloting four times. Big Puma was a beloved figure, particularly in his hometown of Houston, and he coached high school baseball after his career ended.

Berkman spent much of his career as a third wheel behind Hall of Famers [Jeff Bagwell](#) and Craig Biggio, but he was better than either of them every single year from 2001 until they each retired.

Berkman is another of the many players on this list who simply faded too quickly at the end of his career to impress enough Hall of Fame voters. Through age 33, he was hitting .299/.412/.555 and had posted 46 or so WAR. Three more good years get him into the Hall of Fame. But he only had one more good year, 2011 for St. Louis, when he hit .301 with 31 homers and was named comeback player of the year.

Ronald Ames Guidry

New York Yankees, 1975-1988

Louisiana Lightning won more than 65 percent of his games as the ace for the Bronx Zoo Yankees of the 1970s. In 1978, he went 25-3 with a league-leading 1.74 ERA, one of the great pitching seasons in baseball history. "Ron Guidry," his teammate Willie Randolph said, "pound for pound was the fiercest competitor I ever played with."

Ron Guidry has always had Hall of Fame supporters who like to compare him to another Yankees legend, Whitey Ford. The idea, I think, is that they were both left-handed aces for great New York teams and they both had relatively short careers and won a very high percentage of games. It's not a perfect comparison; Ford's career was somewhat short but it was longer and better overall than Guidry. Then again, Guidry in '77 and '78 was probably better than Ford at his best.

Guidry only won 170 games in his career which all but disqualified him in the minds of many Hall of Fame voters. But from 1977-85, Guidry was markedly better than *many* pitchers currently in the Hall of Fame.

Dwight Eugene (Doc) Gooden

New York Mets—New York Yankees—Cleveland—Houston—Tampa Bay, 1984-2000

Doctor K, as he was called, was one of the great young pitchers ever. He mixed a fastball that jumped over bats with a regal curve that people called "Lord Charles." In his second season, he went 24-4 with a 1.53 ERA; maybe the best pitching season in the 50 years post-expansion. Picture of pure power on the mound.

We all know the ending — the drugs, the injuries, the off-field problems, the efforts to put his life back together. We know why he's not in the Hall of Fame. But I'd say this: I can only think of a handful of pitchers in the Hall that I would take over the 1984-85 version of Dwight Gooden. He was a right-handed [Sandy Koufax](#), and if he'd managed even one more legendary year after 1985, he might be in Cooperstown even with his many personal issues.

Alas, Gooden would only have a smattering of very good and good and OK seasons, but after age 23, he simply wasn't that pitcher anymore.

Elston Gene Howard

New York Yankees—Boston, 1955-1968

The first African American to play for the New York Yankees, he was both a pioneer and a perennial All-Star. The 1963 American League MVP was perhaps the most admired player of his day.

There are so many ways you can reshape Elston Howard's career so that he would be a no-doubt, slam-dunk Hall of Famer. He began his career in the Negro Leagues rather than in the minors. He was drafted into the Army during the Korean War and lost two years. He starred in Triple-A ball for two seasons while the Yankees delayed and lingered before finally bringing up their first Black player.

As such, Howard was already 26 years old when he finally got his chance — he had been ready for the majors for several years. And at the start, he couldn't even play his natural position as

catcher because the Yankees already had a decent one named [Yogi Berra](#). Howard didn't actually start catching full-time until he was 31.

From age 31-35, Howard hit .297, slugged .478, made the All-Star team every year, won two Gold Gloves and an MVP Award. Working backward, it's easy to imagine just how great a young Elston Howard would have been as an everyday catcher. Then again, his impact on the game as the first African American to break through for the New York Yankees is enormous and worthy of Hall of Fame consideration.

Orel Leonard Hershiser IV

Los Angeles—Cleveland—San Francisco—New York Mets, 1983-2000

This Bulldog almost single-handedly carried the 1988 Los Angeles Dodgers to the pennant and World Series title. That year, he set the major-league record with 59 1/3 consecutive scoreless innings. In the postseason, he went 3-0 with a save and swept both the NLCS and World Series MVPs. Cerebral pitcher won 204 games in his career.

William Nuschler (Will) Clark Jr.

San Francisco—Texas—Baltimore—St. Louis, 1986-2000

Sweet-swinging first baseman hit .303 for his career and inspired a generation of young players to wiggle the bat behind them as they waited for the pitch. Was impossible to get out during the 1989 National League Championship Series as he hit .650 and carried the Giants to the World Series.

Will the Thrill was just the coolest. I don't know what else there is to say. Clayton Kershaw wears No. 22 in honor of Clark; he did not grow up dreaming of becoming the best pitcher of his generation. He grew up, the way so many did, dreaming of swinging a bat the simple, elegant yet ferocious way that Clark did.

In the end, Clark was swamped by expectation. In his first full year, he hit .308 with 35 homers, 91 RBIs and people were talking about him as a future Triple Crown winner. Alas, he never hit that many home runs again — that year, 1987, was a fluky home run season for a lot of players. He did lead the league in RBIs in 1988, and he barely lost the batting crown to Tony Gwynn in 1989. He was a line-drive machine to the end. In his last season, he was traded to St. Louis. In 51 games, he hit .345/.426/.655 with 12 home runs and 42 RBIs. He promptly retired to spend more time hunting. "I'm better with a gun than I am with a bat," he said.

Jorge Rafael Posada Villeta

New York Yankees, 1995-2011

A switch-hitting stalwart behind the plate for the 1990s and 2000s Yankee dynasty teams, he played on four World Series championship teams. He finished his career among the catching leaders in doubles, home runs, runs and RBIs. Though he never won a Gold Glove, he loved catching. "When you take me out from behind the plate," he wrote, "you're taking my heart."

One interesting aspect of the Hall of Fame is how many New York Yankees are among those great players who remain on the outside. It is interesting because there's an often-repeated line that goes something like this: "Oh, Player X would definitely be in the Hall of Fame if he had played in New York." But I don't think any team in baseball has as many close-but-not-quite Hall of Famers as the New York Yankees.

The big drawback for Posada as a Hall of Fame candidate is probably that he was never viewed as an outstanding defensive catcher. He never won a Gold Glove and seemingly was never really in the conversation. Advanced statistics more or less confirm that he was average or below-average in just about every defensive category. It also didn't help that his career was short, even for a catcher. He didn't become a full-time catcher until he was 27.

Bobby Lee Bonds

San Francisco—New York Yankees—California—Chicago White Sox—Texas—Cleveland—St. Louis—Chicago Cubs, 1968-1981

One of the greatest talents to ever play professional baseball, he had five 30-homer, 30-stolen base seasons. He won three Gold Gloves as a right fielder, led the league in runs twice, and at the time of his retirement was one of only two players — along with his close friend Willie Mays — to hit 300 homers and steal 300 bases in a career.

But a career marred by injuries, salary squabbles, alcoholism and unfulfilled expectations. Bonds could run and slug and throw like few others in the game's history. But he also had a giant hole in his swing and began setting strikeout records from the day he arrived in the big leagues.

These days, striking out 187 and 189 times like Bonds did in his first two full seasons would barely be noticed. Ronald Acuña Jr. struck out 188 times in 2019 and was striking out at an even faster pace in 2020. Giancarlo Stanton struck out 211 times his last full season.

But in Bonds' time, those strikeouts painted him as an underachiever who wasn't trying hard enough.

Timothy Adam (Tim) Hudson

Oakland—Atlanta—San Francisco, 1999-2015

An intelligent pitcher whose stuff always dived downward. He won consistently, year after year, by keeping the ball in the park and inducing double plays. Had a winning record every season

from 1999-2013. Pitched on seven postseason teams and made two starts in the 2014 World Series for the champion San Francisco Giants.

He just quietly went about his business, won every year. He never won a Cy Young Award, never threw a no-hitter, never won a World Series game, never struck out 15 in a game,

That's the legacy of Hudson, a nice guy who gave you 200-plus innings every year, won 222 games with a terrific 120 ERA+, gave every team his all. His Hall of Fame challenge is that he comes on the ballot with another nice guy who was a very good pitcher, Mark Buerhle, who did some more famous things. And both of them have the issue of coming on the ballot with another nice guy who was a very good pitcher, Andy Pettitte, who started more postseason games than anyone in baseball history (but also got wrapped up in a PED scandal). This is the extraordinary challenge of becoming a Hall of Famer. There have been so many great players.

James Sherman (Jim or Jimmy) Wynn

Houston—Los Angeles—Atlanta—New York Yankees—Milwaukee, 1963-1977

The Toy Cannon could do it all. He reached base, stole bases, played all three outfield spots, but mostly he hit home runs. Massive home runs. When he was young, his father had told him that singles hitters drive Chevys but home run hitters drive Cadillacs. The Toy Cannon drove Caddies.

Jimmy Wynn is a popular Hall of Fame candidate in part because he was so wildly underrated in his time. It is appealing to see him finally get his due. The Toy Cannon, as he was called, faced serious headwinds as a player. He spent his prime in the pitcher-dominated 1960s, and he played almost 700 games in the hitters' dungeon that was the Houston Astrodome. He played in a time when batting average was everything, and he was a lifetime .250 hitter — so much of his value came with walks, and nobody respected walks in those days.

As such, he went virtually unnoticed in his prime. He was only selected to the All-Star team once as an Astros player, even though from 1965-73, he compiled 41.2 WAR, second only to [Willie Mays](#) among National League center fielders. He only finished Top 10 in the MVP balloting once, and that was as a Dodger toward the end of his career.

Wynn's career was shortened by injuries and a sudden decline at age 35, and so his lifetime totals — 1,665 hits, 291 homers, etc. — are not what you would expect from a Hall of Famer. But at his best, he was as good as almost anybody.

John Garrett Olerud

Toronto—New York Mets—Seattle—New York Yankees—Boston, 1989-2005

Johnny O had a sweet swing, a steady presence and a perpetual optimism about baseball and life. After facing a near-death experience while in college, he came at baseball with a healthy perspective. In his 17-year career, he hit for average, drew walks, clubbed 500 doubles, played

brilliant first base defense and won fans everywhere. A member of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame.

Olerud has a wonderful Hall of Fame case by the numbers. He hit .295/.398/.465 over his career, which is certainly Hall of Fame quality. Advanced defensive metrics suggest he was not just a good defensive first baseman but one of the best in baseball history — only Keith Hernandez has more fielding runs above average than Olerud. His 58 combined WAR put him squarely on the Hall of Fame bubble. And yet, he only got four Hall of Fame votes his one year on the ballot.

David Gus (Buddy) Bell

Cleveland—Texas—Cincinnati—Houston, 1972-1989

A member of baseball royalty as part of one of the game's three-generation families. A good offensive player who cracked more than 2,500 hits in his big league career, but his calling card was defense: Few have ever been better at the hot corner. When once told by an admirer that he was a Hall of Fame quality player, he replied: "Nah. I was just a guy who loved playing."

There are a lot of third basemen on this countdown. The reason is simple: There are a lot of really, really good third basemen who have been overlooked by Hall of Fame voters. I think it's because third base is a hybrid position — you don't necessarily put your best defensive player there (though you can) but, at the same time, you cannot hide a great offensive player there. As such, I think Hall of Fame voters seem to have trouble getting their arms around just how valuable a good two-way third baseman really is.

Take Buddy Bell. He was a fantastic defensive third baseman, one of the best ever. He was, in my view, the defensive equal of Hall of Fame shortstops like Luis Aparicio, Bill Mazeroski, Phil Rizutto, Nellie Fox and Rabbit Maranville. And he was a *much* better hitter than any of them.

So why are they in the Hall of Fame when Bell has never even been considered? (He got eight votes his only year on the ballot.) It's because people assume that a great defensive shortstop provides much, much, much, much, much (much) more value than a great defensive third baseman, and I just don't think that's true. Shortstop is the more valuable defensive position, yes, but it's much closer than people realize.

If Buddy Bell had been a shortstop — and there's no doubt in my mind he could have been — he would essentially have been Alan Trammell, and he'd be in the Hall of Fame right now.

Miscellaneous stuff

Only MVP winner who never made an All Star game—Kirk Gibson (he was invited twice but declined but never voted in, never played).

I guessed A-Rod but the first shortstop with at least 200 hits, 30 home runs and 40 doubles in a season was Cal Ripken Jr. (210 hits, 34 HR, 46 2B in 1991).

Current longest-tenured manager in MLB is Oakland's Bob Melvin (hired June 9, 2011).

Elvis Andrus has been the opening day shortstop for the Rangers the last 12 seasons—last before him was Michael Young (2004-08).

Mariano Rivera (born in 1969) was the last active player born in the 1960's.

Baseball tidbits newsletter – interesting and random stuff, fodder for bar bets.

Only two pitchers born between 1971 and 1980 are in the HOF—Pedro Martinez and Roy Halladay. Others born in that decade who might be considered—Johan Santana (two Cy Youngs in a short career), CC Sabathia (3K strikeouts), Billy Wagner, Andy Pettitte (5 rings).

Pitchers are used very differently these days. Through age 35 Max Scherzer 2357 innings and 145 wins. Through age 35 Tom Seaver 3622 innings and 245 wins.

Dick Allen

Add Dick Allen to long list of players who died this year (Seaver, Brock, Ford, Gibson, Kaline, Morgan, Don Larsen not to mention Horace Clarke). He was one of a few players (Reggie Jackson, Ricky Henderson, George Brett, Vida Blue) I'd spend my hard earned lawn cutting money to go see.

Allen was NL rookie of the year in 1964, AL MVP in 1972 Batted over .300 7 times. From 1964-1974 he was second to Hank Aaron for MLB lead in OPS and slugging pct. 351 career HRs and .292 career average. 7 All Star games. Ten seasons with 20+ HRs.

We miss a lot when we don't get exposure to smaller markets. Nolan Arenado of the Colorado Rockies is the best all-around third baseman in the National League, winning the NL Gold Glove award all eight years he's played in the majors, as well as four Silver Sluggers. He's driven in 100 or more runs in five of the last six years and hit 37 or more home runs in each of those years. But we hardly get to see him.

From 1903 to 1968 the Yankees won 44% of AL pennants.

Gene Mauch, managed the most games without winning a world series--1,902-2,037 from 1960-87.

Some great seasons remembered

2001 Mariners won 116 games but the Yankees beat them in the ACLS

2018 Red Sox won 108 and beat the Astros in the World Series.

1999 Yankees won 114 and swept the Padres.

1927 Yankees 110 wins and also swept the series.

1984 Tigers started 35-4 en-route to a 104 win season, beat San Diego.

1991-2005 the Braves won 14 straight division titles. They won 106 games in 1998 (but lost to Padres in NLCS).

1986 Mets won 108 and beat Bill Buckner's Red Sox.

1906 Cubs went 116-36 for best winning pct. Ever.

1975 Reds won 108 and backed it up the next year with 102 and back to back World Series wins.

MLB.com came up with best players by position to never win a World Series since 1969—do you have other nominations?

C – Carlton Fisk (over Mike Piazza)

1B Jeff Bagwell

2B Rod Carew

SS Robin Yount

3B Andre Beltré

LF Barry Bonds (over Carl Yastrzemski)

CF Ken Griffey Jr. (over Mike Trout)

RF Larry Walker (over Tony Gwynn)

DH Edgar Martínez

SP – Phil Niekro (over Felix Hernández)

RD Lee Smith (over Trevor Hoffman)

Manager – Dusty Baker

**More from Joe Posnanski's countdown of players not in the HOF who should be debated.
Edited with some old timers removed.**

Omar Enrique Vizquel González

Seattle—Cleveland—San Francisco—Texas—Chicago White Sox—Toronto, 1989-2012

He played shortstop like a dream — no shortstop ever made such artistry out of fielding ground balls with his bare hand — and cracked 2,877 hits in his 24-year career. Won 11 Gold Gloves as a shortstop; only [Ozzie Smith](#) won more.

David Ismael (Dave) Concepción Benitez

Cincinnati, 1970-1988

Brilliant defensive shortstop who was often called the glue that held together the Big Red Machine. He won five Gold Gloves and provided some offense, hitting .300 three times and stealing more than 300 bases in his career.

Dagoberto (Bert, Campy) Campaneris Blanco

Kansas City/Oakland—Texas—California—New York Yankees, 1964-1983

Campy was a versatile speedster who played every position in one game and led the league in steals six times. Star shortstop for the dynasty Oakland A's of the 1970s. "You can talk about Reggie Jackson, Catfish Hunter and Sal Bando, all those great players," A's owner Charlie Finley once said. "But it was Campy who made everything go."

Mark Henry Belanger

Baltimore—Los Angeles, 1965-1982

Considered by some to be the greatest defensive shortstop in baseball history. The Blade played in more than 2,000 games and won eight Gold Gloves despite being famously limited as a hitter. "You're my shortstop," his manager Earl Weaver told him, "if you hit .0001."

OK, it's time to talk about one of the most interesting — and controversial— Hall of Fame cases going, the case of Omar Vizquel. He was a terrific defensive shortstop and a below-average hitter who played forever and, as such, compiled 2,877 hits in his career. Here's the thing about borderline Hall of Fame cases: They need to capture the imagination. You might argue that Dwight Evans was a better player than Jim Rice but Rice's case captured the imagination. You

might argue that Dave Stieb was a better pitcher than Jack Morris, but Morris' case captured the imagination. And so on.

Vizquel's particular combination — 11 Gold Gloves and more than 2,800 hits — does capture the imagination. He received more than 50 percent of the vote in 2020 while the other shortstops listed above never came close to such a gaudy percentage.

Here is my basic issue: I think every shortstop listed here — Dave Concepción, Bert Campaneris and Mark Belanger — was about as good and valuable as Omar Vizquel. They did it differently. Concepción was Vizquel's hero and he was pretty close to Vizquel defensively, plus he was a better hitter. Campy was not as good defensively as either but was a significantly better hitter and one of the greatest ever base stealers. Belanger couldn't hit even with Vizquel, but he was a defensive magician who on defense surpassed even Vizquel. If the idea is to put in the best defensive shortstop in history, I'd say the Ozzie Smith is already there. And maybe Andrelton Simmons will be there someday. Belanger is in that class.

The point is this: The Hall of Fame is all about separating great players from the rest. As such, the more distinctive a great player is, the more clear his Hall of Fame case ... and vice versa. If you have multiple players with equally compelling Hall of Fame case, that hurts all of their cases, right?

I basically think all four players have roughly an equal Hall of Fame case to me. If I *had* to rank them in the order I'd vote them in, I suppose I'd go like this:

1. Bert Campaneris
2. Omar Vizquel
3. Dave Concepción
4. Mark Belanger

But honestly, as players, I'd vote them all in or none of them.

