

By Thomas Ryan Stone

Introduction

Backstory

I started writing this book around 1983. I was ten years old at the time, and I knew then that one day I would write a book on the topic of Baseball All-Time Teams. I of course had no idea what its exact format would be, or when I would undertake the project exactly, but it seemed inevitable.

I grew up in Western New York, in the rural town of Wheatland, which is near the city of Rochester. My street had only a few children close to my age, so there weren't a wide variety of things to do. A small group of us spent most of our summers playing whiffle-ball or tennis-ball (a version of baseball where a tennis ball is used so that things like batting helmets are not necessary). Often the games were played with only 4 or 5 players – total. Nonetheless, we spent countless happy sun-filled days playing ball – the kind of pure baseball joy that grown men think of when they become emotional over movies like *Field of Dreams* or *The Natural*. Sure, we'd occasionally play football or basketball when the season was right, or just for variety. But baseball, in one form or other, was our primary activity.

When it was raining, or during the winter (Rochester is well-known for its snowfall), we would still gather around the same theme, only this time baseball was played on board games or in our minds. We played All-Star Championship "Disc" baseball, a game that provided spinner discs representing the greats of the game, allowing you to statistically simulate realistic games on paper (we even went so far as to create our own player discs out of construction paper and cardboard). During the 80s we played early computer simulations – such as MicroLeague Baseball on my family's Atari system (a game that was statistics-based instead of action or joystick-based).

It is here that the connection with this book is made. In order to choose teams for such endeavors we would spend long hours discussing the greatest players in baseball history. We would compare contemporary greats like Mike Schmidt and Tom Seaver with stars from our dads' eras like Mickey Mantle and Warren Spahn, not to mention the mythical players from long ago like Babe Ruth and Walter Johnson. We would discuss and argue over the greatest at each position, the greatest for each

team, the best single-teams and seasons, and just about every question you could think of. We'd stump each other with trivia, trade baseball cards, and everything else that baseball-crazed kids did in the late 70s and early 80s. But at a certain point, around age ten, I realized that I would one day write a book giving my answers to the question of "Who would be on a Dream-Team for each major league franchise?" I even started doing some research on it during childhood from what would become a very tattered edition of the Baseball Encyclopedia. I wish I still had those notes, as it would be interesting to compare my current choices with the decisions of a child.

The Perennial Topic

The issue of Dream Teams has been discussed amongst baseball fans for many decades. Once baseball had enough history, it was natural for even the casual fan to ponder who the best of the game are. Since baseball has well-defined positions, creating a mythical roster of greats is often more appealing than trying to create an overall top-10 or top-100 list. The most common form of this question is to ask for an overall Dream Team covering the entire history of the sport. However, with over 100 years of stars to choose from, this is now an extremely difficult and argumentative question. The next logical move is to split the Dream Teams up into American League and National League players. Sometimes such teams ignore 19th century players, in part because the AL only came into existence in 1901 and also because the game becomes radically different from the modern contest the further back in time you look. The rules and abilities of the players, and hence the achievements and their statistical representation, just don't compare well at all with the modern day game.

Another approach to Dream Teams is that taken by this book: to create a dream team roster for each current and long-standing major league franchise. I am of course not the first to attempt such a thing; numerous authors have done so in the past, are doing so in the present, and will no doubt do so in the future. Fan surveys have at times asked this question in each major-league city, producing a similar (if more popularity-driven) dream team result. Sometimes the end product is just a starting nine, sometimes a few backups are chosen. On rare occasions a full-roster is chosen, and just as rare, the reasons for the choices are provided.

This book will not only choose a full roster, it will take you through my thought process (by highlighting the significant reasons) for each choice. But since there is plenty of recorded opinions on this topic

already, this book will also compare my selections with those of other writers, past and present, as well as fan surveys, official and semi-official team selections, and any other prominent attempts at answering this question that I can find. I will also consider Bill James' popular Win Shares system to see the all-time teams it would determine.

The hope is not to provide a definitive answer to the dream team question for each club—due to the number of factors involved, I do not believe that this can be easily objectively answered, at least in the way that most questions can. Rather, I hope this book will serve as a new baseline for discussion of the subject: the rosters I am choosing come with at least some reasoning to consider (and refute if you disagree), and you can quickly compare my choices with those of many other (often more prominent) writers, surveys, and so on.

