

The Lively Ball Era Compared to Dead Ball Era

Pseudo .400 Hitters

Which Hall of Fame Record will Stand the Longest

The Highest Career IPBA (In-Play Batting Averages)

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Chapter 17

*The interesting facts for **Chapter 17** continue the discussion of players who either batted .400 for a season or were very close to batting .400. Also, players who excelled with very low SOAs or excelled with very high IPBA are discussed.*

How Does a Player Qualify for a Batting Title?

- Prior to 1920, a player had to appear in 60% of a team's games.
- From 1920 to 1937, a player had to appear in a minimum of 100 games.
- From 1938 to 1944, The AL used a minimum of 400 at-bats and the NL stayed with a minimum of 100 games.
- From 1945 to 1956, a player must have a minimum of 2.6 at-bats per scheduled team game.
- From 1957- present, a player must have a minimum of 3.1 plate appearances per scheduled team game.

Pseudo .400 Hitters Since 1941

Two players did manage to have a batting average of at least .400 for 162 consecutive games spanning more than one season. They are Tony Gwynn and Wade Boggs.

Table 20.22

| Players | Start Date | End Date | AB | H | HR | AVG |
|------------|------------|----------|-----|-----|----|------|
| Tony Gwynn | 7/27/93 | 5/13/95 | 624 | 251 | 15 | .402 |
| Wade Boggs | 6/9/85 | 6/6/86 | 641 | 257 | 12 | .401 |

**A poll was conducted by the Hall of Fame. The question was:
Which Hall of Famer's record will stand the longest?**

The results, published in the Hall of Fame newsletter in November, 2008 were:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Nolan Ryan's seven no-hitters | 32.3% |
| Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak | 31.6% |
| Ty Cobb's .366 life-time batting average | 29.2% |
| Ted Williams as the last man to bat .400 | 6.7% |

Do you agree or disagree?

What Happened to Baseball in the Years 1920 to 1930 (The so called "Lively Ball Era")?

The table below compares the means for 'The Four Statistics' for both leagues for the years of the 'Dead Ball Era (1913-1919)', and the years of the 'Lively Ball Era (1920-1930)'.

| Years | (1913 – 1919) | | (1920 – 1930) | |
|-------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| Mean | National L. | American L. | National L. | American L. |
| AVG | .252 | .253 | .287 | .286 |
| IPBA | .283 | .284 | .312 | .312 |
| SOA | .106 | .109 | .081 | .084 |
| IPHRA | .006 | .004 | .014 | .013 |

Many articles have been written concerning why batting averages and home runs increased so much for the years from 1920 to 1930. The following facts are agreed upon:

- Because of the Black Sox scandal of 1919, the popularity of baseball had declined.
- In an attempt to clean up the mess of the Black Sox scandal of 1919, the spitball and other trick pitches were abolished starting in 1920. It must be commented that pitchers who used the spitter before 1920 were grandfathered.
- Due to the death of Ray Chapman on August 16, 1920, umpires were ordered to only use shiny white balls throughout the game.
- In 1919, Babe Ruth's last year with the Red Sox, he hit a record 29 home runs. The fans were excited over seeing home runs.
- Starting in 1920, many players copied Ruth's style of hitting. This style included not choking up on the bat and swinging with a pronounced upper-cut. Ruth's style replaced the spray-hitting style which resulted in singles.
- Attendance in 1920 increased about 20% from 1919. The owners attributed the increase in attendance to the increase in offensive.
- The batters switched to thin-handle bats.
- The year 1930 was considered the liveliest of the lively ball era. It was the only year, in the history of baseball, where the league average was over .300. For that year, the league average was .303.

The question that is not agreed upon is: Did the owners intentionally change the ball's design to make the ball livelier? The Reach Company, the manufacturer of the ball for both leagues, claimed the only change in the ball's design was the yarn used in the stitching. The company ran a full page add in which they said, "There has been no change to the cork center ball since we introduced it in 1910." The United States Bureau of Standards conducted tests on the ball. These tests substantiated the statements of the Reach Company. John McGraw, who managed the New York Giants from 1902 to 1932, said, "I don't care what the manufacturers of the ball used by the major leagues say. It is lively, and every sensible baseball man knows it."

