

Rating the '07 HOF Candidates Based on Win Shares

Written by Bill Gilbert

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One of the first items of business in baseball each year is the announcement of players elected to the Hall of Fame. This leads to lots of speculation and a little analysis prior to the announcement which is scheduled for January 9, 2007.

Many systems exist for evaluating player performance. One such system, the Win Shares method, developed by Bill James in 2002, is a complex method for evaluating players which includes all aspects of performance—offense, defense and pitching. James has stated that, “Historically, 400 Win Shares means absolute enshrinement in the Hall of Fame and 300 Win Shares makes a player more likely than not to be a Hall of Famer. However, future standards may be different. Players with 300-350 Win Shares in the past have generally gone into the Hall of Fame. In the future, they more often will not.”

The 2007 class of Hall of Fame candidates is the strongest in several years. It consists of 15 holdovers and 16 players eligible for the first time. Four holdovers have over 300 Win Shares, **A**

ndre Dawson

with 340,

Bert Blyleven

, 339;

Dave Parker

, 327; and

Alan Trammell

with 318. Four newcomers on the list have over 300 Win Shares;

Cal Ripken, Jr.

, 427;

Tony Gwynn

, 398;

Mark McGwire

, 342; and

Harold Baines

, 307. One of the newcomers last year,

Will Clark

, had 331 Win Shares but failed to receive the 5% of votes required to remain on the ballot. The only 2006 newcomers with enough votes to remain on the ballot were

Orel Hershiser

(11.2%) and

Albert Belle

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(7.7%).

With the weak incoming class last year, all but one of the 15 holdovers gained votes. The only one that didn't was **Willie McGee** who lost 14 votes and dropped below 5%, eliminating him from further consideration by the Baseball Writers. The big gainers were

Bert Blyleven

(66 votes),

Bruce Sutter

(56 votes) and

Goose Gossage

(51 votes). Sutter's total of 400 votes (76.9%) was enough for election to the Hall.

Jim Rice

(64.8%, Gossage (64.6%), Andre Dawson (61.0%) and Blyleven (53.3%) are now within striking range of the 75% required for election but with the incoming class being so strong, they will probably not gain enough votes to make it this year. They will have a much better chance next year with a very weak class becoming eligible.

In the 2007 class, Ripken and Gwynn are certain to be elected on the first ballot. McGwire has the numbers to be elected but is tainted with the steroid cloud and many writers have indicated they will not vote for him. He may make it eventually but not this year. The only other newcomer that is likely to receive significant support is Baines but he is not a serious candidate for election since he was not a dominant player and was primarily a designated hitter for much of his career.

Jose Canseco has the numbers that would ordinarily make him at least a marginal candidate but his sordid past may prevent him from getting enough votes (5%) to stay on the ballot.

Following is a list of Win Shares for the 32 players on the ballot. Players on the ballot for the first time are shown in bold. 2005 and 2006 voting is shown for the holdovers.

Player	Win Shares	2005 Votes	2005 Percent	2006 Votes	2006 Percent
Cal Ripken, Jr.	427				
Tony Gwynn	398				
Mark McGwire	342				
Andre Dawson	340	273	52.3	317	61.0
Bert Blyleven	339	211	40.9	277	53.3
Dave Parker	327	65	12.6	76	14.4
Alan Trammell	318	87	16.9	92	17.7
Harold Baines	307				
Dale Murphy	294	54	10.5	56	10.8
Tommy John	289	123	23.8	154	29.6
Jim Rice	282	307	59.5	337	64.8
Tony Fernandez	280				
Steve Garvey	279	106	20.5	135	26.0

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Jose Canseco	272				
Dave Concepcion	269	55	10.7	65	12.5
Bobby Bonilla	267				
Don Mattingly	263	59	11.4	64	12.3
Paul O'Neill	259				
Wally Joiner	253				
Albert Belle	243		40	7.7	
Ken Caminiti	242				
Jack Morris	225	172	33.3	214	41.2
Eric Davis	224				
Goose Gossage	223	285	55.2	336	64.6
Orel Hershiser	210			58	11.2
Devon White	207				
Lee Smith	198	200	38.8	234	45.0
Bret Saberhagen	193				
Jay Buhner	174				
Dante Bichette	168				
Scott Brosius	111				
Bobby Witt	102				

The last 10 players elected by the Baseball Writers have averaged 342 Win Shares, a figure exceeded by only Ripken and Gwynn on the ballot this year.

Player	Year	Win Shares
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Dave Winfield	2001	415
Kirby Puckett	2001	281
Ozzie Smith	2002	325
Gary Carter	2003	337
Eddie Murray	2003	437
Paul Molitor	2004	414
Dennis Eckersley	2004	301
Wade Boggs	2005	394
Ryne Sandberg	2005	346
Bruce Sutter	2006	168

Average		342

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Conclusions:

1. Cal Ripken, Jr. and Tony Gwynn will easily be elected by the Baseball Writers this year. Some have speculated that Ripken might set the record for the highest percentage of votes, now held by Tom Seaver with 98.84%. His .340 career on-base percentage could be an obstacle to voters that place special emphasis on first ballot election.
2. Mark McGwire will not come close but will remain on the ballot and could get elected in the future. If he is not elected, he will be the only eligible player with over 500 home runs not in the Hall.
3. None of the holdovers will receive enough votes for election.
4. Blyleven and Gossage will continue to move up but will fall short. They could be positioned for election next year when Tim Lincecum is the only strong new candidate.
5. Rice will continue to fall short because of his relatively short career.
6. Some other newcomers (Baines, Bonilla, O'Neill) could get enough votes to remain on the ballot. However, a stronger candidate last year, Will Clark, did not get enough votes to remain on the ballot.
7. There will not be a groundswell of support for Scott Brosius and Bobby Witt.

If I had a ballot, I would cast votes for Ripken, Gwynn, Blyleven, Trammell and Gossage. If I were on the Veterans Committee, I would vote for Gil Hodges, Ron Santo and Minnie Minoso and I would try to figure out some way to get Buck O'Neil in.