

Who belongs in baseball's Hall of Fame? That is, which players have EARNED the right to be there? This book answers that question, and tells you precisely how good a career the player had compared to the other great players. For example, at the end of the 2010 season, Derek Jeter was the #6 best shortstop of the modern era (since 1920) and the #54 best player among ALL position players of that period. Dr. Michael Hoban is a retired university professor. He earned his Ph.D. in mathematics from Columbia University, and has been a fan of the game for more than 60 years. The professor has been a serious baseball analyst since 1998 when he joined SABR (Society for American Baseball Research). This is his fourth book on baseball.

A GOOD CAWS: A Hall of Fame Handbook

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A GOOD CAWS: A Hall of Fame Handbook

The CAWS Career Gauge:
Who Belongs and Who Does Not

“Mike, ... I appreciate your using Win Shares for the purpose for which it was intended ... thanks ... Bill (James).”

Michael Hoban, Ph.D.

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ISBN 978-1-60910-651-5

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Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2011

First Edition

Contents

Introduction	1
About The Author	3
The Win Shares System	5
A Good CAWS.....	12
How to Judge a Career	14
The CAWS Formula.....	16
The Deadball Era and the Modern Era	18
Defensive Adjustment	20
Numbers and the Hall of Fame.....	22
Four Special Groups of Players.....	25
Core Value - Elmer Flick and Heinie Manush	28
Jackie Robinson – The 1800/255 Benchmark	30
Pedro Martinez and Sandy Koufax – the 2400/180 Benchmark	33
Mariano Rivera – the 1500/150 Benchmark.....	36
Nolan Ryan and Tom Seaver – The Value of Longevity	39
Strange HOF Voting – Allie Reynolds and Bob Lemon	42
Even Stranger HOF Voting - Maury Wills and Luis Aparicio	48
Players with 3000 Hits – Do They have HOF Numbers?.....	51
500 Home Runs – Sammy Sosa, Odd Man Out	54
Blacks in Baseball – A Question of Quality, not Quantity.....	58
Steroids and the Hall of Fame	69
The Hall of Doubt?.....	77
The Veterans Committee Ballot - Pre-1943 Election.....	80
The Veterans Committee Ballot - After-1942 Election.....	84
The Expansion Era Hall of Fame Ballot - 2010	90

A GOOD CAWS

The 21 st Century Hall of Famers	95
Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens – Great Talent Compromised.....	100
Albert Pujols – An Amazing Ten Seasons	106
Derek Jeter – Baseball Class	110
Chipper Jones – Third Base Excellence	113
Roberto Alomar – Just How Good Was He?	116
Tim Lincecum – Some Stars Get No Respect.....	120
The Class of 2010 – the New Hall of Famers	124
John Smoltz – Does He Have Hall of Fame Numbers?	131
Barry Larkin – A Hall of Fame Career at Shortstop	135
ARod and Manny – Two More Casualties.....	139
Dick Allen and Fred McGriff – An Interesting Comparison	142
The 2011 HOF Ballot – How Many REAL Hall of Famers?.....	144
2013 Hall of Fame Ballot - Some Impressive First Timers.....	152
The Lists	155
The Position Players with Obvious HOF Numbers	157
The Pitchers Who Have Obvious HOF Numbers.....	162
The 25 Best Careers at Each Position.....	167
The Hall of Famers Who Do Not Have HOF Numbers	181
The Position Players with HOF Numbers Not Yet in the Hall	185
The Pitchers with HOF Numbers Not Yet in the Hall of Fame.....	187
The 140 Best Players of the Modern Era.....	189
The CAWS Ranking for Position Players – 2011.....	202
The CAWS Ranking for Pitchers - 2011	212

The Win Shares System

The “Best Players”

Fans of any sport are usually interested in knowing who are (or were) the best players in the game. At the end of the playing season, many fans enjoy looking back and being able to say that player A had a better season than player B. And when a player’s career is ending, we like to conclude that “C was better than D and almost as good as E.” Comparing athletes in this way is almost a national pastime in itself.

Baseball fans are particularly fortunate in that no other sport rivals baseball for the sheer number of statistics available for comparing the players. In fact, there are so many numbers available, that it often leads to confusion as to what to look at in order to judge how good a player really is (or was). For many years, a player’s batting average (BA) was used to suggest who were the best hitters. But, careful analysis over a number of years has now convinced us that a combination of on-base-percentage (OBP) and slugging average (SLG) is a better indicator of who were the most effective batters.

Of course, in baseball, batting alone does not tell us who is a “better player.” Fielding must also enter into the equation. And judging fielding has always been more difficult than judging hitting. The skills required of a good shortstop or catcher are much different than those required of a left fielder or a first baseman. And attempting to judge who was the best “all-around” player has always been difficult.

But not to worry. Over the years, there have been a number of dedicated people who have devoted a considerable amount of time

A GOOD CAWS

into researching these questions. Many of these analysts are members of an organization known as SABR (Society for American Baseball Research). As a baseball fan and a mathematician, I have spent considerable time over the past twelve years studying the various approaches that have been taken regarding the comparison of baseball players. And I am happy to report that the most highly respected of all of these analysts, Bill James, has developed a system that I believe is **a quantum leap ahead of all such systems** in this regard.