The answer could have been in the yarn. The new yarn was from Australia and was a much stronger than the previous yarn. This allowed the ball to be wound tighter which made the ball harder than before. Many baseball people of that time claimed the harder ball was livelier. Also, pitchers claimed the new stitching made a difficult to throw a curve ball.

If it was not the ball, what did cause the batting offensive statistics to increase so much? Some possibilities include:

- Always having a shiny white ball to hit.
- The outlawing of the spitball and other trick pitches.
- The copying of Ruth's style of hitting.

After the 1930 season, the ball was altered to help the pitchers. The stitching on the ball was changed to make it easier for the pitcher to grip. To reduce the velocity of the ball; the cover was made thicker. As a result of these changes to the ball, the National League batting average dropped to .277 in 1931.

The Skill Needed to Hit a Baseball:

Many people say the most difficult thing to do in any sport is hit a baseball.

- The ball only takes 5/10ths of a second to reach the hitter.
- The batter has 2/10ths of a second to move his bat from his stance to the hitting zone.
- That leaves 3/10ths of a second for the hitter to:
 - Pick up the ball visually,
 - Determine what the pitch is,
 - Determine the location of the pitch,
 - And decide whether to swing or take the pitch.

The Best Career IPBA Hitters:

The table below presents the two players with the highest career IPBA.

The Best Career IPBA Hitters (based on a minimum of 2500 at-bats) of All-Time, Babe Ruth (1914-1935) and Manny Ramirez (1993-Present):

| PLAYER | AB | H | SO | BB | HR | AVG | IPBA | SOA | IPHRA |
|--------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|-------|
| Ruth | 8399 | 2873 | 1330 | 2062 | 714 | .342 | .406 | .158 | .101 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|
| Ramirez | 7610 | 2392 | 1667 | 1212 | 527 | .314 | .402 | .219 | .089 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|

- (Ramirez career statistics up to and including 2008)
- Ruth's ratio of ABs to Ks was 6.31 (1 K for each 6.31 ABs).
- Ramirez's ratio of ABs to Ks was 4.57 (1 K for each 4.57 ABs).

Can You Find The New Kid On The Block With a Career IPBA > .400 from 2000 through 2008?

Learning Statistics with Baseball

The Greatest Contact Hitters of All-Time:

- Sewell was the hardest player to strike out (minimum of 1000 games). His ratio of ABs to Ks for his career was 62.6. He struck out one time for every 62 at-bats.
- The next three players were Lloyd Waner, Nellie Fox, and Tommy Holmes with AB to K ratios of 44.9, 42.7, and 40.9 respectively.
- In 1925, 1929, and 1933 Joe Sewell had 608, 578, and 524 at-bats and struck out only four times in each of those years.
- Joe Sewell holds the record of most consecutive games without striking out (115 games in 1929). Nellie Fox had 98 consecutive games without striking out in 1958.

Joe Sewell Trivia

- On September 15, 1921, a pitcher named Arliss Taylor made his only appearance in the Major-Leagues. In two innings of work, he yielded seven hits. What is so strange about this? The answer is his only strike out victim was Joe Sewell.
- In 1930, Sewell struck out only three times in 353 at-bats, but two of his strike outs occurred in the same game.

The table below compares, for the year in which they had their highest AVGs, the statistics for the player with the lowest career SOA to the two players with the highest career IPBA.

Highest Yearly Batting Averages for Sewell, Ruth, and Ramirez

| Player | Year | AB | H | SO | HR | AVG | IPBA | SOA | IPHRA |
|---------|------|-----|-----|-----|----|------|------|------|-------|
| Sewell | 1923 | 553 | 195 | 12 | 3 | .353 | .360 | .022 | .006 |
| Ruth | 1923 | 522 | 205 | 93 | 41 | .393 | .478 | .178 | .096 |
| Ramirez | 2000 | 439 | 154 | 117 | 38 | .351 | .478 | .267 | .118 |

Notice the difference between Sewell and Ruth for the year 1923. Ruth had the highest career IPBA and Sewell had the lowest career SOA. Neither player was able to hit .400 for that year.

