

Progressive Team Home Run Leaders of the New York Mets and Chicago White Sox

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Abstract - In this paper, we will look at which players have been the career home run leaders for the New York Mets and the Chicago White Sox since the beginning of the organizations.

Introduction

Baseball has always had a fascination with statistics. Alan Schwarz's book The Numbers Game gives a wonderful history of baseball and statistics. One area where statistics are of particular interest are statistical leaders. In this paper I shall look at the players who were the career home run leaders for the New York Mets and the Chicago White Sox through the history of the two teams.

I will eventually compile such lists for all teams but I chose to start with these two teams. I chose the Mets because they have always been my favorite team. I chose the White Sox in honor of their recent World Series victory and because I thought Dennis DiMarzio, a fellow colleague, baseball enthusiast, and long-time White Sox fan, would enjoy it.

The Mets

The New York Mets began play in 1962, ending a four year absence of National League baseball in New York. New York's management chose to populate the roster with a number of veteran players, most of whom had left their most productive years far behind them. Among the players on the roster, there were three players who already had hit at least 200 career home runs. Gil Hodges had 361, on his way to a career total of 370. Gus Bell had hit 200 and finished with 206. Bell had very little impact with the Mets in the 30 games he played for them before being traded to the Milwaukee Braves on May 21, 1962. Interestingly, Bell was sent as the player to be named later in a November 1961 trade that brought the one established slugger who actually had an impact on the Mets. Frank Thomas came to the Mets with 223 career home runs. He finished with 286 home runs, with 52 of those coming with the Mets in slightly more than two seasons.

The 1962 Mets, while not a successful team, did hit a decent number of home runs for a season during this pitcher dominated era of baseball. They finished 6th in the ten-team National League with 139 home runs. Thomas hit 34 of those.

Though he didn't have a huge impact for the Mets until years later as the manager of the 1969 "Miracle Mets," Hodges did stamp his name firmly in Mets history on April 11, 1962. In this first game in Mets history, Hodges hit a home run leading off the 4th inning against the St. Louis Cardinals' Larry Jackson, registering the first ever New York Mets home run, giving him

the career Mets' home run lead. Sole possession of that honor lasted only until four outs later as Charlie Neal hit a one out home run in the 5th inning, also off of Jackson.

Over the next few days, Thomas, Jim Marshall and Felix Mantilla each hit their first home runs of the season to create a five man tie at the top of the Mets' career home run list, with one. Mantilla's blast came in the first inning on April 15 against Bob Friend of the Pittsburgh Pirates. His place at the top of the leader board lasted only three more innings when Marshall hit his second home run in as many days to become the first Mets' player with two home runs. On April 18, Thomas joined Marshall with his second home run.

April 19th was the beginning of the time when only legitimate home run threats were at the top of the list. Ed Bouchee hit a 4th inning home run to join Marshall and Thomas. However, Thomas quickly asserted himself, hitting number three in the 6th inning and number four in the 8th. All three home runs came off Ray Washburn of the Cardinals. From that point on, until 1964 when he was traded by the Mets to the Phillies, Thomas' supremacy was never threatened. He left with a record 52 home runs as a New York Met.

On September 3, 1965, Jim Hickman set two Mets home run records. He was the first New York Met to hit three home runs in one game. Additionally, his second home run tied Thomas at 52, and his third gave him sole possession of first place on the all-time list with 53. Hickman finished the year with 56 on his way to 60 career Mets home runs.

Hickman's reign lasted until August 12, 1969 when Ed Kranepool hit a home run against Houston's Don Wilson and passed him. Kranepool's place in Mets' history as a home run hitter is more a matter of longevity than anything else. He has almost 25% more at-bats than any other Met in history. His place on this list is also interesting since he held the top spot three different times. Passing Hickman, he stayed at the top for less than a year when Ron Swoboda's two home runs on May 31, 1970 allowed him to tie and pass Kranepool. At the end of that season, Swoboda departed the Mets with a team record 69 home runs. That led until July 20, 1971 when Kranepool hit his 70th against future Hall of Famer Ferguson Jenkins. However, the next two years saw Kranepool play a limited role and, on June 14, 1974, he was tied by Cleon Jones at 85. Kranepool regained the lead 11 days later. Jones tied him again on June 29 and passed him on July 2. Jones ended his Met career in 1975, playing his last game with them on July 18, with 93 career home runs. On September 19, Kranepool again pulled even but it took until April 17, 1976 before Kranepool again took the lead.

Kranepool finished his career, all served with the Mets, with 118 home runs. His stay at the top of the home run list lasted until 1982.

In 1975, the Mets purchased Dave Kingman from the San Francisco Giants. He was the first real home run hitter the Mets had since Frank Thomas. In the two and a half years of his first stint with the Mets, he slugged 82 home runs. From 1981 through 1983, he returned, hitting another 72 home runs as a Met. His home runs against the Astros' Joe Niekro on May 29, 1982 and the Pirates' Rick Rhoden on June 9, 1982 allowed Kingman to tie and pass Kranepool.

