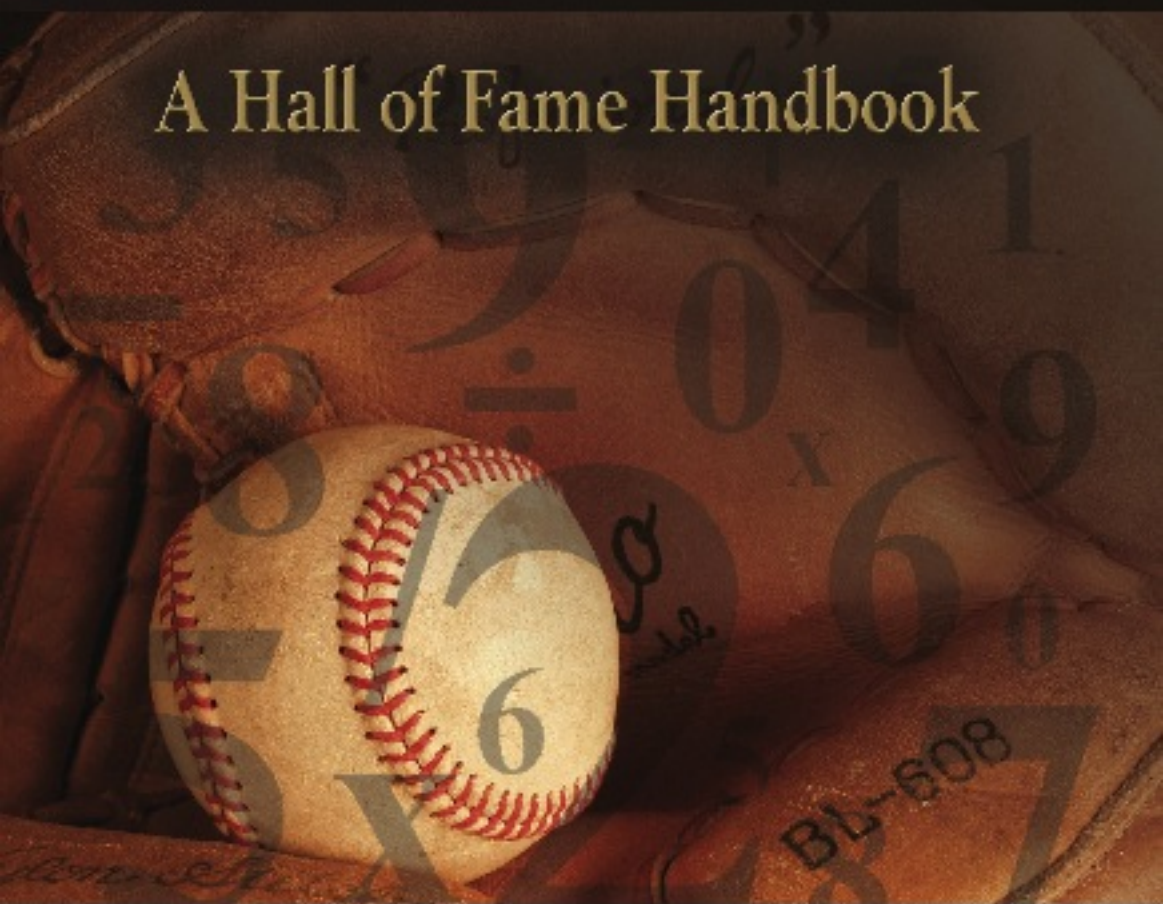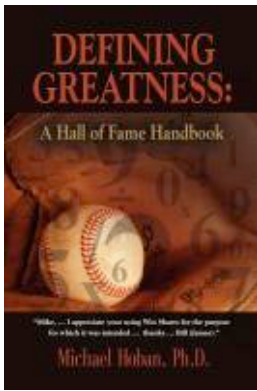# DEFINING GREATNESS:

A Hall of Fame Handbook

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

Michael Hoban, Ph.D.