Torii Kedar Hunter

Minnesota—Los Angeles Angels—Detroit, 1997-2015

A defensive wizard in center field who thrilled fans every time he went back on a fly ball. He probably stole more home runs than any outfielder in Major League history. He also hit more than 350 home runs of his own and was the vocal leader for eight different playoff teams.

When advanced defensive numbers started becoming somewhat popular in the late 2000s and early 2010s, there was a lot of angst about them because of Torii Hunter.

He had been recognized as one of the great defensive center fielders of his or any time ... but his defensive metrics were squirrely. Some years (particularly when he was young) they were

great. Other years, as he grew older, they were surprisingly mediocre or even poor. People were outraged by this. How could the numbers miss Hunter's obvious brilliance?

I actually have a theory on this: Torii Hunter was a beautiful defensive player — key word there is "beautiful." The numbers cannot capture — and do not even try to capture — how electrifying it is to watch someone make a defensive play. Some players make it look easy. Some make it look hard. Some get the job done but look awkward. And a handful, very few, are so graceful, so smooth, so fluid that every play they make, even the easy ones, makes us smile.

Hunter was one of those players. In so many ways, his defensive numbers miss the point of what made him such a marvelous player. His extraordinary gift was in delighting crowds with the way he chased down fly balls. Hunter was also a very good hitter who mashed 353 home runs — he actually became a better hitter as he got older.

Dan Raymond Quisenberry
Kansas City—St. Louis—San Francisco, 1979-1990

Sidewinding reliever who trusted his sinker to get the job done, Quiz led the league in saves five times for the fierce Kansas City Royals of the early 1980s. A beloved figure for his class and sense of humor. "I've seen the future," he once said, "and it's much like the present, only longer."

Who really knows what to do with relief pitchers when it comes to the Hall of Fame? All I can tell you for sure is that when Bruce Sutter was elected to the Hall, it became my quest to prove that Quiz was every bit as good as Sutter.

He was, you know.

Quiz and Sutter achieved their success in different ways. Sutter was a power pitcher with an earth-shattering split-fingered fastball. He *seemed* dominant. Quiz did not. He got hitters out by simply doing every little thing right. He almost never walked a batter. He threw four wild pitches in his entire career. He threw sinkerball after sinkerball after sinkerball and in doing so he kept the ball in the park and induced as many double plays per capita as any pitcher of his time.

Quiz [was my friend](#) so it is difficult for me to be impartial about him or his Hall of Fame case. He was simply a fantastic person, driven by faith, dedicated to family, filled with empathy and, yes, so, so funny.

"I found a delivery in my flaw," he once said.

"Natural grass is a wonderful thing for little bugs and sinkerball pitchers," he once said.

"I want to thank all the pitchers who couldn't go nine innings and manager Dick Howser who wouldn't let them go," he said when he won the 1982 Fireman award for best reliever.

"What's the best part of playing baseball?" he was asked.

"No homework," he said.

I miss him. He would make the Hall of Fame a better place.

Andrew Eugene (Andy) Pettitte
New York Yankees—Houston, 1995-2013

Durable lefty was a model of consistency, he never had a single losing record in his 18-year career. Had one of the greatest pickoff moves in the history of the game. Was an October mainstay, making 44 postseason starts in his career and winning 19 games, far and away the most for any pitcher.

Mark Alan Buehrle
Chicago White Sox—Miami—Toronto, 2000-2015

Durable lefty was a model of consistency; he won double-digit games every year from 2001-2015. Had one of the greatest pickoff moves in the history of the game. Worked fast and was all but untouchable when he had things going; threw a no-hitter in 2007 and a perfect game in 2009. His through-the-legs glove throw in 2010 might just be the greatest defensive play in baseball history.

I don't see how you separate Andy Pettitte and Mark Buehrle.

Buehrle: 60.0 WAR, 29.3 Wins Above Average, 3,283 innings, 3.81 ERA, two no-hitters, four Gold Gloves.

Pettitte: 60.7 WAR, 29.8 Wins Above Average, 3,316 innings, 3.85 ERA, most postseason starts and wins for any pitcher.

Where do you even go from there? Pettitte has 42 more wins, which is obviously a lot, but he also played for much better teams. Buehrle has more sensational moments with those no-hitters and great defensive plays but he also only finished Top 5 in the Cy Young Award voting just once (Pettitte did four times). Pettitte admitted using PEDs but insisted that he only did so to recover from injury. Buehrle never won 20 or had a sub-3.00 ERA.

I can see how voters would find both their Hall of Fame cases just slightly lacking. But I can't see how one would get more votes than the other.

Roger Eugene Maris***Cleveland—Kansas City—New York Yankees—St. Louis, 1957-1968***

Two-time Most Valuable Player, he achieved immortality in 1961 by hitting 61 home runs and breaking [Babe Ruth](#)'s single-season home run record. Good all-around player who ran the bases effectively, played a good right field and consistently hit better with runners in scoring position.

Would you believe me if I told you that Thurman Munson, José Vizcaino, Von Hayes and Bill Doran all got more big-league plate appearances than Roger Maris? It was a stunningly short career for Maris — he was done at 33. As such, his career numbers do not come close to resembling a Hall of Fame resume — I mean he only had 1,325 career hits.

But, of course, Maris hit 61 homers in a season, a number that many baseball fans still consider the true record, and you could make a persuasive argument that doing something that singular, that noteworthy, that historic should send a player straight to the Hall of Fame, do not pass “Go,” do not collect \$200. This has been the argument some have made for Don Larsen, who threw the only perfect game in World Series history. But Larsen’s achievement was only one game while Maris’ was an entire season.

Maris has always had those people willing to make his case — he received as much as 43 percent of the Hall of Fame vote — but he has never had quite enough support to push him over the time. If you look at the entire career, Maris probably had two Hall of Fame worthy seasons. In fact, you could argue that his 1960 MVP year was, when you consider everything, as good as his 1961 season. He also had a handful of very good years.

But really it comes down to this: Do you think 61 homers in a season should get a player into the Hall of Fame? There’s no right or wrong answer, it’s just how you feel.

Anthony Nomar Garciaparra***Boston—Chicago Cubs—Los Angeles—Oakland, 1996-2009***

Nomah, as he was called by the Boston faithful, was a one-of-a-kind hitter before injuries wore him down. Won back-to-back batting titles in 1999 and 2000. A lifetime .313 hitter, Ted Williams once said that when he saw Nomah hit, he was reminded of Joe DiMaggio.

Vern Stephens, best I can tell, never appeared on a single Hall of Fame ballot. He retired in 1955 and was apparently eligible to be on the 1960 ballot — Ralph Kiner retired that same year and he got three votes in 1960 — but Stephens’ name is not among the 134 players who got at least one vote. Seventy-nine players got at least one vote in 1962, 54 got votes in ’64 and 49 got votes in ’66. But no Vern Stephens.

He has to be the greatest player in baseball history who has never even been *considered* for the Hall of Fame.

Stephens was a unique player — before him, no shortstop had ever hit 25 homers in a season. Stephens did it three times, topping out in 1949 when he hit 39 homers and also led the league with 159 RBIs. He actually led the league in RBIs three times.

And yet, when I look at Stephens' career, I can't help but immediately think about another great Boston shortstop, Nomar Garciaparra. I'm not sure which one has the better Hall of Fame case.

Stephens: .286/.355/.460 in 7,243 PAs, 119 OPS+

Garciaparra: .313/.361/.521 in 6,116 PAs, 124 OPS+

Stephens walked more. Garciaparra hit for a much better average and with more power. Garciaparra was probably the better defender at short. Stephens' career was longer, but that's because he played four full seasons during World War II (he failed his military physical because of a bum knee). Stephens was a bit of a flake — he loved to party, he very briefly left to play in the Mexican League — and he was very popular. Nomah was a bit quirky — he had all those weird toe-taps and batting mannerisms — and he too was very popular.

Salvatore Leonard (Sal) Bando

Kansas City/Oakland—Milwaukee, 1966-1981

A rough-and-tumble player, Captain Sal was at the heart of the Oakland Athletics 1970s dynasty when they won three World Series in a row. One of the most admired and respected players of his day, he hit for power, played superb defense and rarely made mistakes on the field. His teammates would follow him anywhere.

Here we are with another third baseman who mixed great defense with excellent offense and got almost no consideration at all for the Hall of Fame. In Bando's case, it almost certainly comes down to his .254 career batting average, a stat that overlooks the more than 1,000 walks he drew over his career.

Bando finished Top 4 in the MVP balloting three times. All three years, he finished behind at least one teammate. He was not only an underrated part of those Oakland A's teams that won three World Series in a row, there's a good argument to be made that he was the most important player on those teams.

Maurice Morning (Maury) Wills

Los Angeles—Pittsburgh—Montreal, 1959-1972

Speedster who led the National League in stolen bases six years in a row, a stretch that included his record-breaking 104 stolen bases in 1962. He helped lead the Dodgers to four pennants and three World Series titles. Credited by many for bringing speed back into baseball.

You have probably heard the Maury Wills-Dave Roberts story. When Roberts was young, he was Maury Wills' protege. And he vividly remembers Wills once telling him: "Dave, there's going to come a day when you are going to be on first base, and everyone in the park is going to know you're going to run, everybody on television is going to know, the pitcher is going to know. And you're going to have to go anyway. And that's when you're going to become a real base stealer."

Of course, that exact situation happened in the 2004 ALCS and Roberts stole the base, and it is legend.

I love that story because it clearly expresses the impact of Maury Wills. Many people believe he really injected speed back into the game when he started stealing bases in the 1960s. The true history is considerably more complicated than that. But Wills did spark a lot of excitement when he ran with abandon in the 1960s. All in all, Maury Wills was a below-average hitter with almost no power. He was probably about average as a defender. It is his impact as a pioneering base stealer that defines his case for the Baseball Hall of Fame.

That impact is hard to define and hard to prove. So it is wonderful the Wills did have a clear and documented impact on one of the most famous baseball plays of the last 50 years.

Donald Arthur (Don) Mattingly
New York Yankees, 1982-1995

Donnie Baseball was the 1980s epitome of what a ballplayer was supposed to look and play like, with the eyblack painted on his face, the dirt that always seemed to be on his uniform, the way he uncoiled from his extreme batting crouch and knocked doubles all over the park. A lifetime .307 hitter, he was the class of the New York Yankees during one of the team's rare droughts.

The title "Best Player in Baseball," used to be more of an ornamental thing. There are now so many one-stop shopping statistics like WAR and Win Shares that many would tell you that the Best Player in Baseball is almost a mathematically quantifiable concept.

But before those stats, choosing the Best Player in Baseball was less science and more art. Throughout the mid-1980s, there was a strong feeling, perhaps even a consensus, that Don Mattingly was the best player in the game. How could he not be? He hit for stunning averages (.343 in 1984, .352 in 1986), he drove in 100 RBIs every year, he hit so many doubles, he won Gold Gloves as a first baseman, I mean what else is there?

We now believe that there are other things. Mattingly rarely walked. He was fairly slow. And he played first base, which is the least demanding and significant defensive position on the

diamond. By the way we judge baseball now, Mattingly was probably never the best player in baseball and not even all that close.

But that doesn't make the title seem any less real. From 1984-87, he hit .337/.381/.560 and averaged 46 doubles, 30 homers, 121 RBIs and 102 runs. He was an icon of the game; if there had been a vote, I suspect most people would have been happy to make him the silhouette in the MLB logo.

William Henry (Willie) Davis

Los Angeles—Montreal—Texas—St. Louis—San Diego—California, 1960-1979

Terrific defensive center fielder who was a stalwart for the successful Dodgers of the 1960s. His numbers were hurt by his time and ballpark, but he still managed more than 2,500 hits in his career, and he displayed a rare combination of power and speed.

Throughout the 1960s, whenever people talked about Willie Davis, they talked about him being a disappointment. He was such an awesome presence as a ballplayer — 6-foot-2, 180 pounds, breathtakingly fast, powerful arm, natural power — that it just seemed he should be better. He was supposed to hit .330. He was supposed to hit 30 homers. He was supposed to steal 50 bases. He didn't do any of those things.

Some players are just cursed by expectations — people become more interested in what they cannot do than what they can. And because of that, people often missed the obvious truth that Davis was one helluva baseball player.

He had so much going against him. In addition to those expectations, he spent his prime in the 1960s when pitchers dominated the game. He played half his games at Dodger Stadium when that was a hitter's nightmare. Before pitchers took over the game, he had a marvelous 1962 season when he hit .285, smacked 21 homers, stole 32 bases, led the league with 10 triples and scored 103 runs.

And from 1969-71, when the mounds were lowered and the strike zone made smaller, he hit .300 every year.

All the while, he played superb defense, even though [Willie Mays](#), [Roberto Clemente](#) and Curt Flood basically locked out every other outfielder from winning Gold Gloves.

Of course, you can't change history, can't change that Davis did play in a brutal hitting environment and, as such, put up several seasons in his prime that people generally saw as unsatisfactory. That's why he has never gotten a single Hall of Fame vote. But make no mistake: Willie Davis could really play.

Rickey Eugene (Rick) Reuschel

Chicago Cubs—New York Yankees—Pittsburgh—San Francisco, 1972-1991

A wildly underrated pitcher in his time, Big Daddy posted 68 wins above replacement in his career and was a startling 38 wins better than average. Spent the bulk of his career playing for poor teams, but he did pitch in the World Series for New York in 1981 and San Francisco in 1989.

Let's be honest: Rick Reuschel's 68 career WAR, which is better than more than 60 percent of the pitchers actually in the Hall of Fame, has done less for Reuschel's career reputation and more for wrecking how people feel about the WAR metric itself. It's strange that people feel that way. No matter how you might feel about WAR, it does a pretty good job picking out great pitchers. There have only been 23 pitchers since the end of Deadball with 68-plus WAR and 20 of them are in the Hall of Fame.

The only exceptions are [Roger Clemens](#) and Kevin Brown, who both have PED issues, and Rich Reuschel, who decidedly does not.

People just have the hardest time seeing Reuschel as a great pitcher, no matter what the numbers say. He didn't look like a great pitcher — he had a roundness that us 50-something dads can appreciate — and he didn't do the things that you might expect from great pitchers then. He only won 20 once. He gave up a lot of hits. He missed a big chunk of time in the middle of his career after having rotator cuff surgery. Etc.

But so much of what you saw with Reuschel was deceiving. His roundness belied great athleticism; Reuschel was one of the best fielding pitchers of his day. He only won 20 once in large part because he spent the prime of his career playing for terrible Cubs teams. He almost always pitched better than his win total. In 1979, for instance, he won 18 games, but he had 10 quality starts that were either losses or no decisions. In 1975, when he went 11-17, he had *fifteen* starts like that.

In fact, over his career he had 158 quality starts that were either losses or no-decisions. That ranks eighth in the expansion era. In those starts, Reuschel was 0-81 with a 2.45 ERA. So much of his good work went unrecorded. There is no great "Reuschel for the Hall" wave going, and I don't expect one anytime soon. But Big Daddy was a really good pitcher who just didn't look or seem like a really good pitcher.

William Ashley (Bill) Freehan ***Detroit, 1961-1976***

Arguably the best all-around catcher of the 1960s, he was a defensive wonder and a productive power hitter in an era dominated by pitchers. Was unlucky in MVP voting. He finished third in the 1967 MVP race to [Carl Yastrzemski](#), who won the Triple Crown. He finished second the next year to his batterymate Denny McLain, who won 31 games. Made the All-Star team every year from 1964-73.

Bill Freehan was just as solid as they come. He did not really have the presence or charisma of [Johnny Bench](#), Carlton Fisk or Thurman Munson. Instead, he just went out every year and

caught every day, blocked pitches in the dirt, blocked base runners trying to score, he took a bunch of pitches in the shoulder (he led the league in getting hit by pitches three times) and he would crack 20 or so homers a year. You could count on him.

Somehow, though, he only got two votes in his one year on the Hall of Fame ballot. One theme I see again and again in the Hall of Fame voting is that a whole lot depends on who else is on the ballot with you. What you want is to be the top new player — or one of the top couple of new players — on your first ballot. That sets you up to succeed.

But Dahlen came on the ballot with [Henry Aaron](#) and [Frank Robinson](#). Billy Williams and Tony Oliva also came on the ballot that year. That was yet another bad break for Freehan because there were already a bunch of players on the ballot — Juan Marichal, Harmon Killebrew, Hoyt Wilhelm, Luis Aparicio, Don Drysdale — who the BBWAA would eventually vote in. Freehan fell through the cracks. He has a good Hall of Fame case.

Bernabé (Bernie) Williams Figueroa Jr.
New York Yankees, 1991-2006

Center field star of the New York Yankees dynasty in the 1990s, he mixed power, speed and breathtaking consistency as he helped lead the Bronx Bombers to four World Series championships. Scored and drove in 100 runs in five different seasons. A jazz musician on and off the field.

Every time I look at Bernie Williams' Baseball-Reference page — something I must admit doing more often than you might expect — I find myself thinking what a raw Hall of Fame deal he got. I'm not sure that Williams belongs in the Hall of Fame. But I am sure that he deserved significantly more consideration than he got. I mean:

- He was the everyday center fielder for the best team of the last 40 years.
- He was essentially a .300 hitter who walked a lot, hit with power and stole bases.
- He won four Gold Gloves (though we'll get back to this one).
- By Bill James' "Hall of Fame Monitor," he is not only a likely Hall of Famer but a near-certain one. The Monitor counts up statistical achievements and assesses how likely it is for a player to be elected to the Hall of Fame, with 100 meaning the player has a good chance and 130-plus meaning the player is a virtual cinch for the Hall unless there's some overwhelming strike against him. Williams' Hall of Fame Monitor score is 134.

So why did Bernie Williams fall off the ballot after only two years? There are two reasons, I think.

1. Williams had the misfortune of being a fledgling Hall of Fame candidate in 2013. That was his second ballot, and you might just call that the death ballot. That was the year [Barry Bonds](#), [Roger Clemens](#), Sammy Sosa, Craig Biggio, [Mike Piazza](#) and [Curt Schilling](#) all came on at the same time. The voters were absolutely paralyzed. Williams had gotten 10 percent of the vote his first year on the ballot, which wasn't great but it was something to build on. Instead, he was washed away in 2013 when nobody really knew what to do.

2. Defense. Bernie Williams did win those four center field Gold Gloves, but his advanced defensive numbers as a center fielder are wrecking-ball bad. By Baseball-Reference, he was 139 runs worse than average out there; FanGraphs has him even worse than that.