Darryl Strawberry ended Kingman's reign in 1988. Kingman had finished with 154 home runs for the Mets. On May 1, Strawberry hit a 420 foot home run off Cincinnati's Pat Perry to tie Kingman. Two days later, Strawberry victimized Atlanta's Juan Eichelberger to become the Mets' all-time home run leader.

For a while it looked like Mike Piazza might threaten Strawberry's record. However, it now looks like Piazza, with 220 career home runs as a Met, is destined to move to the American League as a designated hitter. So, Strawberry's record appears safe for now. Perhaps David Wright will some day pass Strawberry.

The White Sox

Baseball's dead ball era is generally regarded as spanning the period from 1901 through 1919. In 1930, Carl Reynolds hit 22 home runs and Smead Jolley hit 16. These were the first two White Sox to hit more than 14 home runs in a season. By this time, 19 major leaguers had combined for 39 seasons with 30 or more home runs, led by Babe Ruth with 10 such seasons. In fact, from 1901 through 1930, there were 15 seasons in which the White Sox failed to out homer the **individual** league home run leader. This is not to say the White Sox were not a successful team during those years. They won four American League pennants and two world championships during that time (of course, they probably should have won a third in 1919, but that is another topic). They won over half their games 19 times in those 30 years, seven times winning over 60% of their games. They finished in the top half of the league standings exactly half the time. They just didn't hit many home runs. In fact, their lack of power earned them the early nickname "the Pale Hose".

As a team, the 1901 White Sox had remarkable power parity. Fourteen players hit home runs. Ten of them were at least tied for the team lead at some point in the season. Twenty-two of the team's 32 home runs either gave someone the team lead or tied him for the lead.

On April 29, 1901, Frank Shugart hit the first home run in White Sox history against Frank Owen of the Detroit Tigers. Obviously, this gave him the team career lead at one. He was then joined for that honor by John Skopec (4/30/1901), Herm McFarland (5/1/1901 in the 2nd inning), Dummy Hoy (5/1/1901 in the 5th inning), Fielder Jones (5/6/1901), Jack Katoll (5/12/1901 in the 8th inning), Fred Hartman (5/12/1901 in the 9th inning) and Sam Mertes (5/14/1901). Eight players hit one home run before anyone hit two.

The deadlock was broken by Hartman on May 16. Parity again reigned as he was joined by Mertes (5/23/1901 in the 3rd inning), McFarland (5/23/1901 in the 6th inning) and Frank Isbell (5/28/1901). June 8 saw Mertes and McFarland both hit number three. Mertes hit his in the first inning, McFarland in the 2nd. They were joined at three by Hartman (6/10/1901), Isbell (6/17/1901), and Billy Sullivan (7/7/1901).

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The first to four home runs was McFarland (7/29/1901). He was joined by Sullivan (8/7/1901) and Mertes (8/13/1901). Mertes hit his fifth on September 6. The White Sox played 19 more games that season but no one else joined him at five.

Mertes extended his lead with his 6th career home run with the White Sox on May 22, 1902. It was also his last home run with the White Sox. On August 30, 1902, Isbell tied Mertes. Isbell became the sole leader a week later when he hit his 7th. That was his last home run that year.

Isbell extended his stay atop the leader board by hitting two in 1903, one in 1904, two in 1905, none in either 1906 or 1907, and one in 1908 before retiring after his homerless 1909.

Isbell's stay at the top lasted until July 3, 1913 when Ping Bodie hit number 13 of his White Sox career against Roy Mitchell of the St. Louis Browns. Bodie finished 1913 with 17 home runs. He added three more in 1914. His 20 remained the standard until 1919.

On August 7, 1919, Happy Felsch hit a home run against Scott Perry of the Philadelphia Athletics. That was his 20th. On August 27, he hit one against Bert Gallia of the Browns to become the career leader. He hit four more in 1919 and 14 in 1920 to give him 38 for the White Sox career record. He was only 28 years old but he would hit no more home runs for anyone. He was banned from baseball by Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis for his role in the Black Sox scandal.

Felsch remained the leader until 1924. Hall of Famer Harry Hooper hit his 38th career home run as a member of the White Sox on August 26. It was followed the next day by number 39. Together with the six he hit in 1925, Hooper then retired with a White Sox record 45 career home runs.

Hooper's reign did not last very long. July 1 and July 2 in 1927 saw Bibb Falk hit career home runs numbers 45 and 46. Falk made it to 50 before leaving the White Sox after the 1928 season. His 50 was the record until the White Sox finally had an actual home run threat.

In his first two years in the major leagues, 1934 and 1935, Henry John "Zeke" Bonura, totaled 48 home runs, placing him second on the White Sox career list. On May 3, 1936, he hit a home run against Gordon Rhodes of the Athletics to tie Falk. Two days later he hit two against Harry Kelley of the Athletics to take the White Sox career lead. Bonura finished his time with the White Sox with 79 home runs. That total remained the record for 19 years.

