



Home Run Drought

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The game of baseball was forever changed by the home run production of Babe Ruth. What is most remarkable is the frequency with which he hit home runs. In 8,398 career at-bats over 22-years, Ruth's 714 home runs occurred once every 11.76 at-bats, or roughly one home run every 3.5 games.

To realize how truly amazing this performance is, consider the production of the top ten career home run hitters of all time (through the 2006 season). The following table measures the frequency with which these players produced home runs and then projects their career total had they performed with the same efficiency as Babe Ruth.

Player	Seasons	At-Bats	Home Runs	Frequency	
Babe Ruth	22	8,398	714	11.76	
Player	Seasons	At-Bats	Home Runs	Frequency	Ruth's Pace
Hank Aaron	23	12,364	755	16.38	1,051
Barry Bonds *	21	9,507	734	12.95	808
Willie Mays	22	10,881	660	16.49	925
Sammy Sosa	17	8,401	588	14.29	714
Frank Robinson	21	10,006	586	17.08	850
Mark McGuire	16	6,187	583	10.61	527
Harmon Killebrew	22	8,147	573	14.22	693
Rafael Palmiero	20	10,472	569	18.40	890
Ken Griffey, Jr. *	18	8,298	563	14.74	706
Reggie Jackson	21	9,864	563	17.52	839

* *Active Player*

Ignoring the possibility that several of the players above may have their career records tainted by the use of performance enhancing substances, only one player achieved a more efficient home run frequency than Babe Ruth.

Every player experiences a slump from time to time, even the mighty Babe Ruth. But the 1933 season saw Babe Ruth experience his longest drought between home runs.



On April 30th, in the second game of a doubleheader against the Boston Red Sox, Ruth hit his fifth home run of the 1933 season off of left-hander Bob Weiland, a feat that was largely overshadowed by Tony Lazzeri's seven consecutive hits during the twin bill.

And even though his annual production of round trippers had been declining steadily since the 1927 season when he hit a record 60 home runs, Ruth still led the league in home runs in 1928 (54), 1929 (46), 1930 (49) and 1931 (46). He finished second in 1932 behind Jimmie Foxx, tallying 41 homers against Foxx's 58.

While he was closer to the end of his career than the beginning, no one expected that the 37-year old Bambino was washed up.



Yet for the next 14 games Ruth failed to produce a trademark home run, 17 games if you count the three exhibition games the Yankees squeezed into their schedule. In the longest home run slump of his career, Ruth had 45 consecutive at-bats during the regular schedule without a home run. For the average player this was an acceptable home run to at-bat ratio. But this was not just any player. This was Babe Ruth – *the Bambino, the Big Bam, the Sultan of Swat, the Colossus of Clout, the Wazir of Wham, the Maharajah of Mash, the Rajah of Rap, the Caliph of Clout, the Behemoth of Bust*, and holder of every home run record in baseball at the time.

This is not to say that Ruth didn't hit the ball at all, but the best he could manage was a paltry 11 hits, all singles, in 45 at-bats – a .244 average. Even the disastrous 1925 season that began with the *Bellyache Heard 'Round the World* saw Ruth bat .290 for the season.

Throughout it all, Ruth maintained a normal routine and schedule. He appeared in the May 1st exhibition game against the Binghamton Triplets, the Yankees' farm club in the New York-Penn League, and in other exhibition games on May 12th against the Indianapolis Indians (Class AA – American Association) and on May 15th against the Wheeling Stogies (Class C – Middle Atlantic League).

Fans came out to see Babe Ruth. Over 300 fans in Indiana, including the governor and several congressmen, had signed a petition asking that Babe Ruth pitch in their game against the Indianapolis Indians. He pitched two innings.

On May 13th he signed 51 bats and 51 baseballs for the War Department to be divided among the best baseball players in the military's 51 citizen's training camps.

On May 19th he paid a surprise visit to the Passaic Home and Orphan Asylum in Passaic, New Jersey to reward six youngsters who had prevented a commuter train crash on May 5th by waving their jackets on the track to stop the engine. He passed out Babe Ruth baseball hats and Babe Ruth baseball ties and autographed a baseball for



each of the boys. He also arranged for them to attend the next day's game at Yankee Stadium against the St. Louis Browns – at Colonel Ruppert's expense. As he was often inclined to do, Ruth promised to hit a home run for them as he left to return to New York.