The way WAR works, those numbers are simply subtracted from his total. The idea is that someone who is that bad defensively costs his team lots of runs and lots of wins. Williams' career WAR is somewhere between 43.9 (FanGraphs) and 49.6 (Baseball-Reference) and that is really below Hall of Fame level. But if he had been even an *average* center fielder, his WAR would be in the mid-60s, and he'd be very much in the Hall of Fame game.

Was he *that bad* a defensive center fielder? He definitely wasn't good out there but until the late years — when the Yankees had no business keeping him out there — he certainly didn't look that bad. I mean, he looked good enough that they gave him those Gold Gloves. I know, it's dangerous to trust your eyes, but the Yankees did a whole lot of winning in those years; it sure didn't seem like they lost many games because of Williams' limited range in center. I'm not questioning the defensive numbers themselves so much as I'm questioning if it's really right to take away 15 wins from a player who was the everyday center fielder for four World Series-winning teams.

Anyway, I'd like to see Bernie Williams get another look.

James Lee (Jim) Kaat

Washington—Minnesota—Chicago White Sox—Philadelphia—New York Yankees—St. Louis, 1959-1983

Pete editorial comment—no idea why Kaat is ranked so low. He should be a lock.

Kitty was the very picture of grace on the mound. With his long stride, impeccable balance and barrage of different pitches, he won 283 games in his 25-year career. He also won a record 16 Gold Gloves for defensive excellence. One of the smartest pitchers of all time, he became a beloved and award-winning broadcaster after retirement.

So here is something pretty extraordinary: Jim Kaat came on the Hall of Fame ballot in 1989 with 283 wins. If history is a judge, that should have put him in great shape to be elected to the Hall of Fame. The last pitcher to come on the ballot with that many wins? [Warren Spahn](#) and

[Robin Roberts](#) in 1973. Pitcher wins were pretty much everything in those days, and so it just made sense that Kaat's impressive win total made him a very compelling candidate.

Unfortunately for him, he had the worst timing imaginable. See, he came on the ballot the same year as [Gaylord Perry](#) (314 wins) and [Fergie Jenkins](#) (284 wins). I mean that's a very bad break — to have 283 wins and be *third* on your own ballot. He still got 20 percent of the vote and seemed likely to build momentum. But, alas, his bad timing was only going to get worse.

The next year Jim Palmer came on the ballot and though he had fewer career wins than Kaat, he was a better pitcher — one of the best ever, a three-time Cy Young Award winner, a force for the Earl Weaver Orioles. Palmer was elected with more than 92 percent of the vote. Kaat stayed in place.

Then, in short order: [Tom Seaver](#) (311 wins) came on the ballot in 1992; [Phil Niekro](#) (318 wins) came on in 1993; [Steve Carlton](#) (329 wins) and Don Sutton (324 wins) came on in 1994; Tommy John (288 wins) came on in 1995; [Bert Blyleven](#) (287 wins) came on in 1998 and [Nolan Ryan](#) (324 wins) came on in 1999. What a decade. There has never before and never will again be a barrage of pitchers with so many wins.

And by the end, Kaat's 283 wins — while historically impressive (he's *still* 31st on the all-time list) — simply didn't move anybody. While most players see their Hall of Fame percentages rise with the years, Kaat's didn't. Every time he seemed ready to gain some momentum, some pitcher with more wins came along to quash it.

Kitty has lived a marvelous baseball life. Again, I'd love to see the Hall of Fame voters take a more holistic approach — Kaat should be recognized and honored for being a terrific pitcher, probably the best fielding pitcher ever and an admired baseball announcer.

Vada Edward Pinson

Cincinnati—St. Louis—Cleveland—California—Kansas City, 1958-1975

One of the fastest players of his or any time, he cracked more than 2,750 hits and stole more than 300 bases in his career. One of many players whose offense was hampered during the pitching-dominated 1960s, he still led the league in hits, doubles and triples twice. Widely respected player who coached for nearly two decades after retirement.

There are a handful of players who seemed destined to get to that magical 3,000 hit total but, in the end, for some reason fell short. None of them seemed as sure a thing as Vada Pinson.

He was a hit machine early right from the start of his career — at age 26, he had 1,381 hits, which still ranks fourth on the all-time list behind Ty Cobb, [Mel Ott](#) and [Al Kaline](#). He is one of only nine players to get to 2,000 hits by age 30. The other eight are all in the Hall of Fame.

Pinson was traded from Cincinnati just before he got to 2,000 hits, and his decline came too quickly. His speed fell off, his averages dropped and he bounced from St. Louis to Cleveland to California to Kansas City. He had some moments in his late career — in 1970, he hit a career-high 24 home runs for Cleveland and he stole 25 bases the next year — and he played enough to push his hit total up to 2,686 at the end of his age-35 season. He needed just 314 hits — three so-so years would get him there.

But in 1975, he hit .223 and was released. He tried to pick up with Milwaukee in spring training the next year, but he didn't make the team. He was 37 years old and had 2,757 hits — a measly 243 hits shy of a sure place in Cooperstown.

Thurman Lee Munson
New York Yankees, 1969-1979

Pete editorial comment—my hero. Spoke at my senior sports banquet. Hung with me and signed stuff. Awesome player who was all about hustle.

The first Yankees player to be named captain after [Lou Gehrig](#) more than 30 years earlier, he was the gruff force behind the Bronx Zoo teams that won three pennants and two World Series. A brilliant defensive catcher who won three Gold Gloves, he hit .300 five times and drove in 100 RBIs three times. The 1976 American League MVP. When he died in a plane crash in 1979, flags in New York and New Jersey were flown at half-staff.

One afternoon in 1979, I was in Cleveland playing catch in the backyard with a friend and we spent much of that afternoon talking about how Thurman Munson wanted to play for his hometown Indians (he grew up in Akron). We were so excited about the possibility; Munson was a larger-than-life figure, the leader of the unbeatable New York Yankees, and if he came to Cleveland we felt sure he would turn around all of Cleveland's bad sports fortune.

In the middle of our conversation, my Dad stuck his head out the window and told us that Thurman Munson had died.

He was only 32 when he was killed in a plane crash while practicing landings on his new Cessna twin-engine jet. It is unclear how much he had left as a ballplayer — catchers do tend to fade young and Munson had already lost all his power — but he was still one of the most iconic players in the game. Munson at his best was a .300 hitter with some power, a bit of speed, a great throwing arm and a rough nature that would not stand for nonsense or losing. At the beginning of the 1976 season, Yankees manager Billy Martin named Munson captain, and Munson responded by hitting .302 with 105 RBIs, winning the MVP award, and the Yankees won their first pennant in a dozen years.

They were swept by the Reds in the World Series — this despite Munson hitting .529 — and then the team picked up [Reggie Jackson](#), who Munson loathed on sight. They would eventually become friendlier, but for two years, in '77 and '78, they were at each other's throats pretty much all the time. Then again, the Yankees won the World Series in '77 and '78 with Munson hitting .320 in each series.

He had such a short career, it's hard to know exactly what to do with his Hall of Fame case but I'd say this: Munson was an All-Star caliber player pretty much every year from 1970-1978, and nine good seasons is a pretty special career for a catcher. Put it this way: Munson had nine 3-WAR seasons, the same number as Hall of Fame catchers Mike Piazza and Mickey Cochrane and just one less than [Yogi Berra](#) and [Gary Carter](#).

And he had four 5-WAR seasons, which is as many as Hall of Famers Bill Dickey and the recently elected Ted Simmons, and one less than Iván Rodríguez. I don't know much more he would have added to his career but the truth is that Munson has a strong Hall of Fame case based entirely on what he was able to do before his untimely death.

Bob Kelly (Bobby) Abreu

Houston—Philadelphia—New York Yankees—Los Angeles Angels—Los Angeles Dodgers—New York Mets, 1996-2014

He was, throughout his prime, a six-tool player who not only hit, hit for power, ran, threw and played great defense, he also walked 100-plus times every year. At different times, he led the league in doubles and triples. Scored and drove in 100 runs in five different seasons.

Bobby Abreu was an astonishingly boring player. I mean, I don't know how else to say it. His at-bats were foul ball after foul ball after take after take; it was like watching a bee try to climb out of a drain. There are some players who just have a natural gift for making everything seem exciting, exhilarating, electrifying. Abreu had the opposite gift.

He was a terrific player by all measurements. From 1998-2003, he hit .310/.414/.522 with 133 homers and 163 stolen bases and by advanced defensive metrics he was a terrific right fielder. But, this is the point, do you know how many All-Star games he made those years? Zero. Gold Gloves? Zero. MVP Top 10 finishes? Zero. How could a player who did so many great things be that underrated?

Boring. It's the only explanation. In his entire career, Abreu only made two All-Star teams, and he never really came close to a top-10 MVP spot. He would have these incredible years like 2004 when he hit .301/.428/.544 with 47 doubles, 30 homers, 40 steals, 118 runs scored, 105 RBIs and everyone would be like, "what's that guy's name with the Phillies again?"

He has a pretty good sabermetric case for the Hall of Fame — Bill James is one of the people ringing the bell for Abreu — but I'm not sure there are too many people buying. He just *barely* cleared the 5 percent line to stay on the ballot in 2019.

Thomas Edward (Tommy) John

***Cleveland—Chicago White Sox—Los Angeles—New York Yankees—California—Oakland,
1963-1989***

Sinkerball specialist who won 288 games in his career and came back from an experimental elbow surgery that would come to bear his name. Induced more double plays than any player in the history of baseball. Excellent postseason pitcher. Pitched 26 seasons, only [Nolan Ryan](#) pitched more.

Tommy John is one of the most famous players in baseball history. I am not one of those people who falls back on wordplay and believes that the “Hall of Fame” actually celebrates fame, but in the case of Tommy John, you have a player whose name is invoked more often than just about anyone, including some of the all-time legends *and* whose 288 wins is the most for any modern player not in the Hall of Fame.

That sure sounds like a Hall of Famer to me.

The main argument against Tommy John is that he was more of a compiler than a dominant pitcher, and that’s mostly true, though he did lead the league in shutouts three times, and he finished second in the Cy Young Award voting twice. But I think there’s something else in play, too: John’s style of pitching was so bland and formulaic that I think people failed to appreciate how rare a talent he was. He forced hitters to pound the ball into the ground. By doing that, sure, he gave up a lot of hits — only [Phil Niekro](#) and [Warren Spahn](#) have given up more since the end of Deadball.

But he did two important things: He kept the ball in the park and he provoked double plays. He finished Top 10 in fewest homers per nine innings 12 times, and his 0.58 homers per nine is one of the lowest totals in modern baseball.

And double plays? No one is even close. He got 604 double plays in his long career, far and away the record. He had 13 seasons where he forced 25 double plays; Whitey Ford has the second-most with nine. If the double play is a pitcher’s best friend, well, Tommy John was a double play’s best friend.

And then there’s the obvious point, the first thing you think about when you hear the name “Tommy John.” He was the first to undergo the elbow surgery that bears his name. Many people believe that it should be Dr. Frank Jobe, who devised the surgery, who should go into the Hall of Fame ... to which I say: “Why not both?” Yes, Jobe’s contribution is obvious and enormously important, but don’t underestimate what John did here. He had the surgery when it was new and risky. And he rehabilitated, came back, pitched great, and showed everyone what’s possible.

Jeffrey Franklin Kent

Toronto—New York Mets—Cleveland—San Francisco—Houston—Los Angeles, 1992-2008

Power-hitting middle infielder, he finished his career with more home runs than any second baseman in the game's history. MVP in 2000 when he hit .334 with 33 home runs and 125 RBIs. Intensity personified.

I've written this before: I'm just not all that interested in Jeff Kent's Hall of Fame case. I can make the case, of course. He won an MVP. He hit more homers than any second baseman ever. He drove in more than 1,500 runs. He slugged .500 for his career. Etc. I certainly don't begrudge anyone who wants to fight ferociously for Kent's place in the Hall of Fame.

I just remain ... unmoved, I guess is the word. For one thing, the "most home runs for any second baseman ever" stat just doesn't do much for me. It feels more like trivia than anything else, feels more like talking about the catcher with the most triples (Duke Farrell!) or the first baseman with the most stolen bases (Jack Doyle!). Second basemen throughout baseball history are famous for *not* hitting home runs, that's why 377 homers leads.

Most homers by position:

Catcher: [Mike Piazza](#), 427

First base: [Albert Pujols](#), 662

Second base: Jeff Kent, 377

Shortstop: [Alex Rodriguez](#), 696*

Third base: [Mike Schmidt](#), 548

Left field: [Barry Bonds](#), 762

Center field: [Willie Mays](#), 660

Right field: [Henry Aaron](#), 755

**None of the great shortstop power hitters — A-Rod, [Ernie Banks](#), [Cal Ripken Jr.](#) — stayed at shortstop through the end of their careers. But A-Rod did play short more than any other position.*

So, it's interesting enough that Kent has the record for second basemen ... but that hardly seems like a Hall of Fame characteristic, especially when you remember that Kent played in a time when *everybody* hit home runs.

On top of that, I'm just being honest here, it seems ludicrous to me to put Jeff Kent in the Hall of Fame when Barry Bonds is not in there. Yes, I know the argument: Bonds used steroids and there's no reason to believe Kent did. But Barry Bonds' baseball value was many, many multiples of his old Giants teammate. There wasn't a single thing that Kent did as well as Bonds. That's true of plenty of people who are in the Hall of Fame, I know, but I cannot get over the absurdity of putting Jeff Kent into the Hall and not Barry Bonds. It feels to me like putting Zeppo Marx into the Hall of Fame but not Groucho. It's like putting Joey Fatone in the Boy Band Hall of

Fame and not Justin Timberlake. It's like putting Mrs. Howell in the Gilligan's Island Hall of Fame and not Mary Ann.

Maybe that's just me.

Kenton Lloyd (Ken) Boyer

St. Louis—New York Mets—Chicago White Sox—Los Angeles, 1955-1969

A member of one of baseball's great fielding families — "All of them Boyers can play defense," one scout said of Ken, Clete and even Cloyd, who was a pitcher — he was a defensive wizard at third base. He was also one of the game's most consistent run producers. Won the MVP award in 1964 when he led the Cardinals back from oblivion.

Ken Boyer had the great misfortune of coming on the ballot in the 1970s. That was a bad time to come on because the Hall of Fame voters in those days were ruthless. [Yogi Berra](#) came on the ballot in 1971 — arguably the greatest catcher and greatest winner in baseball history — and he fell short of election. Whitey Ford and [Robin Roberts](#) came on the ballot in 1973, and neither one was elected (Ford got in the next year, Roberts had to wait until his fourth ballot).

Year after year, they refused to vote in Duke Snider, Don Drysdale, Pee Wee Reese, etc.

Anyway, when Boyer came on the ballot in 1975, he seemed to have some pretty impressive Hall of Fame credentials. He had won an MVP award, he was a five-time Gold Glove winner, he was a powerful run producer when offense was down, he was a widely respected and admired player.

He got nine votes.

Nine votes? How was that possible?

Well, here's how it was possible: Ken Boyer wasn't the best third baseman on the ballot. No, the best third baseman on the ballot was [Eddie Mathews](#) ... this is because Mathews was, at that moment, the best third baseman in baseball history. But the voters kept refusing to vote Mathews into the Hall of Fame. He came on the ballot one year before Boyer and got just 32 percent of the vote. It took him *five* ballots to get into the Hall.

And with Mathews floundering on the ballot, what chance did Boyer have? None. He got nine votes, 15 votes, 14 votes and finally (the year Mathews was finally elected), 18 votes. He was dumped off the ballot after the next year. He got back on the ballot a few years later and did somewhat better as voters stopped being so intractable. But he never came close to election.

He pops up now and again on veterans' ballots, and there's no question that Boyer, like a handful of other third basemen, has a good Hall of Fame case. I mean, he fielded like a

shortstop and hit like a corner outfielder. I'm not sure anyone appreciates just how hard a combination that is to pull off.

David Andrew (Dave) Stieb
Toronto—Chicago White Sox, 1979-93, 1998

A converted outfielder, he became perhaps the best pitcher of his day, leading the league at different times in ERA, ERA+, innings, shutouts and fewest hits per nine innings. His "dead fish" slider was one of the most effective pitches in baseball history.

Let's be honest: The winningest pitchers of the 1980s make up a motley lot.

1. Jack Morris, 162 wins
 2. Dave Stieb, 140 wins
 3. Bob Welch, 137 wins
 4. Charlie Hough, 128 wins
- Fernando Valenzuela, 128 wins

Only one of those five pitchers is in the Hall of Fame, and as you might remember there was a statistical holy war fought before a veterans' committee finally granted Jack Morris entry. That makes the 1980s very different from other decades.

1950s: Four of the five winningest pitchers are in the Hall (only Billy Pierce is not).

1960s: Four of the five winningest pitchers are in the Hall (only Jim Kaat is not).

1970s: All five are in the Hall.

1980s: One out of five.

1990s: Three of the five winningest pitchers are in the Hall (only [Roger Clemens](#) and Kevin Brown are not).

It was just a strange decade, the 1980s. The Cy Young Awards continuously seemed to go to one-hit wonders — Steve Stone, Pete Vukovich, LaMarr Hoyt, Mike Scott — or players whose careers just didn't quite go the way you thought, like Dwight Gooden and Fernando Valenzuela.

I think Stieb was the best pitcher of the 1980s. I also think he had a remarkable knack for hiding that fact. He was just a master at being underrated and underappreciated. He never won more than 18 games in a season, this in a time when 20 wins was the standard of excellence. His won-loss records were always like 17-12 and 14-13, so a lot of people didn't think he was all that good.

He never came close to winning a Cy Young Award though we could now make the case for him being the league's best pitcher in 1982, 1983, 1984 and probably 1985.

He also kept flirting with no-hitters but couldn't finish them off. This just seemed to match his reputation as an almost-great pitcher (he finally did get his no-hitter in 1990, his last good season).

On top of that, he was basically done at 33 because of shoulder and back problems.

Stieb is a sabermetric Hall of Fame darling, and I'd vote him in. But he got just seven votes his one year on the ballot. Stieb, interestingly, came on the ballot the same year as Dennis Eckersley, who is three years older. Eck began his career as a starter, of course, and he was a good one. But it was his second chapter as a great and famous closer that got him into the Hall of Fame. He got 414 more votes than Stieb on that ballot.

According to Jay Jaffe's JAWS system — which combines career WAR with peak WAR — Stieb was slightly better than Eck.

