



## **Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame? Baseball, Cooperstown, and the Politics of Glory**

*Bill James*

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# Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame? Baseball, Cooperstown, and the Politics of Glory

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**Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame? Baseball, Cooperstown, and the Politics of Glory** Bill James Arguing about the merits of players is the baseball fan's second favorite pastime and every year the Hall of Fame elections spark heated controversy. In a book that's sure to thrill--and infuriate--countless fans, Bill James takes a hard look at the Hall, probing its history, its politics and, most of all, its decisions.

## Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame? Baseball, Cooperstown, and the Politics of Glory Details

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## **From Reader Review Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame? Baseball, Cooperstown, and the Politics of Glory for online ebook**

### **Nicholas Bobbitt says**

James may have good ideas, but he's not a good writer.

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### **Ricardo Miro-Maldonado says**

Was really disappointed with this book, so much so I stopped on chapter 9. As a lover of ALL things Baseball I thought this would be a good read, but it's just Bill James nagging about how the Hall of Fame is corrupt and doesn't take into consideration all of his requirements. He's better off just making a magazine with all the comparable stats than turning it into a book. Did not enjoy this at all.

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### **Brian says**

A fairly interesting book about baseball's hall of fame. James's writing style is easy and conversational, but it gets bogged down talking about archane issues of the Hall's past. James focuses on two players - Phil Rizzuto and Don Drysdale - and dissects their Hall of Fame credentials ad nauseam. For someone who has read his Baseball abstracts and other works, this is a mild disappointment.

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### **Robert Owens says**

I read this during my brief interest in sabermetrics. Bill James is the king of this hobby. He makes convincing cases for his arguments, although I did not agree with all of them.

James argued convincingly against the Veterans Committee, which is the old boys club of the Hall. This is how favored players who are not qualified get in through the back door.

A fun and interesting read. If you need barstool arguing fodder, give it a read.

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### **Groucho says**

Whatever happened to the Hall of Fame? According to Bill James, not much. Essentially, the Hall of Fame is the same as it ever was--a foggy, undefined collection of players, many whom deserve recognition, and many whom coasted in due to politics, cronyism, or the simple fact that they outlived their better contemporaries (I'm lookin' at you, Rizzuto!)

Bill James always comes off as a bit of a pedantic dick, but it works here, as he truly knows what he's talking about, and he has the knowledge to back up what he's saying with facts instead of opinion.

The book itself tries (and largely succeeds) to define what makes a true "hall of famer." There are a number of different statistics and methods used by James, who essentially argues that all must be taken into account when determining whether someone is worthy of the honor.

Bill James' methods are so good, in fact, that at one point he predicts HOF elections (BBWAA choices, not Veterans Committee choices) for the next 25 years (from '95 through '19), and his predictions are frighteningly good: Of the 50 men he predicts, 26 have already been elected. One incorrect guess is Pete Rose (James incorrectly guessed that Rose would be reinstated and admitted--something that didn't happen.) He also predicted that players such as Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds would be admitted--obviously in question now, given what we know of their "enhancements" (though not impossible). The other players he predicted would be in that are not are Steve Garvey, Al Oliver, Dave Parker, Jim Kaat, Ted Simmons, Dale Murphy, Jack Morris, Lee Smith, Tim Raines, Joe Carter, Brett Butler, David Cone, Alan Trammell, Lou Whitaker, Jack McDowell, Fred McGriff, Don Mattingly, Dwight Gooden, Ruben Sierra, Ken Griffey, Jeff Bagwell, and Juan Gonzalez. At least one of those players--Griffey--is a sure thing when he becomes eligible in 2016. Many of the others (Jeff Bagwell, Tim Raines, Alan Trammell, Fred McGriff, Lee Smith) have been garnering votes, but not enough to be enshrined (although Bagwell and Raines appear to be possibilities). Some others (including Trammell, Mattingly, and Jack Morris) will likely come in as Veterans Committee selections.

As far as his correct predictions, sure he had a couple of years incorrect. He predicted Don Sutton would be elected in '96, but that didn't happen until '98. He said Yount would be elected in 2000, but that honor occurred in '99. He predicted Dawson would be elected in 2001 and Sandberg would be elected in 2010, but the Hawk wasn't in until 2010, and the Ryno came in much earlier, in '05. Some people James assumed would have a longer playing career--he must have assumed Kirby Puckett would not have retired until about 2003, as he predicted Kirby's induction occurring in '08. Of course, Kirby only played one more year after the publication of James' book.

Still, that's some pretty impressive guess work.

(It's interesting to see who was elected that was not predicted by James. That list includes only Tony Perez (in 2000), Bruce Sutter (in 2006), Bert Blyleven (in 2011), Barry Larkin (in 2012), Tom Glavine (in 2014), Craig Biggio, Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez, and John Smoltz (all in 2015). Mostly pitchers, which is interesting.)

