

Hideki Okajima Wins AL All-Star Final Vote

Written by Maury Brown
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Boston Red Sox lefthanded pitcher **Hideki Okajima** joined the 2007 American League All-Star Team this evening after winning the **Monster All-Star Final Vote** **A.L.**

Okajima received 4.3 million votes in the four-day, on-line balloting on MLB.com to outdistance Detroit pitcher **Jeremy Bonderman**. The others on the Final Vote ballot were pitcher **Pat Neshek** of Minnesota, pitcher **Kelvim Escobar** of the Los Angeles Angels, and pitcher **Roy Halladay** of Toronto.

Okajima joins five other Red Sox on the A.L. All-Star squad: starting first baseman **David Ortiz**, third baseman **Mike Lowell**, outfielder **Manny Ramirez** and righthanded pitchers **Josh Beckett** and **Jonathan Papelbon**. It is Boston's most All-Stars in a season since 2002 (6) and the most of any major league team in 2007.

This is the first time that the Red Sox have ever had as many as three pitchers selected to the All-Star Team in the same season.

Okajima, who is 2-0 with a 0.88 ERA and four saves in 38 relief appearances this season, becomes just the sixth native of Japan to ever be selected for the All-Star Game. The others are RHP **Shigetoshi Hasegawa** (2003), OF **Hideki Matsui** (2003-04), RHP **Hideo Nomo** (1995), RHP **Kazuhiko Sasaki** (2001-02), and OF **Ichiro Suzuki** (2001-07). Of that group, only Nomo (1995) and Suzuki (2001) were selected as All-Stars in

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their rookie seasons.

Okajima will be the ninth Red Sox rookie All-Star, joining 1B **Walt Dropo** (1950); 3B **Frank Malzone** (1957); RHP **Don Schwall** (1961); 1B **George Scott** (1966); C **Carlton Fisk** (1972); OF **Fred Lynn** (1975); SS **Nomar Garciaparra** (1997); and RHP **Jonathan Papelbon** (2006).

Okajima is the third Red Sox player to be selected as an All-Star since the Final Vote program began in 2002, joining Johnny Damon in 2002 and Jason Varitek in 2003.

The 2007 All-Star Game will be played at AT&T Park in San Francisco on Tuesday, July 10.