

The

# LAST BOY

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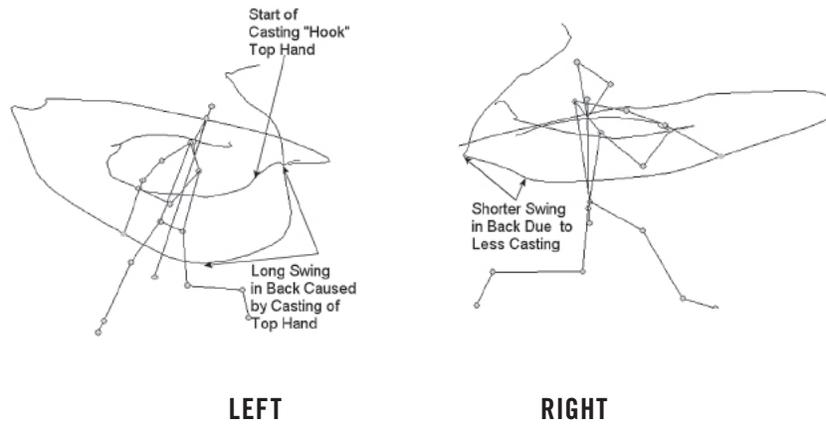
*Mickey Mantle*

*and the End of  
America's Childhood*

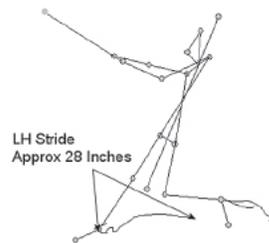
JANE LEAVY



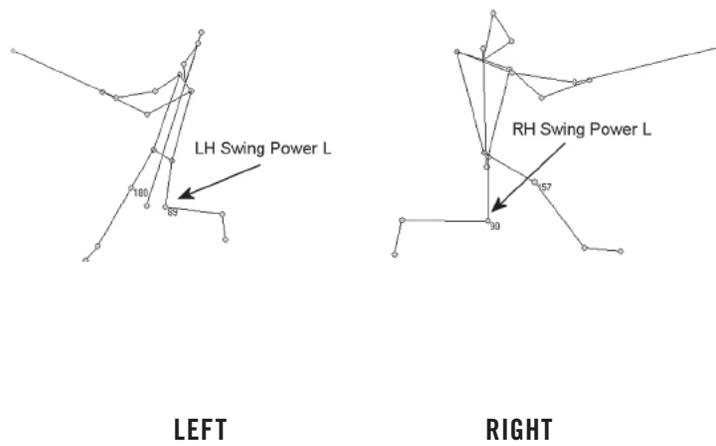
## BAT AND LOWER HAND PATH



## STRIDE



## FINISH





Mantle was nothing but forceful; he never compromised on his swing.



Discobolos, the discus thrower of ancient Greece.

# Who's Better?

## MICKEY CHARLES MANTLE

Born: October 20, 1931, Spavinaw, Oklahoma

Died: August 13, 1995, Dallas, Texas

Buried at Sparkman-Hillcrest Memorial Park, Dallas, Texas (Mausoleum—St. Mark  
NE-N-C-13-A)

First Game: April 17, 1951; Final Game: September 28, 1968

Bat: Both

Throw: Right

Height: 5' 11.5"

Weight: 195

Selected to the Hall of Fame in 1974

Named AL Most Valuable Player by Baseball Writers' Association of America  
(1956 to 1957 and 1962)

Named Major League Player of the Year by The Sporting News (1956)

Named AL Player of the Year by The Sporting News (1956 and 1962)

Named outfielder on The Sporting News Major League All-Star Team (1952 and  
1956 to 1957)

Named outfielder on The Sporting News AL All-Star Team (1961 to 1962 and  
1964)

Won AL Gold Glove as outfielder (1962)

Ejections as player: 1954 (1), 1957 (1), 1958 (2), 1964 (1), 1965 (1), 1968 (1).

Total: 7

## CAREER TOTALS: 18 YEARS

G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	IBB	SO	HBP	SH	SF	XI	ROE	GDP	SB	CS	AVG	OBP	SLG	BFW
2401	8102	1677	2415	344	72	536	1509	1733	144	1710	13	14	47	0	104	113	153	38	.298	.421	.557	71.8

Source: Retrosheet

When traditionalists compare Mays and Mantle, they use the old math: batting average (.302 vs. .298), RBIs (1,903 in 22 years vs. 1,509 in 18 years), and home runs (660 in 2,992 games vs. 536 in 2,401 games). Both hit .300 or better ten times; both hit more than 50 homers in a season twice; both finished their careers with a .557 slugging percentage; both fared well in Branch Rickey's measure of Isolated Power, with Mantle slightly higher than Mays (.256 vs. .259).