Pedro (Tony) Oliva López Hernández
Minnesota, 1962-1976

Nobody hit baseballs harder. A three-time batting champion and one of the most beloved players ever to play in the game. Endured a seemingly endless string of knee injuries but still led the league in hits five times and was selected to eight consecutive All-Star games.

Tony Oliva is my dad's favorite player. As such, I believe he belongs in the Baseball Hall of Fame. I don't even want to know the person who would not make a Hall of Fame argument for their dad's favorite player.

We sometimes call batters like Oliva (or [Tony Gwynn](#) or Rod Carew or [George Brett](#)) "pure hitters." And while that adjective has always felt a bit too nebulous — aren't we just saying "high-average hitters?" — I do think it applies well to Oliva. He hit baseballs pure and hard wherever they were thrown. He was uninterested in any excess thought. He barely ever walked unless he couldn't help it. He didn't particularly care if the pitcher threw him a fastball curveball, slider or change. He just saw the ball, swung hard and ripped it somewhere. It is probably true that nobody ever hit more wicked line drives foul.

Tony Oliva almost didn't play in the Major Leagues. He came over from Cuba when he was 22 years old and shortly afterward was released by the Minnesota Twins, who had not given him a serious look. It was a disappointing and dispiriting experience for Oliva, and he intended to go home to Cuba and pick up his life there ... and undoubtedly would have, if the timing had been different. But the Twins released him in April 1961. And that was the same month as the Bay of Pigs ... and the disintegration of relations between the United States and Cuba.

Yes, he could go home. But he would never be allowed to return to the U.S.

Through a series of breaks and recommendations, he found his way onto a minor-league team in Wytheville, a small town in Southwestern Virginia. He hit .410 in 64 games and suddenly the Twins were very interested. They sent him to Charlotte, where he hit .350. They sent him to Dallas, and he hit .310 and slugged .519. He was ready. He was past ready.

Oliva was at least 25* when he finally got his big-league shot. He had one of the greatest-ever rookie seasons, leading the league in average (.323), runs (109), hits (217), doubles (43) and total bases (374). He won Rookie of the Year.

The next season, he again led the league in average and he led the Twins to the pennant, and he finished second in the MVP voting to his teammate Zoilo Versalles.

**Oliva's true age is uncertain because his birth certificate was lost. In fact, that's how he became known as Tony Oliva. His real name is Pedro but his parents used his brother's birth certificate when he came over to the United States. His brother was Tony.*

The rest of his career was a series of hard-hit balls, doubles in the gap, bats flying into the stands (he had trouble holding on to them) and terrible knee injuries. Carew said that when he roomed with Oliva, he would hear the great man moaning in pain all night long. Still, he led the league in hitting again in 1971, led the league in hitting five times total and finished his career with a sparkling .304 average.

Oliva's Hall of Fame case looked pretty good in 1988 when he suddenly, after six years, jumped up to 47 percent of the vote. He still had eight more years on the ballot, and it seemed certain that his numbers would keep on climbing.

But the Hall of Fame voting can be a roller coaster. In 1989, [Johnny Bench](#) and [Carl Yastrzemski](#) came on the ballot and what sometimes happens when great players come on the ballot is that there's a recalibration of what greatness means. Oliva looked like a Hall of Famer in 1988, when the ballot was filled with similar players like Orlando Cepeda, Harvey Kuenn, Vada Pinson, etc. But Bench and Yaz were on another level, and Oliva's vote percentage tumbled to 30 percent, where it more or less stayed for the rest of his time.

He has been treated better by various Hall of Fame veterans' committees. Oliva fell one vote short of election on the 2015 Golden Days veterans' ballot. The Golden Days committee was supposed to meet again in 2020, which seemed to put Oliva in great shape to finally gain induction, but the committee meetings [were postponed until 2021](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

James Kevin Brown

Texas—Baltimore—Florida—San Diego—Los Angeles—New York Yankees, 1986-2005

Armed with a sinkerball that seemed to add 10 pounds to the baseball, he twice led the league in ERA and finished his career with a sensational 127 ERA+. The ace of pennant-winning teams in Miami and San Diego.

I have not met many people who would call themselves Kevin Brown fans. OK, I'll be honest: I haven't met any. He was named in the Mitchell Report. He was famous for some pretty spectacular and destructive temper tantrums. Teammates generally seemed to loathe him. One of his old pitching coaches, Dave Stewart, once compared Brown's facial expressions on game day to that of a serial killer — and remember, Stewart was renowned for his [own pitching glare](#) so that says something.

As such, Brown's impressive Hall of Fame case has mostly gone unargued.

Should that be rectified? I don't know; I'm not a Kevin Brown fan either. I will say, though that, his 76.5 FanGraphs WAR is way, way, way over the Hall of Fame line. It actually ranks him 24th all-time, ahead of — among others — Warren Spahn, Juan Marichal, [Bob Feller](#) and dozens upon dozens of other Hall of Famers.

The numbers are there; Brown was a thoroughly dominant force with a career 127 ERA+, a bunch of league-leading totals, he was the ace of multiple pennant winners, he probably should have won multiple Cy Young Awards, etc. But he got just 12 votes his one year on the ballot. Why? Well, I already mentioned the knocks, but I actually think there was one more thing working against him: He only won 211 games. Pitcher wins, as we often say here, are at best a flawed statistic. But by winning 211 games, he gave the voters permission to simply ignore his case.

If he had won 250 games, the way Andy Pettitte did, that would have been harder to do, especially because he was a significantly better pitcher than Pettitte.

Graig Nettles

Minnesota—Cleveland—New York Yankees—San Diego—Atlanta—Montreal, 1967-1988

A dazzling defender at third base and a prodigious power hitter, he crushed 390 home runs in his 22-year career and wowed the nation with a series of jaw-dropping defensive plays during the 1977 World Series.

Bill James asked this question: Why is [Brooks Robinson](#) still so celebrated for his amazing defensive performance during the 1970 World Series while Graig Nettles' equally dazzling defense in the 1978 World Series is largely forgotten?

I think the answers probably helps explain why Robinson was a first-ballot Hall of Famer while Nettles never got more than eight percent of the vote.

- Robinson won the MVP for that 1970 World Series because he combined all that astounding defense with a .429 Series batting average, along with two home runs and six RBIs. Would his defense be as well remembered if he hadn't also hit like crazy? I don't think so. Nettles in '78 hit just .160 and was overshadowed by the famously light-hitting Bucky Dent, who hit .417 and was named MVP.

- Robinson had better timing than Nettles. Even though Nettles' career batting average is very low (.248), I feel sure he was a better hitter than Brooksie because he walked more and hit with more home run power. *But*, Robinson hit like crazy in the 1970 World Series, when everyone was watching. Nettles never had a series like that. Also, Robinson put everything together in 1964 — that year he had his best average, most homers, most RBIs, highest on-base percentage, highest slugging percentage. And he won the MVP award. Nettles, meanwhile, spread out his seasons.

- Robinson is a famously wonderful guy while Nettles was much testier and gruffer. Such things matter when it comes to legacies. People have always wanted to see the best in Brooks Robinson, so we gladly celebrate his breathtaking defense and grand moments and overlook that he was not an especially good hitter for most of his career. It isn't that way with Nettles. People seem unwilling to look past his low batting average and see what a great player he really was.

- Nettles bounced around — he played for six teams through the years — while Robinson played every single game of his career for Baltimore. That makes a difference.

None of this is to say that I think Nettles was as good as Robinson. I don't. I rank Brooks Robinson as the greatest defensive third baseman ever and one of the [100 greatest players in baseball history](#). Nettles was not that good. But he was *really* good, sort of a poor man's Brooksie, and I think he's above the Hall of Fame line.

Rafael Palmeiro Corrales

Chicago Cubs—Texas—Baltimore, 1986-2005

A member of the exclusive 3,000-hit, 500-homer club, Raffy was one of the game's most consistent sluggers and run producers. Upon his retirement, he was Top 20 all-time in total bases, doubles, home runs and RBIs.

Oh boy. Remember how I talked about how I could see Jeff Kent's Hall of Fame case but I just don't find it all that interesting? This is even more true for Palmeiro. I know he's a Hall of Famer by the numbers. In fact, I believe there is literally no argument to be made against the Hall of Fame quality of his career numbers.

Maybe you've seen this list. There are five players in baseball history with 3,000 hits and 550 home runs:

1. Henry Aaron, 755 homers, 3,771 hits
2. Alex Rodríguez, 696 homers, 3,115 hits
3. Albert Pujols, 662 homers, 3,236 hits
4. Willie Mays, 660 homers, 3,283 hits
5. Rafael Palmeiro, 569 homers, 3,020 hits

So, yeah, I fully recognize that Palmeiro, but for the PED connection would be in the Hall of Fame.

But ... I still find myself left cold by his Hall of Fame case, and this goes beyond PEDs. I don't even want to talk about PEDs. I want to talk about how Palmeiro's awe-inspiring numbers don't really reflect an awe-inspiring player. I mean, look at that list again. What can you say about the other four players? Right, they were all the best players of their day. The top four guys combined for nine MVP Awards — *nine!* — and realistically they probably should have won four or five more at the very least.

Palmeiro never won an MVP award. But what's more, he never came close to winning an MVP award. And it wasn't like he was robbed or ignored. Look back at his numbers. He never really deserved to come close to an MVP award.

Maybe I can explain it another way. The big four — Aaron, A-Rod, Pujols, Mays — average 62 on a Bill James invention called the "Black Ink Test." Black Ink measures how often a player leads the league in an important category (the name comes from the fact that in the Baseball Encyclopedia, league-leading numbers were bolded, so, "Black Ink"). How extraordinary is 62 on the Black Ink test? Well, put it this way: The average Black Ink score for a Hall of Famer is 27.

And Rafael Palmeiro's Black Ink score is 8.

I do realize I'm not being fair to Palmeiro here: It isn't right to just compare him to four of the greatest players ever. But my point is that his numbers belong in the stratosphere but he was more of a compiler, a guy who took advantage of a great hitters' time and great hitters' ballparks to post really good numbers year after year after year. He was an excellent hitter, no doubt about it. And he was a good fielder, even if he famously won that 1999 Gold Glove when he played 128 of his 156 games as a designated hitter.

What I'm saying is that I believe Palmeiro, sans the failed drug test that he has always disputed, is worthy of the Hall of Fame, but I just don't feel that strongly about it.

Bret William Saberhagen

Kansas City—New York Mets—Colorado—Boston, 1984-2001

Few pitchers in the history of baseball have pitched with the control and confidence of Sabes. He announced his presence with authority as a 21-year-old, leading the Kansas City Royals to their

first World Series title, winning the Cy Young Award and Series MVP in the process. Picked up his second Cy Young Award in '89. Overcame countless injuries.

When Bret Saberhagen was right — and you might recall he had this weird odd-year-even-year thing going for a while — he probably came about as close to pitching perfection as any pitcher in the history of the game. By “pitching perfection,” I mean that Sabes reduced pitching to its bare essence. He worked fast, he threw strikes, he attacked batters’ weaknesses. He had been drafted out of high school as a shortstop, and he never lost that shortstop’s rhythm. No wasted effort. Perfect balance. Put the ball just where he wanted. Fielded everything near the mound.

Let’s talk about the odd-even thing for a minute.

1985: The 21-year-old Sabes goes 20-6 with a 2.87 ERA, leads the league in FIP, WHIP and strikeout-to-walk ratio, carries the Royals to the World Series, makes two Series starts, pitches two complete games and allows just one run. The Royals win their first-ever World Series. Sabes becomes the first pitcher since [Sandy Koufax](#) to sweep the Cy Young and the World Series MVP award.

1986: Disastrous. Saberhagen goes 7-12 with a 4.15 ERA, and even though he was hurt for much of the year and probably also hit unlucky, it’s a shocking season for a young pitcher everyone expected to dominate baseball for years.

1987: Saberhagen is back with a terrific season, 18-10, 3.36 ERA, four shutouts, his first All-Star game.

1988: Blech — 14-16, 3.80 ERA, allowed the most hits in the American League.

1989: Breathtaking! The best year of his career. Sabes goes 23-6 with a league-leading 2.16 ERA. In fact, he led the league in innings, FIP, WHIP and strikeout-to-walk ratio. He ran away with the Cy Young; he should have won it unanimously but for some reason, one voter chose Dave Stewart even though his ERA was a full-run higher.

1990: Injuries again. Went 5-9 with a 3.27 ERA.

1991: Not a great season, but an improvement — 13-8, 3.07 ERA, Saberhagen’s fourth consecutive odd season with at least five wins above replacement.

The cycle more or less ended there — Saberhagen’s last great season came in an even year, 1994, when he only made 24 starts because of the strike but went 14-4 with a 2.74 ERA and an astonishing 143 strikeouts against only 13 walks. [Greg Maddux](#) was the clear Cy Young Award winner that year, but Saberhagen was the second-best pitcher in the National League.

I’m going to return to a theme shortly — you can probably guess who it will build around — but I have this thought that three Cy Young Awards could lock a player in for the Hall of Fame.

There are some problems with the idea but in general, it is hard for me to imagine a pitcher could be the very best in baseball for three different seasons and not be one of the greatest pitchers of all time.

Here are the 10 pitchers who have won at least three Cy Young Awards:

Roger Clemens: 7

[Randy Johnson](#): 5

[Steve Carlton](#) and Greg Maddux: 4

[Clayton Kershaw](#); Sandy Koufax; [Pedro Martínez](#); Jim Palmer; [Max Scherzer](#) and Tom Seaver: 3

All of them — with the exception of Clemens, for other reasons — are in the Hall or will be there when they are eligible.

Bret Saberhagen won two Cy Young Awards and put up four Cy Young-quality seasons. I think he's better than most of the pitchers in the Hall of Fame.

In reality, he never really had a chance at the Hall because he only won 167 games; he got just seven votes his one year on the ballot. Four other pitchers on that ballot, including two relievers, are now in the Hall of Fame. Not one of them won a Cy Young Award.

Curtis Montague (Curt) Schilling

Baltimore—Houston—Philadelphia—Arizona—Boston, 1988-2007

One of the greatest big-game pitchers in the history of baseball, he dominated batters with an overpowering fastball and a gravity-defying splitter. Finished his career with 3,116 strikeouts and the greatest strikeout-to-walk ratio in modern baseball. Pitched the famed "Bloody Sock" game.

Was Cap Anson a key figure in segregating the game? Yes. But he was one of the greatest players of his day.

Did Shoeless Joe Jackson take money from gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series? Yes. But he was one of the greatest players of the day.

Was [Rogers Hornsby](#) a racist, probably an anti-Semite, a gambler, a cheat and a widely regarded terrible person? Yes. But he was one of the greatest players of his day.

Did [Gaylord Perry](#) ... and Don Sutton ... and Whitey Ford likely throw spitballs and scuff balls when that was expressly against the rules? Yes. But they were some of the greatest pitchers of the day.

Did [Pete Rose](#) gamble on baseball and his team when that was so explicitly against baseball's rules that it carried with it the ultimate punishment, banishment from the game itself? Yes. But he was one of the greatest players of the day.

Did [Barry Bonds](#) and [Roger Clemens](#) likely use performance-enhancing drugs when baseball's rules about such things were fuzzy (at best) but everybody understood they were wrong to use? Yes. But they were two of the greatest players of the day.

Has Curt Schilling gone out of his way on a daily basis to insult, mock, alienate and offend many of the people he seems to hope will vote him into the Hall of Fame? Yes. But he was one of the greatest pitchers of the day.

And so on.

it isn't Schilling's politics. It's his nastiness. It's his intolerance. It's his compulsion to troll. Curt Schilling pushes anger and fear and hatred. Every day he divides, every day he offends ... and all the while, he makes sure to note that those he offends deserve it, and bleep 'em if they can't take a joke, and if they happen to have a Hall of Fame vote they should give it to him anyway because he was a damn good pitcher, particularly in the big games. I've done that for eight years. He was a damn good pitcher, particularly in the big games. I still rank him as [one of the 100 greatest players](#) in baseball history. But I'm not voting for him. I suspect he will get into the Hall of Fame anyway, and that's fine. He doesn't need my vote. He shows every day he doesn't want my vote.

Baseball tidbits newsletter – interesting and random stuff, fodder for bar bets.

Everyone knows Joe D and his 56 game hit streak.

Did you know:

Dom DiMaggio at 34 games longest Red Sox streak.

Ty Cobb has Tigers record with 40 games in 1911.

Ichiro's Mariner's record 27 game streak in 2009 is one of seven 20 or more game streaks he had.

Moises Alou at 30 is the Mets record holder.

Jimmy Rollins of the Phillies hit in 38 straight 2005-2006. Teammate Chase Utley reached 35 in 2006.

Pete Rose 44 games for the Reds in 1978.

The Rays have never had a 20 game hitting streak.

Great pitching seasons

1997 Roger Clemens Blue Jays.

2.05 era over 34 starts, 9 complete games, 3 shutouts, first of back to back Cy Young awards.

Jim Palmer 1975.

23-11, 2.09 era, led AL in wins, era and shutouts with 323 innings pitched. In his 10 shutouts he allowed a total of 44 hits.

Blake Snell 2018 Rays.

21 wins, 1.89 era. Right handed batters hit .188 off him, lefty batters .135.

Pedro Martinez 200 Red Sox.

1.74 era. Led majors in era, shutouts, wins, hits per 9 innings. Led AL in strikeouts.

Ron Guidry 1978 Yankees.

25-3, 1.74 era, unanimous Cy Young award winner. 9 shutouts in 35 starts. Struck out franchise record 18 Angels on June 17.

Bob Feller 1946 Indians.

He led all other pitchers in wins (26), games (48), starts (42), complete games (36), shutouts (10), innings (371 1/3) and strikeouts (348). Feller also tossed an April 30 no-hitter against the Yankees that season. His 36 complete games and 348 strikeouts remain franchise records.

Tigers: Justin Verlander (2011)

The raw statistics (24-5 with a 2.40 ERA and 250 strikeouts) were eye-popping. No AL pitcher had won a Triple Crown since Johan Santana in 2006, no Tigers hurler had done so since Hal Newhouser in 1945. No AL pitcher had won that many games in a season since Bob Welch in '90. No AL pitcher had as strong of a combination of stats in the Triple Crown categories since Vida Blue in '71. But beyond the numbers was a summer of dominance in which every Verlander start felt like a no-hit bid in the making. He no-hit the Blue Jays on May 7 (falling a walk shy of a perfect game), held the Royals hitless for five innings five days later, took a no-hit bid into the eighth against Cleveland a month after that and then did so again versus the Angels on July 31. He'd had good seasons before, but this was the year Verlander became Verlander -- and he was rewarded with both the AL Cy Young and MVP Awards.