Who belongs in baseball's Hall of Fame? That is, which players have EARNED the right to be there? In this book, Professor Michael Hoban uses Bill James' Win Shares system to come up with a formula that assigns a numerical value to a player's entire career. The system, called the CAWS Career Gauge (Career Assessment/Wins shares) establishes career benchmarks for each position - to determine if a player has obvious HOF numbers.

Defining Greatness
A Hall of Fame Handbook

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Defining Greatness:

A Hall of Fame Handbook

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 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 ten 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 who 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 for example that the average MVP winner through 2004 had 33.4 win shares for the season.

As an example of win shares results, here is the best season by some of the greatest players in baseball history:

Honus Wagner	1908	59 win shares
Babe Ruth	1923	55
Walter Johnson	1913	54
Barry Bonds	2001	54
Mickey Mantle	1957	51
Ted Williams	1946	49
Ty Cobb	1915	48
Stan Musial	1948	46
Cy Young	1892	44
Willie Mays	1965	43
Hank Aaron	1963	41

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 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.***

I should mention that unless otherwise noted the player's win shares quoted in this book are taken from the book, WIN SHARES, or from THE BILL JAMES HANDBOOK.

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, 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

	Batting	Fielding	Win Shares
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

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.

How to Judge a Career

The Win Shares system does a wonderful job of telling us how good a season a player had. For example, in 2006, Albert Pujols of the Cardinals contributed more to his team than any other National Leaguer. He had 39 win shares that year – 36.3 from the offensive side and 2.4 for his defense. Similarly, Derek Jeter of the Yankees contributed more to his team than any other American Leaguer. He had 33 total win shares – 28.0 for offense and 4.6 for defense. (Data from hardballtimes.com.) As a rule of thumb, 30 win shares for a position player is considered to represent an MVP (Most Valuable Player) type of season.

But how do you go from the examination of a player's individual seasons to a conclusion about his career? This is the essential question that I wished to answer. And, of course, a simplistic answer might be: just add up the win shares from all his seasons and that will tell you. That is, if you know the total of a player's career win shares, you can judge how good he was. But, I think it is not quite as easy as that.

It is true to say that the total career win shares may tell us a lot about a player. For example, *any position player who has 400 career win shares has had a great career* – no question about it. Likewise, for *any pitcher who has 300 career win shares.*

But the evaluation of many players' careers is more complicated than that. Hall of Famer Dave Winfield had 415 career win shares while Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio had 387. Does that mean that Winfield had a better career than DiMaggio or that Dave belongs in the Hall of Fame but Joe does not? Of course not.

Hall of Fame pitcher Don Sutton had 319 career win shares while Hall of Famer Juan Marichal had 263. Does that mean that Sutton was a better pitcher than Marichal? I think that very few fans would reach that conclusion.

The point here is that career win shares alone does not tell us enough about a player's career. And that is where the **CAWS Career Gauge** adds to the value of the Win Shares system. *The CAWS system suggests that a better (and fairer) way to judge a player's career is to combine the win shares*

from a player's ten best seasons plus an appropriate amount of credit for the player's longevity.

And, as we shall see, the CAWS Gauge suggests that Joe DiMaggio and Juan Marichal had better careers than Dave Winfield and Don Sutton, respectively.

You may suggest that this conclusion is a "no-brainer" – and you may be right. But how about this one? Is there some way to demonstrate that players who had relatively short careers like Hank Greenberg (267 career win shares) and Sandy Koufax (194 career win shares) actually did post Hall of Fame numbers?

Well, the CAWS Career Gauge has in fact created benchmarks to determine whether a position player or a pitcher had a **short but great career** and did post HOF numbers. And, as it turns out, Greenberg and Koufax are two of **a very small group of players** who did indeed post HOF numbers in a relatively brief period of time. As we will see later, only eleven position players and eight pitchers qualify for this distinction.

Four Special Groups of Players

As mentioned above and as we will see in the pages that follow, the CAWS Career Gauge suggests that there are 118 position players and 51 pitchers who posted Hall of Fame numbers on the field from 1901 to 2011.