"It will be one of the deepest regrets of my life if I don't send one into the stands for this gang. Will you keep your fingers crossed for me?" Ruth would need more than the hopes of fans young and old, going 0-for-3 against the Browns.

The following table details the unprecedented slump of 1933.

Date	Opponent	At-Bats	Hits	Average	HR
May 1	Binghamton (<i>exhibition</i>)	NA	NA	NA	NA
May 2	Detroit Tigers	3	0	.000	0
May 4	Detroit Tigers	2	0	.000	0
May 6	Cleveland Indians	4	1	.111	0
May 7	Cleveland Indians (<i>Game One</i>)	5	1	.143	0
	Cleveland Indians (<i>Game Two</i>)	4	2	.222	0
May 8	Chicago White Sox	4	2	.273	0
May 10	Chicago White Sox	2	0	.250	0
May 12	Indianapolis (<i>exhibition</i>)	NA	NA	NA	NA
May 14	St. Louis Browns (<i>Game One</i>)	4	1	.250	0
	St. Louis Browns (<i>Game Two</i>)	2	1	.267	0
May 15	Wheeling (<i>exhibition</i>)	NA	NA	NA	NA
May 17	Detroit Tigers	3	1	.272	0
May 18	Detroit Tigers	2	1	.286	0
May 20	St. Louis Browns	3	0	.263	0
May 21	St. Louis Browns	3	1	.268	0
May 23	Cleveland Indians	4	0	.244	0
	Average	45	11	.244	0

On May 24th the Yankees squared off against the Cleveland Indians in Yankee Stadium. On the mound for the Indians was young Oral Hildebrand, fresh off a six-game winning streak.

After retiring Earl Combs and walking Joe Sewell, Hildebrand faced the slumping Ruth, who promptly deposited the first pitch halfway up the right field bleachers for his first home run in the last 46 at-bats. It was his sixth of the year. In typical Yankee fashion, the next batter, Lou Gehrig, followed Ruth's home run with one of his own, his eighth home run of the season. It was a six-run inning and the Yankees would go on to beat the Indians 8 – 6.

Ruth's season would improve as he was named to the very first All-Star team where he stroked the first home run in All-Star history in the third inning off Cardinals' left hander Willie Hallahan.



He would even pitch in the final game of the 1933 season, hurling shutout ball for five innings before giving up four runs in the sixth inning and another in the eighth. The Yankees would hang on to win 6 – 5 behind Ruth’s 34th home run of the season. Imagine that – a 37-year old outfielder throwing a complete game victory at the end of the season!

During Ruth’s slump the Yankees played .500 ball, winning seven games and losing seven games, but also losing the lead in the American League to the Cleveland Indians on May 14th. After swapping the lead with the Senators during late June and again in late July, the Yankees would finish the 1933 season seven games behind Joe Cronin’s Washington Senators.

An interesting side note – during the same 14-game period Lou Gehrig also failed to hit a home run. He would finish the season second on the team in home runs with 32 behind Ruth’s 34.

The following table compares other home run hitters to Babe Ruth in terms of frequency and projects what their home run output might have been had they been able to produce at Ruth’s pace.

Player	Seasons	At-Bats	Home Runs	Frequency	
Babe Ruth	22	8,398	714	11.76	
Player	Seasons	At-Bats	Home Runs	Frequency	Ruth’s Pace
Mickey Mantle	18	8,102	536	15.12	689
Jimmie Foxx	20	8,134	534	15.23	692
Ted Williams	19	7,706	525	14.68	655
Willie McCovey	22	8,197	521	15.73	697
Mel Ott	22	9,456	511	18.50	804
Lou Gehrig	17	8,001	493	16.23	680
Jim Thome *	16	6,409	472	13.58	545
Manny Ramirez *	14	6,575	470	13.99	559
Alex Rodriguez *	13	6,767	464	14.58	575

* *Active Player*