Batting Trivia:

- From 1907 to 1919 Ty Cobb won the American League batting title every year except 1916.
- The year 1922 was a special year for batting average title winners. The two winners both batted over .400. George Sisler batted .420 in the American League and Rogers Hornsby batted .401 in the National League.
- The following players, since 1900, have won their league batting titles for more than two consecutive years: Nap Lajoie (1901-1904), Honus Wagner (1906-1909), Ty Cobb (1907-1915), Rogers Hornsby (1920-1922), Stan Musial (1950-1952), Rod Carew (1972-1975), Wade Boggs (1985-1988), Tony Gwynn (1987-1989), Tony Gwynn (1994-1997).
- In 1920, Babe Ruth batted .376 with a SLG of .847. He also hit 54 home runs almost doubling his output of 1919.
- In 2001, Barry Bonds broke Ruth's SLG. For that year Ruth's SLG was .863.
- Bob Meusel, a Yankee outfielder from 1920 to 1929, holds the record for the AL by hitting for the cycle three times. Babe Herman also did it three times in the NL.
- In 1968, Carl Yastrzemski led the American League with a batting average of .301. This was the lowest league leading batting average in the history of baseball. This might have motivated baseball to lower the pitching mound and tighten the strike zone.
- The closest batting title race occurred in 1931 in the National League. The table below gives the batting results for the three players involved.

| Player | #AB | #H | BA |
|---------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Chick Hafey | 450 | 157 | .3489 |
| Bill Terry | 611 | 213 | .3486 |
| Jim Bottomley | 382 | 133 | .3482 |

In 1949, Ted Williams lost the batting title to George Kell by .00015. Williams had 194 hits in 566 at-bats for an average of .34276. Kell had 179 hits in 522 at-bats for an average of .34291. If Ted had won the batting title; he would have been the only player to win the Triple Crown three times.

- Most home runs by two teammates in a season is held by Mickey Mantle (54) and Roger Maris (61) in 1961.
- The most home runs by three teammates in a season is held by Mickey Mantle (54), Roger Maris (61), and Bill Skowron (28). The next three best are gotten by replacing Bill Skowron, by Yogi Berra (22), by Johnny Blanchard (21), and by Elston Howard (21). The fifth spot was accomplished in 2001 by Barry Bonds (73), Rich Aurilia (37), and Jeff Kent (22).
- The best lifetime home run tandem consisted of Henry Aaron and Eddie Mathews, who hit 863 home runs during their days as teammates with the Atlanta Braves.
- In 1948, Stan Musial missed by one home run the opportunity to lead the National League in hitting, base-hits, doubles, triples, home runs, runs batted in, and slugging. For that year, Musial's batting line was:

AB H R RBI 2B 3B HR BB SO AVG OBP SLG IPBA SOA IPHR
611 230 135 131 46 18 39 79 34 .376 .450 .702 .399 .056 .068

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Stan Musial missed by one home run of joining the elite club of 11 Triple Crown winners.

Some Current Players Batting .400 Late in a Season

Table 20.28 provides a list of some current players who chased the .400 AVG late into the season. The columns give the player, his team, the game number he last played in while still batting .400, his AVG in that last game, the date of the last game, and his final AVG for the season.

| Player | Team | Game # | AVG-Last Game | Date-Last Game | Final AVG |
|-------------------|-----------|--------|---------------|----------------|-----------|
| Rod Carew | Twins | 81 | .401 | 7/10/1977 | .388 |
| Andres Galarraga | Rockies | 63 | .403 | 07/05/1993 | .370 |
| John Olerud | Blue Jays | 105 | .400 | 08/02/1993 | .363 |
| Tony Gwynn | Padres | 87 | .402 | 07/14/1997 | .372 |
| Larry Walker | Rockies | 92 | .402 | 07/17/1997 | .366 |
| Nomar Garciaparra | Red Sox | 63 | .400 | 07/20/2000 | .370 |
| Chipper Jones | Braves | 66 | .400 | 06/18/2008 | .364 |
| Tony Gwynn | Padres | 30 | .408 | 05/15/1994 | .394 |
| Ted Williams | Red Sox | 41 | .401 | 06/05/1957 | .388 |

The table above shows if the season consisted of only 80 games four of the players would have batted above .400 for a season. Clearly, a shortened season will result in much fewer at-bats for a player. As mentioned before, I feel fewer at-bats is a very important key to batting .400 for a season.

What did surprise me was Tony Gwynn's result for 1994 when he batted .394 in a strike-shortened season. After game number 30, he never batted .400 during that season. Although his final AVG of .394 was really just three hits away from him hitting .400, he went his next 80 games without ever touching .400.

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