The reasons Bonura did not remain longer with the White Sox are interesting. "A fans' delight and manager's nightmare, Bonura led AL first basemen in fielding in 1936 by refusing to become involved. As easy grounders bounded by untouched, Zeke waved his "Mussolini salute" with his glove. Known affectionately as "Banana Nose," the colorful and outspoken Bonura was the White Sox' first bona fide home run hitter, with 27 in his rookie year. He continued slugging, but his nonchalant fielding, aggravating annual hold-outs, and rumored interest in owner J. Lou Comiskey's daughter got him traded to Washington in 1938 in

exchange for Joe Kuhel, the AL's top fielding first baseman."
(http://www.baseballlibrary.com/baseballlibrary/ballplayers/B/Bonura_Zeke.stm)

Minnie Minoso finally caught up to Bonura in 1956. On September 2, 1956, Minoso hit a home run against the Cleveland Indians' Hank Aguirre to tie Bonura. The next day, he hit his 80th home run with the White Sox, against Steve Gromek of the Tigers.

Minoso, like Kranepool with the Mets, lost and regained the lead a number of times. Losing it was not a matter of lack of productivity. Instead, Minoso was traded away twice.

At the end of 1957, Minoso's total had reached 100. He spent 1958 and 1959 with Cleveland while Sherm Lollar slowly chipped away at Minoso's lead. Finally, on August 12, 1959, Lollar's home run against Pete Burnside of the Tigers enabled him to tie Minoso. He hit another against the Tigers' Tom Morgan the next day to take the lead with 101. By the end of 1959, he had a total of 108.

June, July and August of 1960 saw Minoso and Lollar in a record-breaking tug-of-war. Minoso tied Lollar at 110 on June 26. On July 26, Minoso homered against Earl Wilson of the Red Sox to take the lead. Lollar tied him at 111 the next day against Tom Sturdivant. Two days later, Lollar's home run against Tom Morgan of the Washington Senators put him back on top. On July 31, Minoso hit one in the 3rd inning and one in the 4th to take the lead back. He had the lead alone for four days when Lollar tied it again on August 3. Minoso again took the lead, now at 114, on August 19. On August 27, Lollar tied him again. Minoso finally took the lead for good on August 30 and finished the year at 120 while Lollar had 115. Minoso extended his total to 134 in 1961, was traded the second time, returned in 1964 to hit one last home run and then retired in 1964, at age 41, with a team record 135.

Interestingly, Minoso did play again for the White Sox. In 1976, a 53-year-old Minoso came out of retirement to play on September 11, 12 and 30, getting one hit in 8 at bats. He played again in 1980, when the 57-year-old coach became the first player to play in five different decades. He was hitless in two at bats.

Minoso's record stood until 1974. Three years earlier, Bill Melton had become the first member of the White Sox to ever lead the league in home runs. Interestingly, Dick Allen did it the next year and again in 1974. No White Sox player has done it since. But while Allen was leading the league in 1974, Melton became the team's career leader. On August 3 and 4th, Melton hit White Sox career home runs 135 and 136 (against Jim Bibby and Steve Foucault, respectively, of the Texas Rangers) to take over the team career lead. Melton, like Bonura, was a defensive liability. On May 8, 1970, he had to be removed from the game after being knocked unconscious by a foul ball that he missed.

Melton, who left the White Sox after 1975, finished with 154 home runs. He held on to the top spot until 1987. Harold Baines hit number 154 on July 21 and 155 on July 22 to set the new standard. Baines raised the mark to 186 before he left the White Sox in 1989. He came back to

the Sox in 1996-1997 and again in 2000-2001 but was unable to regain the lead he had lost in the interim.

On August 8, 1990, Carlton Fisk tied Baines with his home run against Tom Gordon of the Kansas City Royals. On August 17, he hit another against knuckleballer Charlie Hough of the Rangers to become the team leader. Fisk retired after the 1993 season with a White Sox record 214 home runs. By then, however, it was obvious that his mark would not last long since the best home run hitter in White Sox history was already making great progress toward the record.

Frank Thomas, known as "The Big Hurt," hit seven home runs in his rookie year of 1990. He followed that with 32 in 1991 and 24 in 1993. In 1994, the year after Fisk retired, Thomas exploded with 41, followed by 38 in 1995. Among the 40 he hit in 1996, were the record tying 214th on September 13 and numbers 215, 216 and 217, all hit on September 15.

Thomas left the White Sox after the 2005 season and was a free agent signed by the Oakland Athletics. His career total stands at 448. Paul Konerko is the closest of any current White Sox player but he has hit only 203 so far. While it is not impossible that Konerko could hit more than Thomas, I would be surprised if he stayed with the White Sox long enough to get them all with Chicago.

Conclusion

These two studies are the first of what will hopefully be similar looks at all of the other major league teams. Baseball is unique among sports in the way that statistics play such a central role in the game and the fans' enjoyment thereof. The importance of baseball statistics is evidenced by the existence of the Society for American Baseball Research, a scholarly society dedicated to studying baseball.

References and Acknowledgements

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Biography

Fred Worth received his B.S. in Mathematics from Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri in 1982. He received his M.S. in Applied Mathematics in 1987 and his Ph.D. in Mathematics in 1991 from the University of Missouri-Rolla where his son is currently attending school. He has been teaching at Henderson State University since August 1991. He is a member of the Society for American Baseball Research, the Mathematical Association of America, and the Association of Christians in the Mathematical Sciences.