



Five Intentional Walks

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There was little at stake for either the Philadelphia Phillies or the New York Giants on the last day of the 1929 season. The Giants were in third place, 13-1/2 games behind the Chicago Cubs, while the Phillies were in fifth place, 27-1/2 games off the pace. Both teams were playing for pride, but there was something more going on that day.



What was on the line was the National League home run title. Chuck Klein of the Phillies had picked up his 43rd homer on October 4th, setting a new single season league record. Right on his heels was Giants' outfielder Mel Ott with 42 home runs who had held the single season record broken by Klein and who was determined to recapture it.

The 20-year old Ott (at left) was in his 4th season for McGraw's Giants, but there was nothing in his record that would indicate his home run hitting ability – only 19 home runs in the previous three seasons. His 42 home runs in 1929 marked a breakout season for Ott.

His opponent for the home run title was 24-year old Chuck Klein who was in his second season in the majors. 1929 was a breakout season for Klein as well, having only recorded 11 homers the prior season.

The Philadelphia bull pen left nothing to chance, issuing Ott five intentional walks, one with the bases loaded, assuring Klein the National League home run title, his first of four.

The rivalry between Ott and Klein would continue well into the 1930's as both men would battle for home run supremacy. Klein would finish in second place in 1930 before capturing three consecutive titles in 1931 – 1933. After a fifth place showing in 1934 and a seventh place finish in 1935, Klein did not appear among top ten finishers in the National League again. He retired from baseball in 1944 after 17 seasons with a total of 300 home runs.

Ott, however, would remain in the top ten every season for the remainder of his career, capturing six National League home run titles in 1932, 1934, 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1942. He would also finish in second place seven times on his way to 511 career home runs. Ott would lead all National League hitters in career home runs until he was passed by another Giant – Willie Mays.



The following table illustrates the dominance of Mel Ott and Chuck Klein following their breakout season in 1929.

| Year | League Leader (HR) | Runner-Up | Top Ten Finish |
|------|--|-------------------------|---|
| 1929 | Chuck Klein (43) | Mel Ott (42) | |
| 1930 | Hack Wilson (56) | Chuck Klein (40) | Mel Ott (25) – 7 th place |
| 1931 | Chuck Klein (31) | Mel Ott (29) | |
| 1932 | Chuck Klein (38) Mel Ott (38) | | |
| 1933 | Chuck Klein (28) | | Mel Ott (23) – 3 rd place |
| 1934 | Mel Ott (35) | | Chuck Klein (20) – 5 th place |
| 1935 | Wally Berger (34) | Mel Ott (31) | Chuck Klein (21) – 7 th place |
| 1936 | Mel Ott (33) | | |
| 1937 | Mel Ott (31) | | |
| 1938 | Mel Ott (36) | | |
| 1939 | Johnny Mize (28) | Mel Ott (27) | |
| 1940 | Johnny Mize (43) | | Mel Ott (19) – 5 th place |
| 1941 | Dolph Camilli (34) | Mel Ott (27) | |
| 1942 | Mel Ott (30) | | |
| 1943 | Bill Nicholson (29) | Mel Ott (18) | |
| 1944 | Bill Nicholson (33) | Mel Ott (26) | |
| 1945 | Tommy Holmes (28) | | Mel Ott (21) – 4 th place |