Bill James is a dedicated researcher and a prolific and enjoyable writer. For more than thirty years he has been considered the guru of baseball analysis. In fact, in 2004, as a special advisor to the Boston Red Sox front office, he contributed to that team's first World Series triumph in more than eighty years.

In 2002, Bill James published his book called **WIN SHARES** in which he introduced a new system that was the product of more than twenty-five years of research. And it is this system that I am convinced is **far better than any other that has been developed**. The method is so revolutionary that I believe that it is fair to say that **FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER**, we are able to validly look at and compare players (including hitting and fielding and pitching) no matter when they played or whom they played for. **The key to the value of Win Shares is that it tells us how valuable a player was to his team each season.** And, of course, a player's value to his team is what the game is all about.

Win Shares is a very complex system (the book is 728 pages long). But it is not really necessary to understand every nuance of the system in order to appreciate its value. The true genius of the approach seems to be two-fold. First, like any valid evaluation system, it measures a player's value relative to the era in which he

played and to the playing conditions under which he performed. That is, adjustments are made to account for such things as playing in the “dead-ball era” or playing in a “pitcher’s ballpark.” But the second (and more remarkable achievement) is that it appears to be able to measure a player's value regardless of whether he played on a winning or a losing team. And it is not necessary to completely understand how the system works in order to enjoy the results that it produces.

Put as simply as possible, here is what the Win Shares system does - it tells us how good a season a player had. It awards a team a certain number of win shares for the season – depending on the number of games that the team won during the season. It then takes those win shares and distributes them among the players on the team depending on each player’s contribution to the team during the season. And, as a rule of thumb, here is how the number of win shares in a season can be interpreted for an individual position player:

1. 30-40 Win Shares = MVP-type Season
2. 20-30 Win Shares = All-Star Season
3. 10-20 Win Shares = Solid Regular Player
4. 0-10 Win Shares = Bench Player

It is worth noting that the average MVP winner through 2004 had 33.4 win shares for the season.

Here is how the Win Shares system is described in **The Bill James Handbook 2005** (ACTA Sports) – p. 361

“Bill James devised Win Shares to reduce a player’s statistics to a single number related to the number of wins he contributed to his team. It includes offensive, pitching and defensive accomplishments. The quality of the team does not affect an

A GOOD CAWS

individual player's Win Shares. A great player on a bad team will rate as well as a great player on a good team. ...

A Win Share is one-third of a team's win, credited to an individual player. The Win Shares credited to the players on a team always total up to exactly three times the team's win total. If the team wins 100 games, the players on the team will be credited with 300 Win Shares – 300 thirds of a win. If the team wins 80 games, the players on the team will be credited with 240 Win Shares, always and without exception.

Win Shares are a great tool for evaluating trades, award voting and Hall of Fame credentials.”

I certainly agree with this last statement and that is why I feel that Win Shares (when used appropriately) can tell us which players definitely have Hall of Fame numbers.

To get a little more flavor of what Win Shares are all about, consider the following statements from Bill James himself in the Introduction to the book **WIN SHARES** (STATS, Inc., 2002).

*“For many years, I have wanted to have a system **to summarize each player's value each season into a simple integer.** Willie Mays' value in 1954 is 40, in 1955, 40, in 1956, 27, while Mickey Mantle in the same three years is 36,41,49. If we had an analytical system in which we had confidence, and which delivered results in that simple a form, it would open the door to researching thousands of questions which are virtually inaccessible without such a method. It would reduce enormously the time and effort required to research such questions, which can be accessed by other methods, but only with great difficulty. (p.3)*

*We have dozens of methods to compare players. We have piecemeal ways to put those together. What we lack is a way of tying them all into a coherent analysis. We need a **comprehensive system**, in which we have confidence, which has a place for all of the things we must think about when trying to assess value – productivity, park illusions, defense, playing time, contributions to winning teams. Everything. (p. 5)*

*This is the only analytical system I am aware of which is **team-based, rather than derived from individual stats**. Most analysis builds up from the performance of individuals. This analysis breaks down the performance of the team. (p. 9)*

This last point is crucial to understanding the uniqueness of the Win Shares approach and to appreciating the system. Besides being comprehensive, it looks first at the team's accomplishments and then determines each player's contribution to the team's success.

Win Shares – Comprehensive Yet Simple

As long as the game has been played, fans have attempted to compare players using the many statistics available to do so. How many hits or home runs or runs-batted-in or runs scored or stolen bases did the player have? What was his batting average or on-base percentage or slugging average or OPS? And these numbers do not tell us anything about his fielding ability.

The true genius of Win Shares is that it **includes ALL of a player's contributions** to his team and represents them in a single number. So that if we want to know who had the best season, we can simply list those players who had the most win shares for that particular season. As an example of the beauty and simplicity of the system,

A GOOD CAWS

here are lists of the top ten players in each league in 2006 (data from hardballtimes.com).