Although hundreds of players are discussed at length, the book uses primarily two when examining hall of fame worthiness--Don Drysdale and Phil Rizzuto--both "bubble" candidates who eventually found their way into Cooperstown.

But did they deserve the honor? I must say, James is a very persuasive pedantic dick. After reading the book, my determination (along with James's) is that in no way is Don Drysdale a worthy candidate. Rizzuto--maybe it's arguable, but he is very, very low on the qualifications.

So persuasive is James, in fact, that I have personally re-evaluated my beliefs regarding whether Pete Rose and Joe Jackson belong in Cooperstown. No way in hell, I now think.

Of course, my favorite part of the book--likely the favorite part for all Cubs fans--is James' assertion that if he were running the HOF, his FIRST act would be to enshrine Ron Santo.

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### **Gary Geiger says**

This is a good book that is marred by the fact that it has changed the way we view baseball history in a deleterious matter. It looks at Hall of Fame cases for various players using traditional stats (Had this book come out more recently, James might have used more advanced stat) and qualitative measures like the Keltner List. I think of the Keltner List as a guide, not something to be slavishly followed, but it is a good way to look at a players career.

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Unfortunately, since this book has come out, our first thought about a historical baseball player is "Worthy HOFer or no?" Still, this is a good book. James is a helluva writer.

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### **Jorge says**

Si quieres un completo analisis del Salon de la Fama del Beisbol, este es tu libro. Bill James nos da su opinion de quienes estan y de quienes deberian estar en este Olympos del Beisbol. Un libro muy analitico del Salon. Excelente.

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### **Josh says**

An interesting analysis of the Baseball Hall of Fame and how it works (or doesn't work, in many cases). There's some terrific historical pieces here on how the institution functions and came to be in its present form. Some of the material is a bit dated now, but most of it is very strong, combining strong data analysis with a sense for how the game is played in a readable and pleasing format that makes it more compelling.

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Bill James is at the top of the SABR-metrician pantheon, and there's a good reason for it. He can crunch the numbers, but can also write about them in an accessible and compelling way. Baseball writers should take note.

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### **Doreen Petersen says**

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Being a baseball fanatic I absolutely loved this book. It is well worth checking out.

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### **Adrian says**

I first read this book twenty years ago. Just as entertaining a read today. James, a clever statistician, analyses the history of the baseball Hall of Fame how this peculiar institution and its voting patterns have developed and what should be done to correct them. None of which, it must be said, have been adopted. He challenges a number of players who have been voted in and answers questions about many who are frequently brought up as worthy of induction. His statistical comparison of players is fascinating. Clearly this is a book for the truly

obsessed. Many of the chapters read as discrete essays and so there is some repetition.

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### **Dennis says**

Really only suited for baseball history geeks, but it does include lines like "It's enormously difficult to get to Cooperstown (NY) seven months of the year, and Marco Polo couldn't get there during the other five."

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### **Socraticgadfly says**

A good intro to James' sabermetric thoughts as they impact the Hall of Fame.

Though he says early on that this is NOT a book about who should be in or out, it's clear that he thought Phil Rizzuto (written before his induction shouldn't be in), Dick Allen shouldn't be in, and Don Drysdale should be out, among others.

And, was Sandy Koufax's late career brilliance in part not only leaving Ebbets Field, but then leaving the L.A. Coliseum and its short left field for spacious Dodger Stadium and its ultra-high mound?

Agree or disagree, James will make you think, if you are prepared to do so.

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### **J.f. says**

Do you ever wonder why Babe Ruth, the most popular player of all time, only garnered 95% of the Hall of Fame vote (instead of 100%)? Or why a hitter as poor as Rabbit Maranville is in the Hall? Bill James walks us through a history of the Hall of Fame and its voting processes, while also presenting unique James-ian ways of quantifying just what a baseball Hall of Famer is supposed to be.

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### **Bill says**

His best work, IMHO. His explanation of the process by which players make the HOF (as opposed to who deserves it) is eye opening. It was a revelation to discover that the sports writers almost NEVER enshrine some one undeserving... but the "old timers committee" (or it's equivalent) does so frequently.

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### **Randal says**

Not James' liveliest book, it is still as persuasive and as painstakingly researched as anything James writes. His forte is less statistics than the ability to put statistics into context. So the next time you hear somebody advocate for a bum like, say, Jack Morris, who has a couple of gaudy stats but no legitimate claim to the Hall of Fame, you can be prepared to discuss the matter intelligently.

Or you can skip the background reading and just say, "Oh yeah, sez you," a whole bunch.