Twins: Bert Blyleven (1973)

Though the Dutchman's first six and a half seasons in Minnesota were all exemplary, his 1973 campaign stood above the pack. He pitched a career-high 325 innings, tossing an MLB-best nine shutouts, while posting career lows in ERA (2.52) and FIP (2.32) and a career-high 258 strikeouts. Surprisingly, Blyleven received only one AL Cy Young vote despite posting the highest bWAR (9.7) among all nine pitchers receiving votes -- and the highest single-season WAR among pitchers in Twins history. Blyleven's performance that year was a microcosm of the skillset -- driven by his knee-buckling curveball -- that made him the club's all-time leader in complete games (141), shutouts (29) and strikeouts (2,035) and the only pitcher to enter the Hall of Fame as a Twin.

White Sox: Ed Walsh (1908)

Walsh set the franchise's single-season ERA mark with his 1.27 mark produced over 369 2/3 innings and 45 games in 1910 and won 27 games each in '11 and '12. But his performance in '08 gets the nod. Walsh finished 40-15 with a 1.42 ERA over 66 games, 49 of which were starts. He threw 42 complete games and 11 shutouts, which stand as single-season franchise marks. He threw an astounding 464 innings, yet another White Sox record, and fanned 269 against 56 walks. Those 269 strikeouts rank second behind Chris Sale's 274 from 2015. For the record, Walsh has four of the top five single-season strikeout totals. He holds three of the top six individual season win marks and four of the best seven individual ERAs. Let's not forget that Walsh also had five seasons with at least 368 innings pitched

Angels: Dean Chance (1964)

Chance had a breakout season as a 23-year-old in 1964, going 20-9 with a 1.65 ERA in 46 appearances, including 35 starts. He led the league with 15 complete games, 11 shutouts and 278 1/3 innings pitched en route to winning the AL Cy Young Award.

Marlins: Dontrelle Willis (2005)

One of the most popular players in franchise history, Willis showcased his overall talents -- both on the mound and at the plate -- in 2005. The D-Train paced the NL in wins (22), complete games (seven) and shutouts (five), while posting a 2.63 ERA and 6.5 fWAR in his All-Star campaign. With a 22-10 record, Willis remains the only 20-game winner in Marlins history. The lefty with the high leg kick finished second in NL Cy Young Award voting to Chris Carpenter of the Cardinals. Willis logged 236 1/3 innings, second in franchise history only to Kevin Brown's 237 1/3 in 1997. Willis' five shutouts matched A.J. Burnett (2002) for the most in a season in club history. Willis also made an impact with the bat in his hands, hitting .261 with one home run, 11 RBIs and 14 runs.

Mets: Dwight Gooden (1985)

Unquestionably, Tom Seaver is the greatest Mets pitcher of all time. But the greatest *season* by a Mets pitcher? That belongs to Gooden, who followed up his otherworldly rookie campaign with an even better year in 1985. En route to his only NL Cy Young Award, Gooden not only set the Mets' single-season record for bWAR (12.2) by a pitcher, but he also finished with the highest total of any Major League pitcher since Walter Johnson in '13. Gooden led the league in innings, wins, strikeouts, complete games and ERA+, becoming the first (and still only) unanimous Cy Young Award winner in Mets history. It was undoubtedly the best season of an absurd three-year run that saw Gooden win 58 games with a 2.28 ERA.

Nationals: Max Scherzer (2018)

This list could have easily included a number of Scherzer's seasons, but it's his standout 2018 campaign that gets the nod. Scherzer went 18-7 with a 2.53 ERA, while posting an 8.4 bWAR, the highest single-season mark by a Nationals pitcher. He reached the 300-strikeout milestone in only 220 1/3 innings, a mark that only three pitchers -- Pedro Martinez (1999), Randy Johnson (2000 and '01) and Chris Sale ('17) -- reached while pitching fewer frames. To top it off, Scherzer's 150 hits allowed were the fewest all-time in a 300-strikeout season. Along with pacing all pitchers in strikeouts and innings pitched, Scherzer tied for first in the NL in wins and led the league outright in WHIP (0.91), opponents' batting average (.188) and strikeouts per nine innings (12.24).

Phillies: Steve Carlton (1972)

Lefty's 1972 season truly is one of the greatest by any pitcher in baseball history. Carlton went 27-10 with a 1.97 ERA in 41 starts, while racking up 30 complete games and 310 strikeouts to 87 walks in 346 1/3 innings. He won the NL Cy Young Award. He finished fifth in NL MVP voting. He made the NL All-Star team. But the most impressive part about Carlton's season is that he put up those numbers on a truly terrible team. The '72 Phillies finished 59-97, meaning Carlton won a record 45.8 percent of his team's games that season. He was just the fifth pitcher in history to win 20 or more games for a last-place team and he won 15 consecutive decisions at one point. The Hall of Famer also tossed eight shutouts. No pitcher has won more games or thrown more complete games since Carlton in '72. No pitcher has thrown more innings since '73.

Cardinals: Bob Gibson (1968)

The number 1.12 is held in high regards when it comes to baseball history, as it was Gibson's mind-boggling ERA from the 1968 season. Gibson's 1.12 ERA is easily the best in the Live Ball Era (since 1920) and the third-best mark overall since 1900. The greatest Cardinals pitcher of all time had [arguably the greatest season of all time](#) in '68, allowing just 38 earned runs across 304 2/3 innings en route to winning both the NL Cy Young and MVP Awards. The imposing right-hander completed 28 of his 34 starts, 13 of which resulted in shutouts. He also struck out 268 batters and his 0.85 WHIP led the NL that year. Gibson redefined dominance -- and was part of the reason MLB lowered the height of the mound from 15 inches to 10 in '69. Pitchers excelled across the Majors in '68, but none more than Gibson. To top it all off, he struck out 17 batters in Game 1 of the '68 World Series -- a Fall Classic record that still stands.

Cubs: Fergie Jenkins (1971)

With 145 years of Cubs history, it's hard to decipher which individual pitching performance rises to the level of best ever. For example, there is John Clarkson, who won 53 games with a 1.85 ERA in 623 innings in 1885. Or maybe it makes more sense to point to a more modern showing like Jake Arrieta in 2015, when he had a 1.77 ERA and won the NL Cy Young Award. We'll find a middle ground and go with Jenkins' incredible Summer of 1971, when the Cubs legend led the Majors in wins (24), complete games (30) and strikeout-to-walk ratio (7.1). Jenkins outdueled Gibson with a 10-inning masterpiece on Opening Day, and he went on to put up a 2.77 ERA over 325 innings en route to claiming the NL Cy Young Award. The right-hander struck out 263 batters and walked only 37 in 39 starts.

Dodgers: Sandy Koufax (1966)

While pitching through pain, Koufax won 27 games and posted a 1.73 ERA and 317 strikeouts over 323 innings. Most impressive, perhaps, is the fact that Koufax led the Majors with 27 complete games -- just one year after also leading all pitchers with 27 complete games. Then, he retired. Imagine what Koufax could have done if fully healthy. The entire Dodgers staff hasn't combined for 27 complete games over the last seven years.

Giants: Christy Mathewson (1908)

One of the most dominant pitchers in baseball history, Mathewson's biggest year came in 1908, when he won a career-high 37 games, setting a Modern Era record for NL pitchers. The Hall of Famer logged a 1.43 ERA over 390 2/3 innings, racking up 259 strikeouts while issuing only 42 walks. Mathewson completed 34 of his 44 starts that year, including a franchise-record 11 shutouts.

As the Indians plan to change their name, a few others

1993 Florida Marlins, 2012 Miami Marlins

2007 Tampa Bay Devil Rays to Rays

1962 Houston Colt .45's, 1965 Houston Astros

2004 Montreal Expos become Washington Nationals

1969 Seattle Pilots then moved to become Milwaukee Brewers. Seattle Mariners arrived in 1977.

1907 Boston Americans became the Boston Red Sox.

1912 New York Highlanders became the New York Yankees.

Stolen Bases

Vince Coleman has the most career stolen bases for a non-Hall of Famer. 752. The six players in front of him—Rickey Henderson, Lou Brock, Billy Hamilton, Ty Cobb and Tim Lincecum are all in the HOF.

While cruising through baseballreference.com

Roy White

15 seasons all with NYY

1881 games

1803 hits

160 HRs

233 stolen bases

.271 batting average

.360 on base %

.404 slugging %

Brett Gardner

13 years, all with NYY

1548 games

1383 hits

129 HRs

170 stolen bases

.259 batting average

.343 on base %

.401 slugging %

More from Joe Posnanski's series in The Athletic on players not in the HOF and the argument you could make that they should be in.

Carl Reginald (Reggie) Smith

Boston—St. Louis—Los Angeles—San Francisco, 1966-1982

A quiet but powerful switch-hitter who could do everything on a baseball diamond. Showed up as a rookie in Boston and was immediately a key contributor to the Impossible Dream Red Sox. Was a consistent force throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Upon retirement, he was second all-time among switch-hitters in home runs, behind only [Mickey Mantle](#).

Smith as a rookie provided a little bit of everything, he cracked 15 homers, he stole 16 bases, he played glorious center-field defense, he hit a pivotal homer in the World Series. He quietly went about his pursuit of excellence. He led the league in doubles and won a Gold Glove in '68. He hit .309 with 25 homers in '69. In '70, he hit .300 again and scored 109 runs. In '71 he hit 30 homers, led the league in doubles again and also total bases. All the while, he was a superb outfielder and a dynamic base runner.

Reggie Smith was a metronome, doing the same stuff every year: he hit .300, he hit 20 homers, he walked about as much as he struck out, he played excellent defense. He did that in St. Louis, putting up two All-Star seasons.

Then he did it in Los Angeles. He had his best season in 1977 with the Dodgers; he hit .307/.427/.576 with 32 homers, 104 runs scored, 87 RBIs. He led the Dodgers to the pennant

and a matchup with, yes, the other Reggie and the Yankees. Reggie Smith was awfully good in that series. He doubled and homered in Game 2 off Catfish Hunter. He homered again in the elimination Game 5. And he homered again in Game 6 to give the Dodgers a lead.

But, alas, nobody could outshine Reggie Jackson when the lights were brightest. Jackson hit three home runs in Game 6 and the Yankees won the World Series.

Smith was terrific again in '78, hitting .295/.382/.559 with 29 homers and 93 RBIs.

When you add it all up, what do you have? From a Hall of Fame case perspective, Smith was a seven-time All-Star. He posted right around 65 career WAR, which is in Hall of Fame range. His JAWS score — which combines his peak and career value — places him in the same world as other Hall of Fame right fielders like Dave Winfield and Vlad Guerrero.

Johan Alexander Santana Araque
Minnesota—New York Mets, 2000-2012

Though injuries shortened his career, he was one of the game's most dominant pitchers, winning two Cy Young Awards and three times leading the league in ERA. His mesmerizing change-up froze and baffled hitters for a decade.

I will tell you in advance that this essay will drift a bit away from Johan Santana, so let me get two things down about him and his Hall of Fame case.

First, if you compare Santana's core years with [Sandy Koufax](#)'s core years, you get this:

Koufax from 1960-66: 137-60, 2.36 ERA, 147 ERA+, 1,910 Ks, 512 walks, 3.73 K-W, 48.0 WAR, 3 Cy Young Awards, 1 MVP, led league in pitcher WAR twice.

Santana from 2002-2010: 130-66, 2.90 ERA, 150 ERA+, 1,785 Ks, 458 walks, 3.90 K-W, 50.5 WAR, 2 Cy Young Awards, led league in pitcher WAR three times.

Now, this isn't a full comparison. As you can see, it doesn't include Koufax's World Series heroics, which is obviously a vital part — perhaps *the* vital part — of his story. But it does give you an idea of just how good Santana was for those nine seasons.

But the second thing is this: I have come to believe, while doing this series, that if a pitcher wins three or more Cy Young Awards, he's a Hall of Famer. I am not saying there should be some sort of automatic entry, like they have for the PGA Hall of Fame, but I am saying that if you are the best pitcher in the league at least three times, you are certifiably great.

Santana should have won three Cy Young Awards. But in 2005, when he led the American League in WAR, strikeouts, ERA+, FIP, WHIP, fewest hits per nine innings and strikeouts per nine innings, he finished third in the voting, behind Bartolo Colon and [Mariano Rivera](#). It was pretty absurd. It seems to me he lost to Colon solely because of the pitcher wins statistic. In fact, this may have been the last time a pitcher beat out a much more qualified candidate because he had a better win-loss record.

Colon: 21-8, 3.48 ERA, 157 Ks, 43 walks, 122 ERA+, 4 WAR.

Santana: 16-7, 2.87 ERA, 238 Ks, 45 walks, 155 ERA+, 7.2 WAR.

I mean, that's not even close. That vote would not happen today.

David Brian Cone

Kansas City—New York Mets—Toronto—New York Yankees—Boston, 1986-2003

For almost two decades, Cone attacked hitters with a barrage of different pitches, arm angles and creative solutions. Began his career as a power pitcher, ended it as a crafty one. Won the Cy Young Award in 1994. Threw a perfect game on the day the Yankees were honoring [Don Larsen's perfect game](#) in the World Series. Pitched in five World Series himself, and his team won all of them.

Every now and again, probably once a month, I think about Oct. 22, 1996. It happened in Atlanta; seemed like in those days, just about everything happened in Atlanta. The Cowboys had romped the Bills in Super Bowl XXVIII — that very weekend, I saw Frank Sinatra perform in Atlanta. I saw Stevie Wonder walk into an Atlanta restaurant, where he received a standing ovation. Michael Johnson had run faster than humanly possible in Atlanta; Kerri Strug had landed on one leg in Atlanta; Pocket Hercules had lifted an impossible amount of weight in Atlanta; and of course in Atlanta, three Hall of Fame pitchers — [Greg Maddux](#), Tom Glavine and John Smoltz — anchored maybe the greatest rotation we've ever seen.

The Braves seemed well on their way to a dynasty in that World Series. They had absolutely destroyed the New York Yankees in each of the first two games at Yankee Stadium, and now they had come home to wrap up their second consecutive World Series title. Who was ever going to beat that Atlanta team with that pitching staff? These were all the thoughts in my head that night, as the Braves sent out Glavine to silence the Yankees and give Atlanta a non-negotiable 3-0 lead.

The Yankees sent out David Cone.

Cone was 33 years old at the time — almost exactly four years older than me — but he seemed much, much older than that. He'd been through so much already. He'd partied way too hard with the party-all-the-time New York Mets. He'd been featured on the back cover of the New

York tabloids way too many times. He had been traded away by his hometown Kansas City Royals and he'd returned to win a Cy Young Award for the Royals. He had been an ace for hire, twice getting traded midseason to help a contender lock down a playoff spot.

And that very year, 1996, doctors had discovered a life-threatening aneurysm in his pitching shoulder. After surgery, he came back to pitch seven no-hit innings in early September but he had not pitched well since. The Yankees had to hope for the best in Atlanta.

In my memory, Cone had nothing that night. But somehow, he kept getting outs. The night before, Maddux had baffled and befuddled Yankees hitters with a similarly uninspiring assortment of pitches and after the game, they were left in the clubhouse muttering to themselves about how many chances they missed. That's how it seemed to be with Cone. The Yankees scraped two runs off Glavine, one on an error, and led 2-0 into the sixth.

And then the world seemed to collapse on Cone. He walked Glavine to lead off the inning and then gave up a single to Marquis Grissom. The Braves had 1991 World Series star Mark Lemke batting second in the order despite the fact that he was an atrocious hitter, and he popped up his sacrifice bunt attempt. But Cone walked [Chipper Jones](#) next to load the bases anyway. Next up was the ever-dangerous Fred McGriff, who had already driven in five runs in the Series.

That's when Yankees manager Joe Torre walked out to the mound.

This is the moment I think about all the time.

"You want to pitch to him?" Torre asked. The conversation is recorded here as Cone remembered it just after the game.

"Yes," Cone said.

"You feel OK?" Torre asked.

"Yes," Cone said.

"You sure?" Torre asked.

"Yes," Cone said.

From the press box, this conversation was absolutely riveting, even though we couldn't hear a word of it. This is precisely the drama that makes baseball different from other sports — the game stops cold and allows everyone to fully appreciate the drama of the moment and the arc of the characters. Here was David Cone, a truly great pitcher coming off a near-death experience. Here was Joe Torre, one of baseball's most beloved figures, in the first World Series of his long and winding baseball life. In the bullpen, fully warm, was a young middle reliever

named [Mariano Rivera](#) who had already inspired Minnesota manager Tom Kelly to say, “He needs to pitch in a higher league.”

“This is really important,” Torre said. “Are you OK?”

“I’m fine,” Cone said.

“This is really important,” Torre repeated, with a new, almost desperate emphasis on the word “really.” It was almost as if Torre was begging Cone to bail him out by just giving in and accepting that the right thing to do was come out of the game.

“I’m fine,” Cone said. “I can get McGriff.”

Finally — and it did seem to take forever — Torre nodded and walked back to the dugout. Trust was at the heart of Torre’s management style. After getting ahead in the count, Cone threw a high fastball and McGriff could not lay off. He popped up to short. Torre pumped his fist. Cone stomped his foot on the mound.

The danger wasn’t over — Cone allowed a run by walking Ryan Klesko before getting Javy Lopez to end the inning with a foul pop-out. But it was the McGriff at-bat that resonated again and again. The Yankees won Game 3, then won a wild Game 4 though they trailed by six runs. In Game 5, Andy Pettitte outdueled Smoltz. In Game 6, the bullpen — with Rivera in the middle of it all — shut the Braves down, and the game ended with a wild New York celebration that somehow capped off with [Wade Boggs](#) riding [a horse](#). That was a crazy Series.

And I think a lot about David Cone adamantly refusing to come out of the game. Cone, you might know, grew up wanting to be a sportswriter — sort of the opposite version of the classic tale, right? Because of this, I always thought he had a particularly acute sense of the moment. Most athletes, you ask them how they felt in that pivotal and historic instant and they can’t tell you because they weren’t thinking about it that way. They weren’t thinking, “People are going to remember this forever,” or “I will tell my grandchildren about this.”

That’s just not how the minds of most athletes work. If you ask them about it, they will mostly say, “I’m sure I’ll think about that after I retire.”

