

# BASEBALL HISTORY

by

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## Hit By Pitch



When Randy Johnson hung up his glove and spikes over the past winter, he left major league baseball with a slew of accomplishments, including five Cy Young Awards (as well a three second place finishes), second in career strikeouts and first in career strikeouts per 9 innings. He also notched one hundred complete games and has a very good chance to be the last pitcher

to do so. His nearest active pursuer, Roy Halladay, posted his 52<sup>nd</sup> complete game earlier this season.

But, as any baseball fan knows, Johnson also had his wild side to go along with his imposing size, fierce demeanor, and 100 mph fastball that kept many a batsman on edge (just ask John Kruk)). His location *problem* is also reflected in his 1,497 career walks (13<sup>th</sup> place) and 190 hit batsmen, the most of any moundsman since the 1920's, and good for fifth place on the career list.

While reviewing Johnson's career, I decided to delve further into the hit by pitch (HBP) issue and, as they say, one thing led to another. The following is by no means a complete review, but there's quite a bit of food for thought.

Table One on the following page contains the top twenty-five pitchers in the career HBP category. The first column is the total hit batsmen, followed by total

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batters faced, and then the rate at which their opponents were plunked (batters faced divided by hit batsmen). It's a list that is almost evenly balanced between 19<sup>th</sup> century hurlers and their more modern counterparts.

Table One

Rank	Player	Hit Batsmen	Batters Faced	Rate	Note
1	Gus Weyhing	277	19,188	69.30	42 HB in single season
2	Chick Fraser	219	14,553	66.45	
3	Pink Hawley	210	13,213	62.92	
4	Walter Johnson	205	23,405	114.17	
5	Randy Johnson	190	17,067	89.82	
	Eddie Plank	190	17,803	93.70	
7	Tony Mullane	185	19,407	104.90	Incomplete pitching records
8	Joe McGinnity	179	14,132	78.94	
9	Cahrlie Hough	174	16,170	92.93	
	Tim Wakefield	174	12,737	73.20	Only active pitcher on the list
11	Clark Griffith	171	14,335	83.83	
12	Cy Young	161	29,565	183.63	
13	Jim Bunning	160	15,618	97.61	
14	Roger Clemens	159	20,240	127.30	Led league once – 14 in 1995
15	Nolan Ryan	158	22,575	142.88	
16	Vic Willis	156	16,263	104.25	
17	Bert Blyleven	155	20,491	132.20	
18	Don Drysdale	154	14,097	91.54	Led league 5 times in 14 years
19	Burt Cunningham	148	12,285	83.01	
	Adonis Terry	148	15,413	104.14	
21	Silver King	146	13,671	93.64	Incomplete pitching records
22	Win Mercer	144	11,106	77.13	
23	Frank Foreman	142	7,726	54.40	Active 1884 - 1902
24	Ed Doheny	141	6,229	44.18	Active 1895 - 1903
	Pedro Martinez	141	11,394	80.81	

Here are just a few observations regarding Table One:

- The records for Mullane, King, and Foreman are incomplete. Therefore, their rates would be even worse that what is noted here.

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- Mullane had nearly 3,000 pinch hits and was hit himself more often (29 times) than anyone else on the list. Plank was 2<sup>nd</sup> with 24. To put it in a modern day perspective, the leading fifteen active pitchers on the hit batsman list have only been hit a total of 15 times.
- Clemens, for all his legend and seeming intent, ranks 21<sup>st</sup> in terms of frequency. Drysdale settles in at 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Everything I've ever read about Walter Johnson talked about his gentle nature and pinpoint control as well as his fear of severely injuring his opponents. Well, he managed to fall somewhere between the two nasty boys mentioned above.
- Ed Doheny (No. 24) was the most prolific in terms of rate. If he had faced as many batters as Weyhing (No. 1), at that rate he would have struck a frightening 434 batters. His most recent counterpart, Byung-Hyun Kim (80/3,688/46.1), whose last season was 2007, would have dinged 418 would-be hitters, exactly twice as many as Drysdale using the same projection.



