

## First Time's The Charm

by

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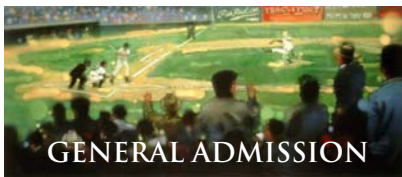
Election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame is an honor bestowed on the game's very best. The rules established by the Baseball Writers' Association of America (BBWAA) are straightforward and strict:

- (1) *A baseball player must have been active as a player in the Major Leagues at some time during a period beginning twenty years before and ending five years prior to election.*
- (2) *The player must have played in each of ten Major League championship seasons, some part of which must have been within the period described in the preceding section.*
- (3) *The player shall have ceased to be an active player in the Major Leagues at least five calendar years preceding the election, but may be otherwise connected with baseball.*
- (4) *In case of the death of an active player or a player who has been retired for less than five full years, a candidate who is otherwise eligible shall be eligible in the next regular election held at least six months after the date of death or after the end of the five year period, whichever occurs first.*
- (5) *Any player on Baseball's ineligible list shall not be an eligible candidate.*

With the induction of Dennis Eckersley and Paul Molitor in 2004, there are currently 258 members of the Hall of Fame – 193 former players, 23 executives or pioneers, 18 Negro leaguers, 16 managers, and 8 umpires. The BBWAA held their first election in 1936.

Many of today's players are referred to as *future Hall of Famers* and indeed for many election to Cooperstown is thought to be automatic. Or is it? Since 1936 only 39 of the 258 members, roughly 15%, were elected in their first year of eligibility.

Many of the names considered to be synonymous with the game of baseball – Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, and Honus Wagner – were elected on the first ballot with over 90% of the vote. However, you may be surprised by the votes received by some players as well as by the players who are absent from the following lists. The table on the left lists the players alphabetically, while the table on the right lists the players according to the percentage of votes they received.



## Hall of Famers Elected on the First Ballot

<i>Listed Alphabetically</i>		
<b>Player</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Hank Aaron	1982	97.8%
Johnny Bench	1989	96.4%
George Brett	1999	98.2%
Lou Brock	1985	79.9%
Rod Carew	1991	90.5%
Steve Carlton	1994	95.8%
Ty Cobb	1936	98.2%
Dennis Eckersley	2004	83.2%
Bob Feller	1962	93.8%
Lou Gehrig	1939	22.6%
Bob Gibson	1981	84.0%
Reggie Jackson	1993	93.6%
Walter Johnson	1936	83.6%
Al Kaline	1980	88.3%
Sandy Koufax	1972	86.9%
Mickey Mantle	1974	88.2%
Christy Mathewson	1936	90.7%
Willie Mays	1979	94.7%
Willie McCovey	1986	81.4%
Paul Molitor	2004	85.4%
Joe Morgan	1990	81.8%
Eddie Murray	2003	85.3%
Stan Musial	1969	93.2%
Jim Palmer	1990	92.6%
Kirby Puckett	2001	82.1%
Brooks Robinson	1983	92.0%
Frank Robinson	1982	89.2%
Jackie Robinson	1962	77.5%
Babe Ruth	1936	95.1%
Nolan Ryan	1999	98.8%
Mike Schmidt	1995	96.5%
Tom Seaver	1992	98.8%
Ozzie Smith	2002	91.7%
Warren Spahn	1973	83.2%
Willie Stargell	1988	82.4%
Honus Wagner	1936	95.1%
Ted Williams	1966	93.4%
Dave Winfield	2001	84.5%
Carl Yastremski	1989	94.6%
Robin Yount	1999	77.5%

<i>Listed by Percentage of Votes Received</i>		
<b>Player</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Nolan Ryan	1999	98.8%
Tom Seaver	1992	98.8%
George Brett	1999	98.2%
Ty Cobb	1936	98.2%
Hank Aaron	1982	97.8%
Mike Schmidt	1995	96.5%
Johnny Bench	1989	96.4%
Honus Wagner	1936	95.1%
Steve Carlton	1994	95.8%
Babe Ruth	1936	95.1%
Willie Mays	1979	94.7%
Carl Yastremski	1989	94.6%
Bob Feller	1962	93.8%
Reggie Jackson	1993	93.6%
Ted Williams	1966	93.4%
Stan Musial	1969	93.2%
Jim Palmer	1990	92.6%
Brooks Robinson	1983	92.0%
Ozzie Smith	2002	91.7%
Christy Mathewson	1936	90.7%
Rod Carew	1991	90.5%
Frank Robinson	1982	89.2%
Al Kaline	1980	88.3%
Mickey Mantle	1974	88.2%
Sandy Koufax	1972	86.9%
Paul Molitor	2004	85.4%
Eddie Murray	2003	85.3%
Dave Winfield	2001	84.5%
Bob Gibson	1981	84.0%
Walter Johnson	1936	83.6%
Dennis Eckersley	2004	83.2%
Warren Spahn	1973	83.2%
Willie Stargell	1988	82.4%
Kirby Puckett	2001	82.1%
Joe Morgan	1990	81.8%
Willie McCovey	1986	81.4%
Lou Brock	1985	79.7%
Robin Yount	1999	77.5%
Jackie Robinson	1962	77.5%
Lou Gehrig	1939	22.6%



The case of Lou Gehrig immediately jumps off the page, with election despite receiving only 22.6% of the vote in 1939. This was, of course, the year in which Gehrig played his final game on April 30, 1939, having been diagnosed with the disease that would later bear his name. His election was held under special circumstances to honor him before his death.

However, there are two players whose failure to be elected on the first ballot has always amazed me: Mel Ott and Joe DiMaggio. Both are among the giants of the game and both were elected in their third year of eligibility.

<b>Mel Ott</b>	<b>1949</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1951</b>
Percentage of Votes Received	61.4%	68.5%	87.2%
	68.5% in run-off		

<b>Joe DiMaggio</b>	<b>1953</b>	<b>1954</b>	<b>1955</b>
Percentage of Votes Received	44.3%	68.4%	88.8%

Mel Ott was involved in the first-ever run-off ballot in 1949, having garnered 61.4% of the votes on the initial ballot, finishing second behind Charlie Gehringer, who received 66.7% of the vote. The BBWAA decided to hold a special run-off election wherein the player who received the most votes would be elected. Gehringer received 85% of the run-off votes cast versus Ott's 68.5%.

In 1950, Ott received 68.5% of the vote, leading Bill Terry (62.5%) and Jimmie Foxx (61.2%). However, no run-off election was conducted and there was no one elected to the Hall of Fame for the first time since 1936. It should be noted that there were no ballots prepared in 1940, 1941, 1943, and 1944. Ott received 88.8% of the vote in 1955 and took his rightful place among baseball's greats in Cooperstown.

No one so dominated the game of baseball between 1936 and 1951 as did Joe DiMaggio. In thirteen seasons he was elected to the All-Star team thirteen times, won the American League's Most Valuable Player Award three times (1939, 1941, 1947), and led his New York Yankees to victory in nine out of the ten World Series appearances they made.

So why was Joltin' Joe not elected in 1953? Possibly because he wasn't really eligible for election, having played his last game on September 30, 1951. The rules as stated on page one provide the answer: *The player shall have ceased to be an active player in the Major Leagues at least five calendar years preceding the election, but may be otherwise connected with baseball.*

According to the rules, DiMaggio would have been eligible in 1955, but since his name appeared on the 1953 and 1954 ballots he was technically elected in his third year.