Cone, though, I always thought he had this strange ability to be an athlete and narrator at the same time. I think that’s part of what makes him such a good announcer now. He really was a great pitcher — at different times, he led the league in wins, winning percentage, innings, strikeouts, FIP, and strikeout-to-walk ratio. His 121 ERA+ and 52.8 JAWS — which combines career and peak value — are borderline Hall of Fame numbers that place him in the same class as Smoltz, Jim Bunning and Early Wynn. Add in his World Series dominance, and it’s a pretty good case.

But what made David Cone so memorable for me was how he seemed to fully embrace the big moments even while they were happening.

“Tell us again, what did Joe Torre say to you?” we asked him for the fourth or fifth time in 1996 on that October day in Atlanta.

“Well,” Cone said, “He got as close as he could to me, and he implored me to tell him the truth.”

With this, Cone smiled a little bit.

“And,” he said, “I did my best to lie to him.”

Pete editorial comment—Posnanski groups Felipe Alou and Dusty Baker together and makes a good argument for “total contribution to baseball” being added as a path to HOF. If you agree with that approach, I think that moves Jim Kaat and Don Mattingly in as well.

Felipe Rojas Alou

San Francisco—Milwaukee/Atlanta—Oakland—New York Yankees—Montreal—Milwaukee Brewers, 1958-1974

As manager:

Montreal—San Francisco, 1992-2006

Baseball’s first Dominican star as an everyday player and also the first Dominican to be named a big-league manager. An all-around player who could do everything, he hit .298 with power from 1962-68 when baseball was dominated by pitching. Often overlooked as he played on teams with Willie Mays and Henry Aaron. Named Manager of the Year in 1994.

Johnnie B. (Dusty) Baker

Atlanta—Los Angeles—San Francisco—Oakland, 1968-1986

As manager:

San Francisco—Chicago Cubs—Cincinnati—Washington—Houston, 1993-2020

A consistent force for the successful Dodgers teams of the 1970s, he mixed power, speed and Gold Glove defense. As manager, he won almost 1,900 games as of 2020 and was named

Manager of the Year three times. He became the first manager to take five different teams to the postseason. Was integral in inventing the high five.

Four words: *Honor great baseball lives*. It seems to me that is a pretty decent synopsis of the mission, right? You have a plaque room filled with the players, the managers, the executives, the umpires, the owners, the pioneers who have made baseball popular and wonderful for more than 150 or so years. But the room is not really filled with players, managers, executives, umpires, owners and pioneers, is it? No. It is filled with men (and, so far, one woman). It is honoring full baseball lives.

And yet, being blunt, there's no real mechanism in the Hall of Fame system to honor full baseball lives.

Take Felipe Alou. Was he purely a Hall of Fame baseball player? No, probably not. He was really, really good, make no mistake about it. He was an offensive force in the pitching-dominated 1960s when only special hitters could thrive. In 1966, he hit .327 and led the league in runs, hits and total bases. In 1968, the year of the pitcher, he hit .317 and again led the league in hits. He was an above-average defender at four positions. He was an excellent base runner.

But: 42 WAR, a .328 career on-base percentage, three All-Star Games, 2,101 hits and 206 homers; that's not quite Hall of Fame level.

Was he purely a Hall of Fame manager? No. He was, again, really good. He never got a chance to finish the job with the 1994 Expos, who might have been good enough to win it all. But his teams only reached one postseason, they never won a pennant, and his 1,033-1,021 career record just isn't going to get him into the Hall.

And it seems like that's where the story ends for the Hall of Fame. Can he go in as a player? No. Can he go in as a manager? No. OK, thank you, Thomas here will show you out.

But Alou was so much more than a player or a manager. For one thing, he was both. And beyond that, he was the first great Dominican position player in the major leagues, a man who launched countless dreams in his country (including those of his brothers, Matty and Jesús, and his son Moises). He was the first Dominican manager in the major leagues. He has lived an extraordinary and important baseball life for more than a half-century.

The Hall of Fame needs a process to honor such people.

Dusty Baker has lived a similarly incredible baseball life. Baker, I think, will make it eventually as a manager, though there could be some winds blowing against him since he has not yet won a World Series. But honestly, when you look at the impact Baker has had on baseball going back 50 years, there should be no question at all.

Baker was a multi-talented player — he hit as high as .321, crushed as many as 30 homers, stole as many as 24 bases, and he won a Gold Glove in 1981. He also had a game in 1984 when stole second, stole third and stole home. Sort of. First, you should know that only 54 players in baseball history have stolen second, third and home in the same inning and only 14 players in the last 75 years. The Marlins' Jon Berti did it this year. The Mariners' Mallex Smith did it last year.

Baker was 35 years old at the time and no longer a base-stealing threat, but he was such a smart player. The Giants were playing the Reds at Candlestick Park, and after Baker singled, he stole second base in something of a surprise maneuver. Then the Reds walked Bob Brenly and, for some weird reason, became utterly distracted by him. Reds catcher Brad Gulden had Brenly picked off first, and while the Reds messed around with that, Baker stole third base. Then he noticed they *still* didn't have Brenly tagged out, so he stole home. The Reds didn't even get Brenly; he made it safely to second base.

In any case, Baker could do everything as a player, and he had a Forrest Gump-like knack of being wherever the action was happening. He was on-deck when [Henry Aaron](#) hit his 715th home run. He was at the center of perhaps the first recorded high five after he hit his 30th home run in 1977. His teammate Glenn Burke held his hand out. "So I reached out and hit his hand," Baker would say. "It seemed like the thing to do."

He hit .371 in four National League Championship Series and in 1977 was the first player to be named NLCS MVP.

And then, as manager, he has been able to time and time again take over bad teams, make them good, and then get fired. It's the strangest thing.

- He took over a 72-90 Giants team, led them to 103 wins (which in 1993 was not good enough to make the playoffs — what a different time) and eventually took them to the 2002 World Series. He was let go after a long feud with the Giants' owner.
- He took over a 95-loss Cubs team, led them to the division title and brought them to the brink of the World Series — that was the year the Cubs blew a three-run lead in the eighth inning against the Marlins and everyone tried to blame it on a guy in the stands who reached out for a foul ball coming right at him (oddly, it was Felipe Alou's son Moises who really sparked the Steve Bartman craziness). Things began to go off the rails in Chicago after a series of injuries and poor decisions, and Baker again did not have his contract renewed.
- He took over a 90-loss Cincinnati Reds team and, after a couple of so-so seasons, led the Reds to three postseason appearances in four years. Unfortunately for him, the Reds lost each of their postseason series and Baker was fired as manager. The Reds promptly went on a run of six consecutive losing seasons.

- He took over the Washington Nationals after they'd had one of the most disappointing seasons of the decade. Despite being utterly loaded with talent, the 2015 Nationals were barely .500 and missed the postseason. Baker promptly led them to a 95-win season and, yes, another heartbreaking playoff loss. After leading them to a 97-win season the next year (and, yes, *another* heartbreaking playoff loss), Baker was again let go.
- He took over the Houston Astros after one of the worst cheating scandals in recent baseball history. The Astros, like the rest, only played 60 games in COVID-dominated 2020, but they sneaked into the postseason and made it all the way to the ALCS, where they lost in Game 7.

No other manager has ever had a career quite like that.

So, again, put it all together, it seems impossible to believe that there have been too many people who have impacted baseball as much as Felipe Alou and Dusty Baker. But that's the question: Can and will the Hall of Fame voters consider full baseball lives?

Recognizing the Negro Leagues a "Major Leagues".

I read lots of cynical comments that this was a PR move by MLB in advance of ugly CBA negotiations. But it is still a very positive thing. It does provide some record book challenges as the piece below talks about.

[How Negro Leaguers may alter leaderboards](#)

Dec 17, 2020

By Mike Petriello [@mike_petriello](#)

December 17, 2020

[Jackie Robinson played in 1,382 regular-season games](#) in the National League, all for the Brooklyn Dodgers, and collected 1,518 hits along the way. For now, anyway.

In the wake of [Wednesday's long-overdue news](#) that the Negro Leagues -- specifically [a collection of seven leagues](#) that played at various times between 1920 and 1948 -- would retroactively be given "major league" status, we will be seeing some changes to baseball's

record books over the next few months. That's because in 1945, [Robinson got into 26 regular-season games for the Kansas City Monarchs](#), for whom he had 38 hits, batting .384/.445/.606.

So, maybe he didn't get into 1,382 regular-season major league games, with 1,518 hits. Maybe he played in 1,408 games and had 1,556 hits. Maybe, nearly five decades after his death in 1972, Robinson's already stellar batting line is about to get even brighter. And since he's hardly the only player who appeared in both Major League Baseball and the Negro Leagues -- [there were dozens](#), including Larry Doby, Willie Mays and Satchel Paige -- that means there are going to be some legends with new stat lines on the backs of their electronic baseball cards.

Which all made us start to wonder: If there are now 29 seasons worth of newly recognized major league history, including approximately 3,400 players -- which, by the way, suddenly [puts us over 20,000 all-time major leaguers](#) -- are we about to suddenly see some new records? Is there a new all-time home run king, or single-season batting champion? (*Spoiler: Yes! Probably.*)

Let's see if we can take an educated guess, and we do mean exactly that, because the answers are not yet finalized. As Ben Lindbergh wrote about extensively [for the Ringer](#), much of the work that spawned this classification change came from the creators of the [Seamheads Negro Leagues Database](#), who have painstakingly spent years attempting to create [as full a listing of Negro League stats as possible](#). They've accumulated box scores for nearly 75% of known Negro League games during those 29 seasons, and more are added every day -- including 16 from 1945 just this week.

So while we investigate the available database, do note that these are tentative findings. As more data is uncovered and as decisions of what to include are finalized, these are subject to change. (It's not like that's never happened before, anyway; in 1999, it was found that Hack Wilson had [really had 191 RBIs](#) in 1930, not 190.)

But first, let's explain what this move really means.

What *is* a major league, anyway?

This is where the distinction between Major League Baseball and *major league baseball* is going to be of critical importance, and why numbers accrued within MLB and the Negro Leagues are going to be considered of equal value.

Fortunately, we have some precedent here, because there isn't just one "major league." There never was. Up until now there were *six*, according to a "[Special Committee on Baseball Records](#)" that convened in the winter of 1968-69. In addition to the current American and National leagues you know today, four other leagues -- the American Association (1882-91), the Union Association (1884), the Players League (1890) and the Federal League (1914-15) -- were granted "major league" status.

Shamefully, that group at the time failed to even consider the inclusion of Negro League baseball. Wednesday's decision by MLB undoes that mistake.

To understand how the inclusion of both MLB and non-MLB numbers works, consider the example of [Hall of Famer Mordecai "Three Finger" Brown](#). After spending his rookie season with the Cardinals, the pitcher spent nine seasons (1904-12) with the Cubs before being traded to Cincinnati. From there, he jumped to the new Federal League, where he spent two seasons (1914-15) with three franchises. When the Federal League folded, Brown returned to the Cubs for 12 final games in 1916.

In total, he pitched in 411 games for the Cardinals, Cubs, and Reds in the National League, and 70 more for his trio of Federal League franchises. But since the Federal League was granted "major league" status in that 1968-69 committee meeting, you won't see 411 as his career games pitched total on his player page at [MLB.com](#) or [Baseball-Reference](#) or [FanGraphs](#). You'll see 481 -- his *combined* total. The two years in the Federal League are listed seamlessly with his time in the National League.

And that, we imagine, is how this will work, too. If you look at [Robinson's page on Baseball-Reference](#), his time with the Monarchs appears under a separate tab titled "Negro & Minor Lg Stats," along with his season spent with the Dodgers' top farm club in Montreal. Soon enough, those Kansas City stats will live right alongside -- and on an equal footing with -- those from his years with Brooklyn.

"There's no distinction to be made," [said John Thorn](#), MLB's official historian. "They were all big leaguers."

So, keeping in mind those caveats, here's what you might see -- and might not. We're just scraping the surface, either way.

Josh Gibson retrospective

A new single-season batting average leader

Let's start with the big one here. Gibson is sometimes known as "the Black Babe Ruth," but it might be as accurate to call the Great Bambino "[the white Josh Gibson](#)." While he was known more for his prodigious power than anything, Gibson posted a wild .466 average in 69 games for the 1943 Homestead Grays.

(This is where this gets a little murky. [Seamheads shows](#) a .441 total average for Gibson in 78 games in '43, but if you split it up, that includes appearances in the [East-West All-Star Game](#),

the [North-South All-Star Game](#), and the [Negro World Series](#). We're sticking only with what he did in the Negro National League regular season.)

That .466 would put him atop a list [that currently looks like this](#):

.440 Hugh Duffy, 1894

.429 Ross Barnes, 1876

.424 Willie Keeler, 1897

.424 Rogers Hornsby, 1924

While it may seem like Gibson's 69 games and 302 plate appearances don't stack up, realize that Barnes played in 60 games with 340 plate appearances in 1876. If the standard of having 3.1 plate appearances per team game is applied, then Gibson easily surpasses the 210 required by the Grays' 68-game Negro National League season. Put another way: [DJ LeMahieu just won the 2020 AL batting title](#) ... with 216 plate appearances. It counts.

It might also make him "[the last man to hit .400](#)," coming two years after Ted Williams did it in 1941. (Probably, anyway. Again, the uncertainty reigns. In 1948, [Artie Wilson](#) hit .437 for the Birmingham Black Bombers of the Negro American League, but in only 136 plate appearances, which would be below the 3.1 plate appearances per team game threshold.)

A new top two in career batting average

You know the names atop the list of [career batting average leaders](#):

.367, Ty Cobb

.358, Rogers Hornsby

.356, Joe Jackson

Move over, Rogers. If we're counting Gibson's Negro National League career, [he's in there at .361](#), just behind Cobb.

A new top two in OPS+

[OPS+](#), or On Base plus Slugging that's adjusted for era and park, isn't perfect, but it's a pretty good way to see who was the best hitter at any given time. It reads so that "100" is league average for that season. ([In 2020](#), the leaders were Juan Soto and Freddie Freeman.)

All-time, with a minimum of 3,000 plate appearances, [it's a who's who of what's what](#):

206 -- Babe Ruth

191 -- Ted Williams

182 -- Barry Bonds

179 -- Lou Gehrig

176 -- Mike Trout

[Gibson, in his Negro National League time, came in at ... 200.](#) That's "twice as good as league average" during his time. It's the second best of any major leaguer ever. Gibson is going to be all over these leaderboards.

Here's one he's not going to be as high on as you'd like, though.

Probably not a new all-time home run king

Gibson was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1972, and [it's right there on the plaque](#): "Hit almost 800 home runs in league and independent baseball during his 17-year career." That would put him well above Barry Bonds' record of 762.

Except for that pesky word "independent," which is the sticking point. Gibson, like many players of the era, spent plenty of time "[barnstorming](#)" -- going on the road, usually in the offseason and sometimes internationally, to earn extra money playing exhibition games against all sorts of pro, semi-pro, and amateur competition. Those aren't considered official league games, and even if they were, the numbers would be impossible to count, so it seems likely [Gibson will be credited with 194 major league home runs](#).

(If you've seen "238" floating around, that's a possibility too, but that would include postseason and Mexican League games, which we're assuming will not be counted. As we said, this is all a moving target until it's finalized.)

Two dozen new no-hitters, including a special one

There have been [305 no-hitters](#) in major league history, from George Bradley in 1876 to [Alec Mills](#) this past September. Of those, 283 of them, or 92.7%, came in the National or American League, with the rest coming from the other long-ago major leagues we noted above.

But now, that list of 305 looks like it might be 329, at least according to [author and no-hitter aficionado Dirk Lammers](#), who has dutifully kept track of such things. According to Lammers, there are [24 known no-hitters](#) to have taken place during the Negro Leagues' eligible seasons. Not included within that 24, but notable nonetheless: the time in 1937 when "Schoolboy"

Johnny Taylor [threw a no-hitter](#) for the Negro National League All-Stars at the Polo Grounds in New York. We've never had an All-Star game no-hitter. That would be the first.

That aside, the most interesting one here belongs to Leon Day, who tossed a no-no on Opening Day for the Newark Eagles in 1945. To this point in history, [Bob Feller owns the first and only major league Opening Day no-hitter](#) when he did it for Cleveland in 1940. He'll likely have company soon.

In addition, Don Larsen (1956) and Roy Halladay (2010) no longer have the only [postseason no-hitters](#), or the first two. ["Red" Grier threw one in Game 3 of the Negro World Series](#) in 1926. Incredibly, he did so on no rest, having been bounced from the previous day's Game 2 in the midst of a seven-run second inning.

[MLB Tonight remembers Leon Day](#)

Willie Mays' first Major League hit was his 11th major league hit

Mays went hitless in his first three MLB games in 1951, but he made his first one count, connecting for a homer off of future Hall of Famer -- and future teammate -- Warren Spahn on [May 28, 1951](#). But [Mays collected 10 hits](#) for the Birmingham Black Barons in 1948, and those will likely be considered his first major league tallies. (He had seven more in the playoffs that year; we're assuming only regular-season numbers will be included.)

Mays' iconic total of 660 career homers isn't likely to change ... yet. As Lindbergh noted, one of those 10 hits was reported to have been a home run, but as no box score has yet been found, it's not included in the database. One day, that "iconic 660" might actually be an iconic ... 661. *(Update, Dec: 18: [That day might be coming a lot sooner than we thought.](#))*

Speaking of iconic numbers, could you imagine if Hank Aaron didn't have 755 homers? If, when everyone celebrated [his breaking of Babe Ruth's record with his 715th home run in 1974](#), everyone was actually a few dingers behind schedule? That's not going to happen here. While Aaron [did hit five homers for the 1952 Indianapolis Clowns](#) before signing with the Braves, only the time span from 1920-48 will be considered "major league."

Minnie Miñoso tops 2,000 hits

Miñoso, the "Cuban Comet," [who probably should have been](#) in the Hall of Fame [long ago](#), retired with 1,963 hits. Or he may have thought he did, because he collected [154 more](#) for the New York Cubans from 1946-48. Add those and the total becomes 2,117. Might that have changed some minds of the Cooperstown voters?

Along the same lines, Roy Campanella retired with 856 RBIs for the Dodgers, [but 171 more](#) in Negro Leagues play pushes him over the 1,000 mark, to 1,027. Doby should get [129 more](#) RBIs to his total of 970, giving him 1,099. And let's not forget the great Satchel Paige, who is going to have his major league record go from 28-31 with a 3.29 ERA to 140-91 with 2.58 ERA. That's just a little more impressive, no?