Very few boys on New York City street corners bragged about how many more times The Mick walked. In ten seasons, he walked 100 times or more (Mays did that once). Or the number of times he grounded into double plays (113), half as many as Mays (251). But to the trained eye of a modern stat geek, walks are the key to Mantle's superior on-base percentage and the reason he fares so well in a preponderance of the new offensive metrics.

Mantle's lifetime batting average was much higher right-handed than left-handed (.329 compared to .275). But his on-base percentage was almost identical (.432 right-handed, .422 left-handed). His OPS is staggering from both sides of the plate—1.014 right-handed and .964 left-handed. (The major league average in 2008 was around .760.) By this standard, Mantle ranks twelfth in baseball history, ahead of Joe DiMaggio, Willie Mays, and Hank Aaron. In eighteen years in the major leagues, Mantle put 6,392 balls into play; 536 of them—or 8.4 percent—were home runs.

Bill James was a security guard at the Stokely Van Camp pork and beans factory in Kansas when he pioneered a formula for runs created ( $RC = \text{total bases} * [(\text{hits} + \text{walks}) / \text{plate appearances}]$ ) that assessed credit for each run produced. Thirty years later, *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world and the Boston Red Sox put him to work in their front office. In 2001, he unveiled a new formula for "win shares," an extrapolation of runs created that calculates a player's contribution to every victory. This system compares players at different positions as well as players of different eras, enabling fantasy baseball to expand into uncharted hypothetical territory. According to this calculus, Mantle should have been the Most Valuable Player nine times, not the three times he actually won the award. He led (or tied) the American League in win shares every year from 1954 to 1964, except 1963, when he played only sixty-five games. When Cyril Morong, an economist turned sabermetrician, extrapolated win shares per at-bat, Mantle finished second behind Ruth.

If the Bill James baseball abstracts are the sabermetric equivalent of the Old Testament, then Pete Palmer's 1984 *Hidden Game of Baseball* is the New Testament. Palmer's work began in the 1960s, when he stayed after work at the Raytheon Company, using the computer to develop a

system of linear weights that assigned a value to each of the seven possible outcomes of an at-bat. It was a breakthrough that precipitated an entirely new way of assessing baseball performance. He pioneered total player rankings and, with co-author, John Thorn, devised a metric called on-base-plus slugging (OPS = SLG + OBP), which measured a player's ability to get on base and hit for power. Topps began putting OPS stats on the back of its baseball cards in 2004. Palmer's next evolutionary step was "batter-fielder wins" (BFW), a calculus for establishing the number of wins over (or under) what an average player would contribute to his team with his batting, baserunning, and fielding. (Retrosheet now includes BFWs among other career totals). Palmer credits Mantle with a total 71.8 BFW over the course of his career, meaning that he was responsible for nearly 72 additional wins beyond what a league-average performer at his position would have contributed. In the world of BFWs, two games per season are significant. In 1955 and 1956, Mantle is responsible for 8 BFW or better; in 1961, he is credited with 7.5 BFW. Three other times, he rated over 5 BFW. Mays, on the other hand, has a career total of 84.4 BFW, in part a reflection of his longevity. But he never had a single-season BFW rating over 7, though he was over 5 on eight other occasions.

Clay Davenport, a weather scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and chief statistician for Baseball Prospectus, spent a decade devising an equation for equivalent average, a metric that measures total offensive value per out with corrections for league offensive production, home ballpark, and team pitching. His most radical innovation was to translate his metrics into traditional baseball numbers, making the new math accessible to old fans. Mantle's translated EqA batting average in Clay Davenport's ratings is .316, four points higher than Mays's.

	MANTLE	MAYS
EqA:	.340	.328
Black Ink:	65	57
OBP:	.421	.384
OPS:	12 <sup>th</sup> all time	30 <sup>th</sup> all time
OPS+:	6 <sup>th</sup> all-time	19 <sup>th</sup> all time
RC:	2039	2368
RC/G:	9.3	7.9
RCAA:	7 <sup>th</sup> all-time	11 <sup>th</sup> all time
RCAP:	6 <sup>th</sup> all time	10 <sup>th</sup> all time
TPRf:	7 <sup>th</sup> all time	9 <sup>th</sup> all-time