While doing the research to find these players, I became aware of four special groups of players who put together HOF numbers somewhat differently than their contemporaries.

1. Position Players with a Short but Great Career – the 1800/255 Benchmark

As we know, some great players have had short careers due to such factors as injury, military service or the color barrier. I would define "relatively short career" for a position player to be fewer than 1800 games played during a career. During the 20th century, **only eleven players have achieved a CAWS score of 255 or better while playing fewer than 1800 games during their careers – and all of these players are in the Hall of Fame**. They are some of the 118 position players with HOF numbers.

		CWS	CV	CAWS
Joe DiMaggio	**1736 games**	**387**	**325**	**341**
Elmer Flick	**1483**	**291**	**280**	**283**
Earl Averill	**1668**	**280**	**268**	**271**
Hank Greenberg	**1394**	**267**	**262**	**263**
Lou Boudreau	**1646**	**277**	**255**	**261**
Bill Terry	**1721**	**278**	**255**	**261**
Larry Doby	**1533**	**268**	**257**	**260**
Jackie Robinson	**1382**	**257**	**257**	**257**
Mickey Cochrane	**1482**	**275**	**250**	**256**
Kirby Puckett	**1783**	**281**	**247**	**256**
Bill Dickey	**1789**	**314**	**235**	**255**

2. Pitchers with a CAWS Score of 180 with fewer than 2400 Innings Pitched.

There are only five pitchers who have achieved a CAWS score of 180 with fewer than 2400 innings pitched *during their entire careers* – and all five are in the Hall of Fame.

	IP	CWS	CV	CAWS
Addie Joss	**2327**	**191**	**191**	**191**
Sandy Koufax	**2324**	**194**	**190**	**191**
Hoyt Wilhelm	**2254**	**256**	**168**	**190**
Goose Gossage	**1809**	**223**	**173**	**186**
Dizzy Dean	**1967**	**181**	**180**	**180**

3. Pitchers with a CAWS Score of 150 with fewer than 1500 Innings Pitched

These pitchers would be the true relievers. These five are the only relievers who have achieved a CAWS score of 150 with fewer than 1500 innings pitched.

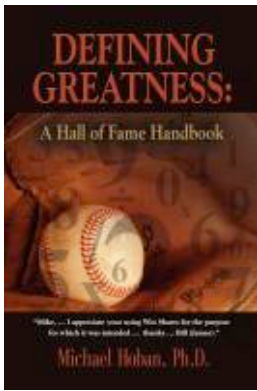|	IP	CWS	CV	CAWS
Mariano Rivera	1211	255	175	195
Lee Smith	1289	198	152	164
Bruce Sutter	**1042**	**168**	**163**	**164**
Billy Wagner	903	182	151	159
Dan Quisenberry	1043	157	155	156

Of these five pitchers, only Bruce Sutter is currently in the Hall of Fame.

4. Pitchers with 300 Career Win Shares but a CAWS score below 235.

The CAWS Career Gauge sets the benchmark for HOF numbers for a starting pitcher at 235. As we will see later, there are 35 pitchers during the 20th century who achieved this benchmark. The Gauge also suggests that if a pitcher earns 300 career win shares but does not have a CAWS score of 235, he has achieved HOF numbers. Only four pitchers have done this – and Ryan, Sutton and Eckersley are all in the Hall of Fame.

	CWS	CV	CAWS
Tom Glavine	314	203	231
Nolan Ryan	**334**	**191**	**227**
Don Sutton	**319**	**187**	**220**
Dennis Eckersley	**301**	**183**	**213**

The fourteen pitchers listed here are, of course, among the 51 who have posted HOF numbers since 1901.

Who belongs in baseball's Hall of Fame? That is, which players have EARNED the right to be there? In this book, Professor Michael Hoban uses Bill James' Win Shares system to come up with a formula that assigns a numerical value to a player's entire career. The system, called the CAWS Career Gauge (Career Assessment/Wins shares) establishes career benchmarks for each position - to determine if a player has obvious HOF numbers.

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