Again, this is just scraping the surface, coming up with what we could eyeball. We don't actually have a combined database available to look at right now, but when we do, more interesting updates are certain to stand out. Either way, it's not like you can simply tell the story of the Negro Leagues with numbers, because you certainly cannot. But now -- soon, anyway -- when you look atop some of the most important leaderboards in baseball history, these players will deservedly be there. They were really always there.

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Baseball tidbits newsletter – interesting and random stuff, fodder for bar bets.

2020 Stats

Nearly a quarter of big-league at-bats in 2020 ended in a strikeout, and the league-wide strikeout rate has risen each year since 2008. Hitters batted .245 this year — the lowest mark since 1972, the year before the American League adopted the designated hitter.

Shane Bieber of the Indians. In half of his 12 starts, Bieber didn't allow an earned run, producing an ERA that no qualified pitcher has beaten since Hall of Famer Greg Maddux in 1994. *1.63 ERA, .494 opponents' OPS, 41.1% strikeout rate.* Bieber racked up double-digit strikeouts eight times, finishing with 122 K's in 77 1/3 innings. That gave him a K-rate more than 1 percentage point higher than the single-season record set by Gerrit Cole the year before (39.9%).

Brewers rookie of the year reliever Devin Williams. faced 100 batters in 2020, and 53 struck out. Just 18 reached base safely. No pitcher had previously faced that many batters in a season while producing a higher K-rate, as Williams edged flame throwing closer Aroldis Chapman (52.5% in 2014).

In 1947 Larry Mize, Yankees 1B hit 51 HRs, struck out 42 times. (No, no one before or since has ever hit that many home runs with that low a strikeout total.)

Tim Lincecum. the only player in history with at least 100 triples, 150 homers and 600 steals, when you're one of only four players in history with at least 700 extra-base hits and 800 steals (joining Ty Cobb, Lou Brock and Rickey Henderson) and when you're seventh all-time in WAR at your position, you go to the Hall of Fame.

Al Kaline had double digit HRs for 20 straight years.

La Russa managed 11 Hall of Famers in Ozzie Smith, Larry Walker, Baines, Fisk, Seaver, Carlton, Reggie Jackson, Dennis Eckersley, Rich Gossage and John Smoltz. That could someday be 14, with Albert Pujols, Yadier Molina and Scott Rolen's votes coming.

Rickey

Henderson led the American League in steals 12 times and led the Majors in six of those years. He stole more than 100 bases in a season three times, including a record 130 steals in 1982 for Oakland. In 1991, with a swipe of third base against the Yankees at the Coliseum on May 1, Henderson eclipsed Hall of Famer Lou Brock with his record 939th career steal. Then he ran away with the title -- Brock remains in second place all-time, 468 steals behind the stolen base king.

Henderson hit 297 home runs during his career, including a career-high 28 in 1986 with the Yankees, as well as in a 1990 AL MVP campaign with the A's. He set the benchmark for the leadoff hitter in every conceivable way, and that includes power -- [he hit a record 81 home runs to open a contest](#).

Henderson drew more walks in his career than Babe Ruth. It's no wonder he finished with a .401 on-base percentage. Until Barry Bonds broke it in 2006, Henderson owned the all-time

record for career walks, with 2,190. Henderson still owns the all-time record for *unintentional* walks, with 2,129.

The quintessential demonstration of this came during the 1989 AL Championship Series between the A's and Blue Jays, when Henderson was named MVP after hitting .400 with a double, triple, two homers, eight steals and eight runs scored in five games. He made 23 plate appearances and reached base 14 times (.609 on-base percentage). Four of his steals came in Game 2 alone. And he wasn't thrown out trying to steal once.

Which team was the first to turn two triple plays in one game?

A:

Minnesota Twins (vs. Boston Red Sox on July 17, 1990) Red Sox won the game 1-0.

The who should be in? HOF debate is a great way to pass the off season. One columnist from mlb.com offered his list by position

C Bill Freehan. Honorable mention: Thurman, Munson, Gene Tenace, Jorge Posada (Joe Mauer not yet eligible)

1B Rafael Palmeiro. Honorable mention Mark McGwire, Fred McGriff, Todd Helton, Gil Hodges

2B Lou Whitaker. Honorable mention Jeff Kent, Bobby Grich (Chase Utley not yet eligible)

3B Dick Allen. Honorable mention Scott Rolen, Graig Nettles, Ken Boyer, Sal Bando (Adrián Beltré not yet eligible)

SS: Omar Vizquel. Nomar Garciaparra, Miguel Tejada, Jim Fregosi (Rodriguez and Jimmy Rollins not yet eligible)

LF Barry Bonds. **Honorable mention:** Pete Rose, Manny Ramirez, Minnie Miñoso

CF **CF:** Kenny Lofton, Andruw Jones, Jim Edmonds, Dale Murphy, Jim Wynn (Carlos Beltrán not yet eligible)

RF: Shoeless Joe Jackson. **Honorable mentions:** Sammy Sosa, Dwight Evans, Reggie Smith, Tony Oliva, Gary Sheffield, Dave Parker, Bobby Abreu (Ichiro Suzuki not yet eligible)

DH: Hal McRae. Honorable mention *Honorable mention:* Baylor (Ortiz not yet eligible)

Starting RHP: Roger Clemens, *Honorable mention:* Curt Schilling, Luis Tiant, Dave Stieb, Kevin Brown, David Cone, Orel Hershiser, Roy Oswalt, Eddie Cicotte (Tim Lincecum not yet eligible)

Starting LHP: Johan Santana, *Honorable mention:* Andy Pettitte, Mark Buehrle, Ron Guidry, Tommy John, Jim Kaat, Mickey Lolich, Jimmy Key (CC Sabathia not yet eligible)

Relief RHP: Dan Quisenberry. *Honorable mention:* Keith Foulke, Tom Gordon, Tom Henke, Firpo Marberry, Troy Percival, Kent Tekulve, John Wetteland (Nathan, Papelbon, Rodríguez and Huston Street not yet eligible)

Relief LHP: Billy Wagner. *Honorable mention:* John Franco, Sparky Lyle, Tug McGraw, Randy Myers

Joe Posnanski's countdown of players who should be discussed as HOF candidates continues

Samuel Peralta (Sammy) Sosa

Texas—Chicago White Sox—Chicago Cubs—Baltimore, 1989-2007

Nobody in baseball history crushed as many home runs in a five-year span as he did from 1998-2002 when he hit 292 of them, an average of 58 homers per year. Fifth player in baseball history to clear 600 home runs. Played the game with boundless enthusiasm and was, for a time, the most popular player on the North Side of Chicago since [Ernie Banks](#).

Gary Antonian Sheffield

Milwaukee—San Diego—Florida—Los Angeles—Atlanta—New York Yankees—Detroit—New York Mets, 1988-2009

Fearsome slugger who waved his bat with menace and hit 509 home runs over his career. Batting champion in 1992. Scored and drove in 100 runs six times. Sheff seemed to have a wild swing but he was, in fact, a precision hitter who never struck out 85 times in a season and walked 300 more times over his career than he struck out.

Let's talk WAR again. We could talk about the main thing keeping Sosa and Sheffield out of the Hall of Fame, the PED accusations that stick to both men, but that's all pretty messy. Sheffield

admitted only to using a steroid cream in 2001 to help his knee recover, but the book “Game of Shadows” by investigative reporters Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams has allegations that connect him to wider use of steroids and human growth hormone.

Sosa’s story is even messier. He was widely suspected of steroid use because of his unprecedented power numbers, but he has fervently and repeatedly denied ever using steroids. In 2009, the New York Times reported that he tested positive for PEDs in 2003. The trouble with the Times report is that the 2003 test results were supposed to stay confidential — it was a survey and not an official drug test — and as such, the Times’ sources were anonymous and their motivations are shaky at best. It has left Sosa fighting against ghosts.

But here’s the thing: Other players who have been widely suspected of steroid use were voted into the Hall of Fame in the last decade. Perhaps there is a bit more smoke with Sheffield and Sosa, but I think that there’s something else holding these two players back: Their Wins Above Replacement number is much lower than you would expect.

Sosa’s WAR is just 58.6, which very much puts him on the Hall of Fame borderline, in the same spot as Darrell Evans, John Olerud, Bobby Bonds, etc. How could someone with 609 home runs and (somewhat surprisingly) terrific defensive numbers have that low a WAR?

Well, it turns out that it comes down to offense. Let’s compare Sosa’s Rbat — which measures a player’s hitting value against the average big-league batter — against the players Baseball-Reference considers “most similar.”

Sammy Sosa was 333 runs above average as a hitter.

Now look at the players who, on the surface, look most similar to him — and remember we are only measuring hitting here:

1. Jim Thome, 587 runs above average
2. [Mike Schmidt](#), 527
3. [Reggie Jackson](#), 477
4. [Ken Griffey Jr.](#), 440
5. Harmon Killebrew, 487

See, that’s not especially close. And the similar batter list goes on like this, [Eddie Mathews](#) (502 Rbat), [Mickey Mantle](#) (802 Rbat), Willie Stargell (433 Rbat) and [Willie McCovey](#) (487 Rbat) were all at least 100 runs better over their careers than Sosa. And so was our other choice here, Gary Sheffield — Sheff’s WAR problems, as you will see, have nothing to do with his offense.

So what gives here? Why does Rbat have Sosa so far below other seemingly similar hitters?

Well, it comes down to a couple of things. For one, Sosa’s .273 career average and .344 career on-base percentage is not impressive. Until he began hitting home runs like a machine, Sosa

never walked and struggled to make contact. Until his legendary/infamous 1998 season, he hit .257/.308/.469.

He was absolutely amazing for the next five seasons (.306/.397/.649), but it still leaves his career oddly misshapen. He hit 609 homers but just 379 doubles. He stole more than 200 bases, but almost all of those were before he became a good player. He was a really good defensive player before the home runs started flying, but he was a pretty bad defensive player after. It all adds up to that 59 or 60 WAR and an ambiguous Hall of Fame argument. Add in the PED suspicions, and, well, Sosa got 14 percent of the Hall of Fame vote in 2020.

Sheffield's career Baseball-Reference WAR is 60.5, which puts him in the same nebulous Hall of Fame limbo as Sosa. But unlike Sosa, there is absolutely no question about his hitting prowess. His Rbat of 561 puts him in the Top 30 all-time and, as you see, above many of the greatest hitters ever. Sheffield was an absurdity in his time, a batter who hit the ball as hard as anybody while rarely striking out.

But the WAR numbers say he was pretty much as bad an outfielder as a player can be.

How do you get to just 60.5 WAR when you are that good a hitter? Well, when WAR calculates you were 195 runs *worse* than the average defender, right, that will do it. Sheffield's defensive WAR is minus-27.7, second-worst in baseball history ahead only of Adam Dunn.

Was Gary Sheffield *that bad* an outfielder? Bill James, for one, doesn't believe it — I mean, Sheffield was a terrific athlete who began his career as a third baseman and shortstop. But it is true that his outfield range was just dreadful year after year after year.

I guess what it comes down to is that I don't think WAR does a particularly good job reflecting the careers of Sosa or Sheffield. Of course, that's not at all what WAR is intended to do, but right or wrong, I know there are voters out there who see their equivocal WAR numbers, factor in their PED connections, and simply choose to vote no. There's nothing wrong with that.

But I do think, to be fair, that Sammy Sosa is not a 58.6 WAR player. He's the most prolific home run hitter most of us ever have seen, a true force of nature, a player at the center of baseball's explosion and baseball's steroid scandal. Baseball in the late 1990s and early 2000s *was* Sammy Sosa hitting the home run, doing the hop-skip-and-jump, beating his chest, pointing to the sky; baseball *was* Sammy Sosa running into the Wrigley Field outfield like a kid pretending to be an airplane while Cubs fans went bananas like they were seeing the Beatles.

And Gary Sheffield is not a 60.5 WAR player. He's the most terrifying and unnerving hitter pitchers have ever seen with the way he would dig into the box and then begin waving that bat — pure menace, pure danger — and then he would unleash his swing and crush baseballs like few ever have.

That's not to say that you would vote them into the Hall of Fame. You might not. There are the PED questions. There are the questions of how well-rounded they were. But when talking about Sosa and Sheffield, we should at least define our terms.

Frederick Stanley (Fred) McGriff

Toronto—San Diego—Atlanta—Tampa Bay—Chicago Cubs—Los Angeles Dodgers, 1986-2004

The Crime Dog is one of the most consistent power hitters in baseball history. He hit between 30 and 37 home runs 10 times in his career and knocked in between 102 and 107 RBIs eight times. Beloved player with a whirly-bird follow through, he also gained fame as the pitch man for the Tom Emanski baseball instruction videos.

Let's talk for a minute about Harold Baines. He has been hovering over this entire series because the Hall of Fame veterans committee shocked just about everybody by electing Baines into the 2019 induction class. It is important to be respectful of Baines' career. I mean, 2,866 hits, 488 doubles, 384 home runs, that is a full career worthy of admiration and respect.

But, well, two things: One, Baines just seemed to jump in line in front of dozens of players who had better careers. Fred McGriff is one of those players. We'll get into that in a minute.

And second, Baines is the prime example of a very strange phenomenon that is overtaking the Hall of Fame: In the last three years, various veterans committees have voted into the Hall of Fame: Baines, Jack Morris, Ted Simmons, Lee Smith and Alan Trammell. What do these five players have in common? Right: None of them was elected by the Baseball Writers' Association of America even though their cases were considered for many, many years. In fact, of the five, only Morris and maybe Smith even came close.

Baines: 6 ballots, topped out at 6.1 percent

Morris: 15 ballots, topped out at 67.7 percent

Simmons: 1 ballot, got 3.7 percent

Smith: 15 ballots, topped out at 50.6 percent

Trammell: 15 ballots, topped out at 40.9 percent

Now, we can argue whether the writers got it right or whether the 16-person Hall of Fame veterans committee got it right ... but right and wrong is not at all my point here. No, my point is there are two very different standards at work. This has always been true when it comes to the BBWAA and the veterans committees, but now the standards are clashing directly.

- Morris' last year on the Writers' ballot was 2014. The veterans raced in and voted him into the Hall in 2018.
- Trammell's last year on the Writers' ballot was 2016. He was promptly elected by the veterans in 2018.
- Smith last appeared on the Writers' ballot in 2017. He was elected by the veterans in 2019.

It's like these veterans committees are now just waiting at the end of the road to immediately impose their own standards on the Hall. They have the final word. And, being honest, it makes you wonder ... why even have a BBWAA vote every year? Why did Jack Morris have to get beaten up in internet arguments for *15 years* if the veterans committee was just going to vote him in first chance they had anyway? Why did Alan Trammell and Lee Smith have to endure so many disappointments if a veterans committee found their cases to be so open-and-shut? Why did Harold Baines need to have his great day marred by the simple fact that almost nobody saw him as a Hall of Famer in the decades before the committee voted him in?

And, more devastatingly, why did the voters wait until after Ron Santo died before voting him in? Why did the voters wait until after Dick Allen died when, surely, he will be elected next year? Why do the voters dawdle as Tony Oliva and Jim Kaat and Maury Wills — all of whom finished just one or two or three votes shy of election in 2015 — grow older?

All of which brings us to Fred McGriff, who spent 10 years on the ballot — the limit is now 10 years and not 15 — and topped out at 39.8 percent.

McGriff will surely be elected by a veterans committee the very first year he is eligible.

He has to be elected by the veterans committee. I mean, you simply cannot vote for Baines and not vote for McGriff. It would be like voting for a Jack in a game of poker but not voting for a King. Baines and McGriff were both left-handed power hitters who played for a very long time and posted wonderful career numbers ... it's just that McGriff was better than Baines in just about every way.

Baines: .289/.356/.465, 121 OPS+, 1,606 runs created, spent most of his career as DH, 38.7 career WAR.

McGriff: .284/.377/.509, 134 OPS+, 1,704 runs created, was almost always a first baseman, 52.6 career WAR.

Baines' career was 400 or so games longer, so I guess you could say he had longevity on his side, but when you consider that McGriff *still* hit almost 100 more home runs, created almost 100 more runs and basically still got on base as many times because of a substantial advantage in walks, well, it's not really a contest. McGriff and Baines had similar strengths and weaknesses and McGriff was the quantifiably better player.

So why have we spent so much time (read: wasted so much time), as Hall of Fame voters, debating McGriff's case when he surely will go into the Hall of Fame soon through an entirely different door anyway? Who has that benefited? It's a key question, I think. I love Fred McGriff. I loved watching him swing the bat, loved those corny and joyous Tom Emanski commercials, loved the "Crime Dog" nickname and always found him to be a delight when interviewing him. A couple of years ago, when I was fortunate to host an event featuring McGriff at the Negro Leagues Hall of Game ceremony, I introduced him to my daughters.

"I love your shoes!" he said to our oldest daughter, Elizabeth. "How can I get those?"

He instantly became her favorite player ever.

But as a Hall of Fame voter, I had to consider McGriff in a very specific context. Was he a Hall of Fame player as compared to the players already in the Hall of Fame? It's so close. He's better than some, not as good as others. He has as many home runs as [Lou Gehrig](#), but not quite the 500 that would clarify things. His career value is right on the border. His impact on the game is substantial and puts him right on the border. I have written before that, for me, Fred McGriff is the Hall of Fame line.

But then, there was another question to ask: Was he one of the 10 best players on the ballot? This is the limit for voters, and this was at a time when you could make a viable argument for as many as 20 players on the ballot. As this thing developed, I never did vote for McGriff. The vast majority of us didn't.

So for 10 years, McGriff had to wake up on a January morning to find out that he wasn't a Hall of Famer. And now, in 2022 I assume, he will be elected into the Hall by 16 voters who get together in a room to talk it over. This is a really weird way to grant baseball immortality.

Keith Hernandez

St. Louis—New York Mets—Cleveland, 1974-1990

A .300 hitter who essentially reinvented the way first basemen attack bunts, Mex won the MVP award in 1979 when he led the league in average, runs and hits. Starred for two World Series-winning teams, the 1982 Cardinals and 1986 Mets. He's Keith Hernandez.

I am not entirely clear why Keith Hernandez's Hall of Fame case never got going. As an 11-time Gold Glove winner who won an MVP award and is pretty widely regarded as the greatest defensive first baseman ever, he was certainly one of the most famous players of his day (and he became even more famous after retirement for his work on Seinfeld and in commercials).

He seemed like the sort of player who would capture the voters' imaginations, especially because he starred in New York, which — if you follow the conventional wisdom — is supposed to make a big difference.

