

BASEBALL HISTORY

by

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Mauer's Milestone

The 2009 major league season was, in many ways, just like the 103+ seasons prior. That is, it was full of surprises, disappointments and single accomplishments. It is one portion of the latter category that I would like to address at this time.

Joe Mauer, at the ripe old age of 26, won his third batting championship in only his sixth major league campaign. That career feat equals the previous total of batting championships won by catchers in all of baseball history. Hall of Famer Ernie Lombardi won two titles and Eugene "Bubbles" Hargrave was the first receiver way back in 1926 to climb the mountain.

Mauer's outstanding 2009 included career highs in hits, RBIs, home runs (falling one short of his 2006 – 2008 total), OBP, SLG, OPS and batting average. He also led the league in the last four areas mentioned above. With six more PA's he will join the career batting list tucked in right behind gentlemen named Boggs, Carew, and Wagner. At that point only three active players – Ichiro, Albert Pujols, and Todd Helton – will be ahead of him. Here are his stats for his championship seasons as well as his career.

	G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS
2006	140	521	181	36	4	13	84	.347	.429	.507	.936
2008	146	536	176	31	4	9	85	.328	.413	.451	.864
2009	138	523	191	30	1	28	96	.365	.444	.587	1.031
Career	699	2,582	844	158	15	72	397	.327	.408	.483	.892

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The future looks very bright for Mauer and any club lucky enough to employ him. Amazingly enough, despite his stunning achievements thus far, most baseball men feel he is just scratching the surface of his enormous talent.

Now for some words about his predecessors. Keep in mind that when Lombardi and Hargrove wore the tools of ignorance that only the only criteria needed to qualify for a batting crown was to appear in 100 or more games.



Lombardi's career stretched 17-seasons from 1931 – 1947. In that time he sported a .300+ batting average ten times. He appeared in two World Series – 1939 and 1940 – with the Cincinnati Reds, coming away with a ring in 1940. His line drive smashes were legendary as was his slowness afoot. If he had had any semblance of speed, infielders would not have been able to play as deep as they did and his batting average would have been even higher.

Among his many accomplishments, he was the 1938 National League MVP and caught both of Johnny Vander Meer's consecutive no-hitters. Much deserved but very belatedly, he was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1985, eight years after his passing and thirty-eight seasons after his final game.

	G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS
1938	129	489	167	30	1	19	95	.342	.391	.524	.915
1942	105	309	102	14	0	11	46	.330	.403	.482	.886
Career	1,853	5,855	1,792	277	27	190	990	.306	.358	.460	.818

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Hargrave spent 23 years in pro ball from 1911 – 1934 except for 1933. He toiled 12 seasons in the majors and 12 in the minors with one split (1913) between the two. Always an outstanding batsman, he swatted .300+ from 1922 – 1927 while performing as the primary backstop for the Cincinnati Reds. He also spent two years – 1929 and 1934 – as a player-manager in the minors with 1934 being his last go-round in organized ball.

Because of multiple double-headers, heavy wool uniforms and primitive catching gear, it was unusual for starting catchers to man their position for less than 100 games. In 1926 (the only year in the 1920s that Hornsby didn't lead all National League hitters) Bubbles caught only 93 games and pinch-hit in 12 games.

	G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS
1926	105	326	115	22	8	6	62	.353	.406	.525	.930
Career	852	2,533	786	155	58	29	376	.310	.372	.452	.824

Finally Bubbles, mainly a National Leaguer, had a younger brother, William “Pinky” Hargrave, who was also a catcher though less accomplished. Pinky's career path was similar to his sibling's spanning the years 1919 to 1937. It consisted of many stops in his 11 seasons in the minors and 10 seasons in the majors, primarily in the American League. Strangely enough the two brothers did not meet competitively until 1930. Bubbles was then in his final major league season as a member of the New York Yankees, catching only 37 games and pinch-hitting in another 8 games.

The brothers went head-to-head at last on May 12, 1930. Big brother Bubbles was on the receiving end of a 3-hit, 7 – 0 whitewash by George Pipgras. Bubbles

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managed a 2-for-4 day while Pinky saw pinch-hitting duty for the Detroit Tigers without reaching base.

In a rematch in Detroit on June 20th, the Tigers returned the favor by thumping the Yanks and Pipgras, 11 – 6. Pinky, in a starting role, stroked two hits in four attempts while Bubbles took an 0-for-2 collar while mopping up.

On September 10th, Pinky, the newest member of the Washington Senators, chugged into New York for the final series between the Nats and the Yanks. Unfortunately there would be no rubber match for the Hargraves as Bubbles' major league career ender occurred on September 6th against the Pinky-less Senators.