As Table One unfolded, I began to wonder about other notable surly hurlers such as Bob Gibson, Early Wynn, and Carl Mays, I was surprised to find the following:

**Table Two**

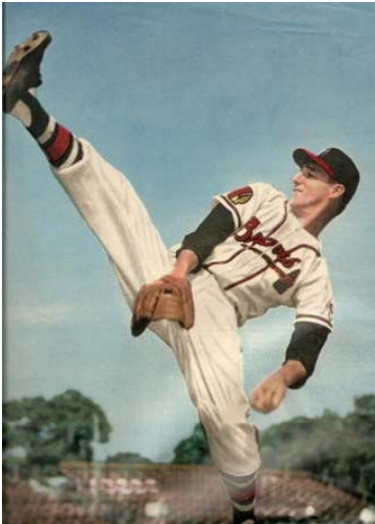
Player	Hit Batsmen	Batters Faced	Rate	Note
Carl Mays	89	12,352	138.79	Hit 34 men after Chapman
Bob Gibson	102	16,068	157.53	8 men were crazy enough to hit him
Early Wynn	64	19,408	303.25	Never in double figures in a season

To be sure these men deserved their reputation, but their frequency rates are puny compared to most of the ones already mentioned. Of course, they and a good many of their peers and predecessors knocked down countless batters to

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get them off the plate. In those times pitching inside meant pitching four or more inches off the plate, unlike today when it means throwing an inside strike.



On the other hand, many pitchers have gotten by without jangling up their opponents to a great degree. Take, for example, Warren Spahn.

Spahn never hit more than 6 men in any one of his 21 seasons. Seven times he smacked only one-a-year while pitching innings from 257 – 310.2 innings. In 1963, his final 20-win campaign, he had zero HBP in 259.2 innings while facing 1,037 batters. His career numbers are 42/21,547/513.02.

Moving along to current times, Table Three is comprised of the top fifteen active hurlers in the HBP category. There are a few surprises here also. The figures are complete through April 23, 2010.

**Table Three**

Rank	Player	Hit Batsmen	Batters Faced	Rate	Note
1	Tim Wakefield	174	12,737	73.20	
2	Jaime Moyer	139	16,721	120.29	
3	Chan Ho Park	135	8,459	62.66	
4	Jamey Wright	134	7,635	56.98	
5	Jeff Weaver	123	7,797	63.39	
6	Vincente Padilla	102	6,265	61.42	
7	Jeff Suppan	92	10,596	115.17	
8	Darren Oliver	88	7,495	85.17	
9	Carlos Zambrano	82	6,688	81.56	
10	Barry Zito	81	8,558	105.65	
11	Javier Vazquez	79	10,528	133.27	
12	Bronson Arroyo	78	6,369	81.65	
13	Tim Hudson	76	8,682	114.24	
14	David Bush	74	4,010	54.19	
	John Lackey	74	6,441	87.04	

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There's only one thing to say – most of the above make Drysdale and Clemens seem like choir boys.

Who holds the distinction of the most HBP in a single season? The honor goes to Phil Knell who, as a 26-year old left-hander for the 1891 Columbus team of the American Association, kabonged 54 men while facing 2,017 for a 37.4 rate. His numbers were 136/6,612/48.62 over his 6-year career.

The post-World War II single season high is 21 shared by Tom Murphy of the 1969 California Angels and Kerry Wood of the 2003 Chicago Cubs. Their respective season numbers were 21/917/43.67 and 21/887/42.24.



Finally, in a singular achievement, Charlie Hough managed to plunk 3 batters in each of two consecutive starts. On September 20, 1987, while pitching for the Texas Rangers, he also gave up 6 hits, walked 2 and knuckled 2 passed balls. Despite all that he gave up, only one earned run while leaving after 8 innings with a no-decision. The Angels eventually prevailed 2 – 1.

Four days later versus the Twins he had an eerily similar performance, giving up 6 hits, 3 walks and chunking 1 wild pitch. He did not have similar luck, however, as one of his victims, Greg Gagne, plated the final two runs with a homer in a 4 – 0 victory.

Hough's numbers for those two games were: six hit batters of 71 batters faced for a rate of 11.83 – ouch!!

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