But things never really got going for him. In his first Hall of Fame year, 1996, Hernandez barely got the 5 percent necessary just to stay on the ballot. He did stay on the ballot for nine years, but just barely each time. He never got 11 percent of the vote. In those nine years, three first basemen were elected by either the BBWAA or veterans committees. Here are those three in career WAR, seven-year peak WAR and JAWS, the Jay Jaffe invention that combines them both.

1. Tony Pérez (54.0 career WAR, 36.5 peak, 45.3 JAWS)
2. Orlando Cepeda (50.1 career WAR, 34.5 peak, 42.3 JAWS)
3. Eddie Murray (68.7 career WAR, 39.1 peak, 53.9 JAWS)

OK, now compare them to Keith Hernandez — 60.1 career WAR, 41.3 peak, 50.8 JAWS.

You will notice, I do use WAR and JAWS quite a bit when discussing these players. This is not to say that I always agree with WAR and JAWS' conclusions; this list, as you have certainly noticed, does not go in order of those things. But I think what WAR and JAWS do well is give us a baseline to discuss.

And in this case, by WAR, Hernandez had the best seven-year peak of the four. I think that's probably right; he and Cepeda are the only two to win MVP awards, and Hernandez's 1979 season — .344/.417/.513, led league in runs and doubles, won the Gold Glove with outrageously good defense — was probably the best year any of the four had. And Hernandez had three or four years that were just about as good.

In career WAR, he only trails Murray because, let's be clear, Eddie Murray was a marvelous and indestructible force who played more than 3,000 games (a thousand or so more than Hernandez). Murray was a metronome who basically had the same superb year every year and over 21 seasons cracked more than 3,000 hits and 500 home runs. Murray is a first-ballot, no-doubt Hall of Famer.

But shouldn't that that put Hernandez close? Why has he basically been ignored?

I don't think it's one thing; it's never just one thing. Hernandez's struggle with drugs in the 1980s undoubtedly has something to do with it. The fact that he was not a home run hitter undoubtedly has something to do with it. The fact that his career ended up being a bit short — his last full season was at age 33 — undoubtedly has a lot to do with it.

But Hernandez also faces a unique challenge that can be summed up in two words: Don Mattingly.

They were not precise contemporaries. Hernandez is seven years older than Mattingly and had collected more than 1,000 hits, four Gold Gloves and an MVP award before Mattingly even debuted in the Major Leagues.

But ... they overlapped in New York. From 1983-89, Hernandez was first baseman for the Mets, Mattingly for the Yankees. They were each 6-foot, 180-or-so pound left-handed batters who sported fantastic mustaches. Comparisons were inevitable and plentiful.

And, frankly, it was a battle that Hernandez could not win, even if he did play for the superior team. Mattingly was everything in the mid-1980s while Hernandez was already into the decline phase of his career. Oh, Hernandez still had good years. In 1984, he hit .311, drove in 94 RBIs, won the Gold Glove and finished second in the MVP voting. He was just about as good in 1985 and '86 as the Mets roared to their World Series title.

But Mattingly was something else. He was almost mythical. He launched double after double into the gaps, crushed 30 homers a year, won his own Gold Gloves in large part because of the gorgeous way he scooped bad throws out of the dirt. And he did it with such style, such coolness, he was an '80s icon like Molly Ringwald, George Michael, Madonna, Bruce Willis, Princess Di — OK, he wasn't like any of them, but he had a vibe. New York belonged to Donnie Baseball.

And I don't think that Hernandez has ever quite escaped that comparison. Mattingly is not in the Hall of Fame. His career has been seen as too short. But the fire is still burning, there are so many people who believe that he belongs in Cooperstown.

Hernandez, meanwhile, is all but forgotten as a Hall of Fame candidate even though his case is significantly better than Mattingly's. I mean, again, not to make too much out of WAR but Hernandez over his career was worth 18 or 19 more wins than Mattingly. Offensively, he was more valuable than Mattingly because he walked almost twice as often. Defensively, he was more valuable than Mattingly — because he really was more valuable defensively than pretty much any first baseman in the game's history.

This leads to one more Keith Hernandez topic. A couple of weeks ago, I wrote about how I am left cold by the argument that [Jeff Kent belongs in the Hall of Fame](#) simply because he hit more home runs than any second baseman ever. But this is only because second basemen through the years rarely hit home runs. Kent's 377 homers are impressive enough as far as that goes, but that would rank him 10th among left fielders, 11th among right fielders and tied for 18th among first basemen. As I wrote then, this feels more like trivia than a notable argument to me.

But then: What are we supposed to do with the consensus that Hernandez was the greatest defensive first baseman ever? Isn't this the same thing? First base, by virtually all measures, is the least challenging and least important defensive position. How much does it matter when talking about the Hall of Fame to say that Hernandez played first base better than anyone else?

Well, I actually think it *does* matter, in a way that Kent's homer lead does not. The goal of every first baseman is to play the best defense possible — whether that means covering a lot of ground, rescuing bad throws, slapping down tags on pickoff plays, charging bunts and so on. The person who does that best makes the team better.

Meanwhile, the goal of second basemen is not only to hit home runs. Nobody thinks that Jeff Kent was the best hitter to play second base, just that he hit the most home runs.

Here, for argument's sake, is my opinion about the best defender ever at each position:

C: [Johnny Bench](#), HOF

1B: Keith Hernandez, not Hall of Fame

2B: Bill Mazerowski, HOF

SS: [Ozzie Smith](#), HOF

3B: [Brooks Robinson](#), HOF

LF: [Carl Yastrzemski](#), HOF (maybe [Barry Bonds](#), not a Hall of Famer though that has nothing to do with his defense).

CF: [Willie Mays](#), HOF

RF: [Roberto Clemente](#), HOF

If Hernandez was a poor hitter, I don't think his first base defense alone would be enough to get him into the Hall of Fame. But he was a very good hitter, an MVP, a big star. Like I said at the top, I do not quite understand why Hernandez hasn't received more support.

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES ANNUAL BASEBALL TRIVIA QUIZ

Whitey Ford faced 18 batters at least 100 times. Only one had a .300 average off him, at .339. Al Kaline faced Ford 129 times. In addition to batting .339, he hit three home runs and had 16 runs batted in.

Besides Bob Gibson, how many Hall of Fame pitchers have 3,000 career strikeouts as a pitcher while batting over .200 with at least 24 career home runs? Walter Johnson struck out 3,509 batters but was no slouch with the bat. His career average was .235 and he hit 24 home runs.

Joe Morgan was one of seven Hall of Famers who played in the 1983 World Series between the Orioles and the Phillies. Who were the other six? Eddie Murray, Steve Carlton, Cal Ripken Jr., Jim Palmer, Tony Perez, Mike Schmidt.

Only one batter hit more than eight career home runs off Tom Seaver — a left-handed-hitting outfielder who connected 11 times while batting .349 off Seaver for the Cubs and Dodgers. Rick Monday.

Last month, the Marlins' Don Mattingly became the fifth former M.V.P. to win the Manager of the Year award (first given in 1983). Can you name the other four? (Hint: two are Hall of Famers.) Joe Torre, Don Baylor, Kirk Gibson, Frank Robinson.

Oldest franchise to never have an MVP—New York Mets.

Three players won the Rookie of the Year Award between 2001-2010 and won the World Series that same season. Dontrelle Willis, Dustin Pedroia, Buster Posey.

Three players retired with exactly 521 career home runs. All are Hall of Famers who won at least one M.V.P. award — but none of them played in the World Series for the winning team. Willie McCovey, Frank Thomas, Ted Williams.

Roger Clemens, Willie Mays and Matt Williams all played in the World Series in three different decades.

Five men have a) played for the Mets, b) are not in the Hall of Fame and c) have had their number retired by a current team (in other words, not the Browns or Expos). Ken Boyer, Jim Fregosi, Randy Jones, Mike Scott, Don Zimmer.

Which Dodgers pitcher both won and lost a World Series clincher at the old Yankee Stadium? Hooton started and lost the decisive Game 6 in 1977 and then started and won the decisive Game 6 in 1981.

Chris Sale is the only pitcher in the 2000s to throw the first and last pitch of the same World Series?

Three players made the final out of a World Series in the division play era (1969-present) and also share a last name with a U.S. president. Davey Johnson, Willie Wilson, Otis Nixon (not Gary Carter, Reggie Jackson or Claudell Washington).

These pitchers won 20 games for last place teams:

Roger Clemens, 1997 Blue Jays

Clemens' record: 21-7 | Blue Jays: 76-86

Phil Niekro, 1979 Braves

Niekro's record: 21-20 | Braves: 66-94

Nolan Ryan, 1974 Angels

Ryan's record: 22-16 | Angels: 68-94

Steve Carlton, 1972 Phillies

Carlton's record: 27-10 | Phillies: 59-97

Reminder of what a dominant season this was: Cy Young Award with a 1.97 ERA, 310 strikeouts and 30 complete games, won 15 straight decisions, won 45.8% of the team's wins.

A guy named Ned Garver (20-12) for the 1951 St. Louis Browns is the only pitcher to win 20 games for a team that lost 100 games.

MLB Players we lost in 2020 (from mlb.com)

[Dick Allen \(age 78\)](#)

One of the most unappreciated great baseball players in history, Allen had to withstand as much racist abuse as any star of his era. ("Dick was a sensitive Black man who refused to be treated as a second-class citizen," Mike Schmidt said.) He responded by hitting, hitting and

hitting some more. Allen was widely thought to be near selection to the Hall of Fame before his passing in December.

Johnny Antonelli (age 89)

One of the most heralded prospects ever -- and one of the first [“Bonus Babies”](#) -- Antonelli had his best years with the Giants, including a brilliant 1954 season, when he won the World Series. The lefty also served in the Korean War in the middle of his career ... and was Army teammates with Willie Mays.

[Kim Batiste \(age 52\)](#)

An infielder who had a key hit in the 1993 National League Championship Series for that beloved Phillies team.

[Glenn Beckert \(age 79\)](#)

The longtime Cub once made four consecutive All-Star teams from 1969-72.

Frank Bolling (age 88)

A longtime second baseman for the Tigers and Braves, he once hit a grand slam off Sandy Koufax.

[Lou Brock* \(age 81\)](#)

The Cardinals' trade of key starting pitcher Ernie Broglio to the Cubs for an unproven speedster turned out to be the greatest trade in franchise history: Cards fans used it to taunt Cubs fans for decades. Brock was most known for his stolen bases -- he was the all-time leader when he retired, and he's still second, with no active player within 600 of him -- but he was great at everything. And he was a figure of quiet dignity in St. Louis, beloved in the community in a way that may have even exceeded his baseball stardom.

[Gene Budig \(age 81\)](#)

The president of the American League from 1994-99, he was the last person to hold the position.

[Horace Clarke \(age 81\)](#)

A likable Yankee during a fallow period for the franchise -- he played for the Yanks for 10 years without playing in a World Series, which is hard to do -- he once broke up three no-hitters in the ninth inning in the span of a *month*.

Derryl Cousins (age 74)

He umpired three World Series, one perfect game behind the plate (Dallas Braden's) and was at second base for the last game at the old Yankee Stadium.

[Ed Farmer \(age 70\)](#)

A successful reliever for the White Sox, he was the radio voice of the team for 30 years.

[Tony Fernandez \(age 57\)](#)

The longtime slick-fielding Blue Jay played for seven teams in his career and hit .395 in his two World Series appearances. He also was the Yankees' starting shortstop before Derek Jeter.

[Whitey Ford* \(age 91\)](#)

"I've been a Yankee fan since I was 5 years old," Ford said when he was inducted into the Hall of Fame, and few have represented the franchise with the signature class and dignity that the Yankees franchise self-mythologizes better than Ford. Of all those Yankees of the 1960s, it was *he* who was known as "The Chairman of the Board." He wasn't physically overwhelming, but as Casey Stengel put it, "If it takes 27 outs to win, who's going to get them out more ways than Mr. Ford?"

[Jim Frey \(age 88\)](#)

High school best friends with Don Zimmer, Frey managed the Royals to a 1980 World Series appearance and nearly got the Cubs to one in '84.

[Dámaso García \(age 63\)](#)

He won the 1982 AL Silver Slugger Award at second base for the Blue Jays and stole 54 bases that season. He also made the All-Star team in '85 and '86.

[Bob Gibson* \(age 84\)](#)

From [my own personal obit](#) for Gibson: "He loomed larger -- an almost mystical figure for the fanbase -- than everyone else, who were merely *legends*. Gibson was more like a grand auk, a regal figure whose mere presence seemed to elevate anyone in his proximity. Every year on Opening Day the Cardinals have all the members of the club's Hall of Fame return to St. Louis, wearing loud red jackets as the city -- which has shut down for the day -- greets them and the Clydesdales horses parading around the field. Everyone who can make it back always does. But there was something particularly special about having Bob Gibson there. You'd have inner-tier Hall of Famers in the room ... but when Gibson walked in, everyone hushed. *That's Bob Gibson*. The only thing you did when you were in the room with Bob Gibson is think, *'Oh my gosh I'm in the room with Bob Gibson.'*"

[David Glass \(age 84\)](#)

Glass owned the Royals from 1993-2019, at last winning a World Series ring in '15.

Carroll Hardy (age 87)

He played one year in the NFL before heading to baseball, where he became the only man to pinch-hit for Ted Williams. (Ted didn't much like it.)

Lou Johnson (age 86)

He spent a decade in the Minors before finally sticking in the Majors in his mid-30s, where he won a World Series as a starting outfielder for the Dodgers.

Jay Johnstone (age 74)

The longtime outfielder was an eccentric, an infamous puller of pranks and, when his career was over, a television personality, hosting the syndicated show "The Lighter Side of Sports." He was also in "The Naked Gun."

[Al Kaline* \(age 85\)](#)

"Mr. Tiger" debuted with the team at the age of 18 and spent the next 22 years with Detroit; at the time of his retirement, he'd spent more of his life as a Tiger than he had spent as anything else. He made 18 All-Star Games, won 10 Gold Glove Awards, earned the Roberto Clemente Award in 1973 and represented the Tigers franchise as well as anyone has ever represented anything.

Eddie Kasko (age 88)

A light-hitting infielder who came to the Majors straight after serving in the Korean War, Kasko was most known as a manager and executive in the Red Sox organization, where he played a hand in drafting Roger Clemens, Curt Schilling and Jeff Bagwell.

[Matt Keough \(age 64\)](#)

A converted infielder, he was a solid pitcher for the A's for nearly a decade. After his retirement, he appeared on "The Real Housewives of Orange County" with his ex-wife.

[Don Larsen \(age 90\)](#)

Larsen was shelled in his first start of the 1956 World Series, going just 1 2/3 innings in Game 2, giving up four runs (all unearned) and walking four batters. There were no such control issues in Game 5, in which he of course threw the only perfect game in postseason history and was thus responsible for one of the most famous games in baseball history.

Phil Linz (age 81)

He homered off Bob Gibson in the 1964 World Series, but he's much more well-known for the infamous ["harmonica incident"](#) that led to Yogi Berra being fired as manager at the end of the season.

[Mike McCormick \(age 81\)](#)

The first man to win a Cy Young Award for the Giants -- and the only until Tim Lincecum would do it more than 40 years later -- he's also the guy who gave up Hank Aaron's 500th homer.

[Lindy McDaniel \(age 84\)](#)

A longtime reliever, he pitched 21 years in the Majors, mostly for the Cardinals and Yankees. He also once retired 32 straight batters.

[John McNamara \(age 88\)](#)

A manager for six clubs in the Majors, his best team was in 1986 with the Red Sox, when he came oh-so-close to earning the curse-breaking designation that would eventually go to Terry Francona.

Denis Menke (age 80)

An oft-traveled infielder who ended up having a long career as a hitting coach.

[Joe Morgan* \(age 77\)](#)

The epitome of a player who could do everything, the Little General won two MVP Awards (1975, '76), and his Big Red Machine teams won the World Series both those years. He was also an incredible fielder and still got on base at an All-Star's clip into his 40s. He'd later become a longtime broadcaster whose views could be polarizing but his intelligence and understanding of the game was never questioned. As someone with speed, power and a keen batting eye, he was essentially the perfect "Moneyball" player.

[Bob Oliver \(age 77\)](#)

The father of longtime reliever Darren Oliver, Bob played a decade in the Majors and hit the first grand slam in Royals history.

[Ron Perranoski \(age 84\)](#)

A left-hander who won four World Series with the Dodgers, two as a player and two as a pitching coach.

[Charley Pride \(age 86\)](#)

The country music groundbreaker played in the Negro Leagues (he was an All-Star in 1956 and '57) and in the Minors before discovering an even more lucrative career. He was also a part-owner of the Rangers.

Rick Reed (age 70)

Reed worked the 1991 World Series and multiple All-Star Games. He's also the umpire in the movie "For the Love of the Game."

[Tom Seaver* \(age 75\)](#)

There have been millions of men named "Tom," but only one of them got to be known as "Tom Terrific." Seaver was both overwhelming and precise, physically gifted and deeply intelligent, making him an impossible combination for hitters to deal with. He was the savior of the Mets, The Franchise, a North Star for that whole franchise still to this day. He was a first-ballot Hall of Famer and yet, after college, he was nearly a dentist. After turning down an offer from the Dodgers he felt was beneath him, then-Dodgers scout Tommy Lasorda told him, "Good luck with your dental career."

Hal Smith (age 89)

In Game 7 of the 1960 World Series, Smith hit a dramatic three-run homer to give the Pirates a 9-7 lead in bottom of the eighth. The Yankees would tie the game in the top of the ninth, leading to Bill Mazeroski's far-more-remembered walk-off shot in the bottom half of the ninth.

[Hank Steinbrenner \(age 63\)](#)

George's oldest son co-chaired the Yankees with his brother Hal.

[Tony Taylor \(age 84\)](#)

The longtime Phillie played 19 years in the Majors and notched 2,007 hits.

[Claudell Washington \(age 65\)](#)

Signed out of sandlot ball in Berkeley, Calif., Washington made the 1975 All-Star Game when he was still 20. He's also the guy who [hit the ball that Ferris Bueller caught](#).

[Bob Watson \(age 74\)](#)

The veteran hitter played 19 years and scored the millionth run in MLB history. But he made his biggest mark as an executive, becoming the first Black general manager to win a World Series ring with the Yankees in 1996.

Bobby Winkles (age 90)

The longtime Arizona State coach -- he coached Reggie Jackson there -- made the leap to the Majors and managed the Angels and the A's.

[Jimmy Wynn \(age 78\)](#)

An underrated hitter with a 15-year career, Wynn was a heavy-strikeout, heavy-walk, heavy-power hitter long before that became baseball's norm.