American League

	Batting	Fielding	Win Shares
1. Derek Jeter	28.0	4.6	33
2. Joe Mauer	21.3	9.5	31
3. David Ortiz	29.3	0.1	29
4. Manny Ramirez	26.9	2.1	29
5. Justin Morneau	25.5	2.0	28
6. Jermaine Dye	23.7	2.8	27
7. Raul Ibanez	24.0	3.1	27
8. Jim Thome	25.9	0.0	26
9. Carlos Guillen	21.5	4.3	26
10. Michael Young	18.5	7.7	26

National League

1. Albert Pujols	36.3	2.4	39
2. Carlos Beltran	30.0	8.3	38
3. Lance Berkman	31.7	2.0	34
4. Miguel Cabrera	30.9	2.8	34
5. David Wright	27.4	4.3	32
6. Ryan Howard	29.8	1.2	31
7. Alfonso Soriano	25.9	3.6	30
8. Jose Reyes	26.3	3.1	29
9. Mike Cameron	21.2	7.2	28
10. Chase Utley	23.2	4.9	28

A HALL OF FAME HANDBOOK

As you can see, Derek Jeter had the best overall season in the American League in 2006 with 33 win shares although David Ortiz had the best hitting season with 29.3 win shares.

And in the National League, Albert Pujols had both the best overall season with 39 win shares and the best hitting season with 36.3 win shares.

Does this mean that Derek Jeter and Albert Pujols were the most valuable players in their leagues during the 2006 season? Yes, it does. But does that mean that they were chosen to receive the Most Valuable Player Awards (MVP) for 2006? No, it does not.

As it turns out, Justin Morneau (#5 on our list above) was chosen the American League MVP and Ryan Howard (#6 on the list above) was chosen National League MVP.

Numbers and the Hall of Fame

Who belongs in the Hall of Fame? According to the guidelines set forth for the BBWAA election process, “*Voting shall be based upon the player's record, playing ability, integrity, sportsmanship, character, and contributions to the team(s) on which the player played.*” This statement clearly says that “integrity, sportsmanship, character” may be considered. It **does not say** that accomplishments such as managing, broadcasting, etc. may be considered. There are some fans who feel that Phil Rizzuto, for example, was elected by the Veteran’s Committee partly because of his long broadcasting career. And since he played and was a broadcaster for the same team (the Yankees), one could interpret the statement above as allowing for this.

But what about Gil Hodges? Should Hodges’ success as the manager of the New York Mets be considered for his induction *as a player* since he played for such a brief period of time with the Mets (“contributions to the team on which the player **played**”)? The answer would appear to be - No. But that does not mean that the voters will necessarily see it that way.

In any case, I think it is fair to say that the official statement above makes it very clear that a player’s **on-field performance (as a player)** should be regarded as the **most important consideration** for induction into baseball’s ultimate shrine.

In the **CAWS Career Gauge**, I have used Win Shares to create a series of benchmarks (or standards) to tell us which players (including pitchers) have HOF numbers based on their on-field performance during the regular season (that is, no numbers from the

A HALL OF FAME HANDBOOK

post-season are used at all). It is important to note that the purpose of the CAWS Gauge is to identify those players who have **obvious HOF numbers**. There are some players (like Dick Allen) who have met the CAWS standard and have not been elected to the Hall (presumably on the “sportsmanship” issue).

There will be some other players who are in the Hall (such as Roy Campanella) who do not meet the CAWS standard. This does NOT mean that such a player does not belong in the Hall of Fame. In my view, Campy definitely belongs in the Hall based on the criteria quoted above. However, there are a number of players who are in the Hall who are certainly questionable choices.

With the induction of Rickey Henderson, Jim Rice and Joe Gordon in 2009 and Andre Dawson in 2010, there were 124 major league position players (not pitchers) in the Hall of Fame (by my count) who had played the majority of their careers in the major leagues since 1901 and had been elected by either the BBWAA (baseball writers) or the Veteran’s Committee. And, as most fans know, there has always been a note of controversy regarding some of these players - as to whether they truly belong in the Hall. *Suggestions have been made that anything from popularity to politics have driven their induction – rather than their actual performance on the field in the major leagues.*

As a case in point, it has been said that three players who were inducted into the Hall of Fame together by the Veteran’s Committee in 1946 are there not so much because of their playing ability but rather because they were the subject of a popular poem.

A GOOD CAWS

Joe Tinker, Johnny Evers and Frank Chance were “immortalized” in a poem written by Franklin Pierce Adams in 1910. The CAWS Gauge suggests that none of these three players comes close to having the performance numbers that would justify induction into the Hall of Fame.

Who belongs in baseball's Hall of Fame? That is, which players have EARNED the right to be there? This book answers that question, and tells you precisely how good a career the player had compared to the other great players. For example, at the end of the 2010 season, Derek Jeter was the #6 best shortstop of the modern era (since 1920) and the #54 best player among ALL position players of that period. Dr. Michael Hoban is a retired university professor. He earned his Ph.D. in mathematics from Columbia University, and has been a fan of the game for more than 60 years. The professor has been a serious baseball analyst since 1998 when he joined SABR (Society for American Baseball Research). This is his fourth book on baseball.

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