Format and Groundrules

It is a well-known fact that no one cares more about the sanctity of rules than ten-year old boys. Not scientists, not judges, not the police. In fact, politicians would do well to think back to their childhood when justice and rules were held to be inviolate. To a ten-year old, setting the rules of the game and making sure they are fair – guaranteeing equality of opportunity in the competition while not at all striving for equality of outcome – is just as important as the game itself. With this in mind then, here are the ground rules for this book:

1. Each chapter will have two sections. The first will be a discussion of my choices for a particular team's all-time dream-team roster. The second will be a comparison of my choices with those of other prominent authors, fan surveys, the Win Shares system, and so on.
2. A "team" here is perhaps better defined as a "franchise", a long-standing entity that survives intact through such things as moves from city to city, changes in team nickname, or the demolition of a stadium. So for example, the Los Angeles Dodgers chapter will include the Brooklyn Dodgers – as well as the earlier clubs with nicknames stretching back to 1884 (Robins, Superbas, Bridegrooms, Grooms, Grays, and Atlantics).
3. Only a player's accomplishments for the particular franchise will be considered for selection to that team's all-time roster. A player may have had a great career, but if he only played for a team for one or two years, he won't make it. However, a player can be chosen for more than one all-time team, and as it turns out

several are. Because these are rosters, a player can only be chosen for the team once, i.e., even if he is the best player for that team at more than one position.

4. Attempts will be made to choose a player at the position he played most often, but this is flexible. A rule of "reasonableness" will be used to determine, in each particular case, what would be best for the roster. Minimal playing levels must be attained to qualify at each position, but even these minimums are altered depending on how long the team has existed. Such factors will be discussed where appropriate.
5. Two players at each infield position will be selected, a starter, and a backup. Six outfielders will be chosen, with some attention paid to RF/CF/LF balance. However, this will not be a strict rule: a team with five LF and one RF would not be acceptable, but one with 3 LF, 1 CF, and 2 RF could be. Ten pitchers will be chosen, with between 5-8 starters and 2-5 relievers. Again, the reasons for each starter/reliever allocation will be discussed where appropriate.
6. An attempt will be made to fairly weigh a player's longevity with the team against his peak performance for the team. How much should one or two great seasons be valued as opposed to five star seasons or ten or fifteen mediocre seasons? There is no simple answer to this of course, so that too will be a part of the discussion for each selection.
7. No new statistic or equation (simple or otherwise) will be introduced in this book as a means of comparing players across eras. This has become an increasingly popular (and useful) endeavor in the past few decades, and it is one that I enjoy following and have my own opinions on. But because there are so many such attempts, and so much debate surrounding them, I will not muddle the goals of this book by overcomplicating things. I hope to allow for as broad a reading audience as possible, so I will keep the use of statistics simple. I will discuss only well-known standards including raw numbers such as home runs and stolen bases, as well as computed numbers such as batting average, slugging percentage, on-base percentage, earned run average, and so on. The same for awards and other achievements, where I will mention All-Star selections, MVPs, and Cy Young awards, but little else.

Not all authors who have written on all-time or “dream” teams have used the same ground rules, so comparing my choices with theirs (as I will do in each chapter) must be done with this context in mind.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to so many, where should I start? As I did at the outset, I'll start at the beginning. The fun times I had as a child were because of the great kids in my neighborhood. I won't mention them all, but two deserve it more than others. Steve Grattan (one year older, and a far better athlete than I) was my best friend throughout all of grade school. It was in his front yard where we played most often. My brother David (two years younger) was even more important because he was my constant companion while growing up. While other kids would play ball with us, it was these two who generally participated with me in any serious baseball discussions.

Related to this, I'd like to thank my parents who have always been supportive in everything I do. Of most relevance to this book, they must be thanked for letting me spend ("waste") so much of my childhood playing, studying, and reading about baseball. Even when we were late for supper (time and time again), they always let us go back out to play until we could no longer see the ball coming towards us at home plate.

[TBD: Other authors and sources... Baseball-Reference.com, etc., and thanks also to Uncle George...Susan...others]