



# **The Cooperstown Casebook: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In, and Who Should Pack Their Plaques**

*Jay Jaffe*

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The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, tucked away in upstate New York in a small town called Cooperstown, is far from any major media market or big league stadium. Yet no sports hall of fame's membership is so hallowed, nor its qualifications so debated, nor its voting process so dissected.

Since its founding in 1936, the Hall of Fame's standards for election have been nebulous, and its selection processes arcane, resulting in confusion among voters, not to mention mistakes in who has been recognized and who has been bypassed. Numerous so-called "greats" have been inducted despite having not been so great, while popular but controversial players such as all-time home run leader Barry Bonds and all-time hits leader Pete Rose are on the outside looking in.

Now, in *The Cooperstown Casebook*, Jay Jaffe shows us how to use his revolutionary ranking system to ensure the right players are recognized. The foundation of Jaffe's approach is his JAWS system, an acronym for the Jaffe WAR Score, which he developed over a decade ago. Through JAWS, each candidate can be objectively compared on the basis of career and peak value to the players at his position who are already in the Hall of Fame. Because of its utility, JAWS has gained an increasing amount of exposure in recent years. Through his analysis, Jaffe shows why the Hall of Fame still matters and how it can remain relevant in the 21st century.

## **The Cooperstown Casebook: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In, and Who Should Pack Their Plaques Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Cooperstown Casebook: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In, and Who Should Pack Their Plaques for online ebook**

## **Harold Kasselmann says**

This is not the type of book you sit down and read on a weekend spree. For me, it was a good resource book that I can use for years to come. It can be a bit tedious to read the credentials of all 317 current members of the Hall of Fame, but there are players who are spotlighted and generate debate. I especially enjoyed the chapters making the case for players like Trammel, Grich, Minoso and Schilling. Many of Jaffe's calculations will shock you-Pie Traynor is the worst third baseman of those enshrined. Kiki Cuyler doesn't belong? Nor does Bill Mazerowski, Phil Rizzuto, Hack Wilson, Frankie Frisch, Joe Cronin and maybe even Lou Brock, Andre Dawson, and Catfish Hunter. Gee, I had most of those guys on my all-star baseball game that you spun with their traditional stats on a card. I was robbed.

But aside from some good debates about the merits of players, you will be disheartened by the cronyism involved in voting, especially the various veterans' committees that voted for teammates or former employees, and the excess representation of players from the late 20's and especially the 30's from cronyism. But the new rules and expanding electorate to internet writers will cause a change in the way players are evaluated in the future, if it hasn't already begun in the last 3-years. Now the crux of Jaffe's thesis originates with his JAWS analysis. He subjectively(not unreasonably) focuses on a player's seven peak year WAR values to come up with his own JAWS metric for hall worthiness. He has three categories for every player; namely WAR, peak WAR, and the average WAR for all players for a particular player's position. In that way, each player can be compared to every other player's WAR who played that position. So Jaffe compares players worthiness by player position.(Query whether that should be the case or whether a player should be evaluated based on traditional statistics, current statistics, the total players in the HOF, or the eye test). In any event, the terminology for the current metrics are explained and make for interesting comparative reading and debates. Worth the money as a resource book.

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## **Chris Jaffe says**

So .... I don't think I'm really the best audience for this book.

It reminds me a lot of a book I read & devoured as a kid. I don't recall its name or who wrote it (no, not Bill James's Politics of Glory - this was before that book had come out) - but it was an overview of the Hall of Fame and the Hall of Famers inside. I loved that book. It was the first time I'd ever heard of all of these guys and got any sense for the people in Cooperstown. Have a lot of fond memories of it.

So why only three stars out of five for Jay Jaffe's book if it reminds me of a book I look back on so fondly? Simple: I already know about the Hall of Fame and the Hall of Famers. This is a solid book. It's a fairly well-written book. There's nothing inherently wrong with it. But it's covering ground I've already seen covered.

There are two parts to the book. The first part has 100 pages on some of the big issues and debates in the history of Hall of Fame voting - stuff like cronyism on the Veterans Committee, the steroids debate, the dearth of third basemen in Cooperstown. Stuff like that. Jay Jaffe handles it all well, but it's stuff I already knew about.

The second part is a series of brief reviews of all MLB players in Cooperstown as well as some of the most notable guys not yet in there. There is a chapter for each position (10 in all, as starting pitchers & relievers each get their own chapter). Each chapter leads off with an extended profile (six to ten pages) of a player to two at the position who is the subject of a debate of his Hall-worthiness. Then comes little bits on everyone else. It's about 300 pages of this -- by my count there are 14 profiles and 264 capsule reviews. Each of those capsules are about the same length: a paragraph or two, and last a bit over a half-page each. If you're not familiar with the Hall of Famers, feel free to enjoy. For me .... the whole thing became wearying. It actually gave me a new appreciation for Bill James's original Historical Abstract. That was mostly a series of overviews of tons of players - but that section never felt redundant. In part it's because James is a great writer, but it's also that he varied the length of his pieces. If he had a lot to say about someone, he went on at length. Others maybe got a sentence or two. Just giving a paragraph or so for 260-some people ...it all sounds the same. I don't hold it against Jay Jaffe that he isn't Bill James. That's an unfair comparison. But I just plain didn't get much out of this book, so 3 out of 5 stars.

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### **Carianne Carleo-Evangelist says**

I received this from NetGalley and was curious about it as I'd occasionally read some of Jaffe's work via posts on Twitter and wanted to learn more. It definitely ended up to be a really interesting read and one I'd recommend to any baseball fan.

Some of the stats were a little too dense especially first thing in the morning, but I really like how he balanced the stats with anecdotes and qualitative research. I especially enjoyed the chapters where he looked at the cronyism allegations that have battered the Hall throughout its history and backed it up with research that contextualized some of the claims.

The parts that I found most interesting were the various iterations of the veterans committees and how they've endeavored to handle the backlog from before the Hall's formation and as it has grown over time. I also liked how he'd put two players head to head, such as Blyleven and Jack Morris to further explore their candidacies.

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### **Dave says**

Disclaimer: If baseball bores you to tears, stop reading now and move along. This review likely won't stir your drink. As a novice of knowledge a mile wide and an inch deep, baseball is one of the few things that comes instinctually to me. While having flamed out after a brief collegiate fall stint and a disastrous semi-pro dalliance, watching a game often offers a cyborgian data analysis in my mind of what is happening outside the visually obvious. What substitutes may be coming up. Why fielders are playing where they are. What pitches may be thrown in certain counts. I was the kid that pored over the stats on the backs of my baseball cards. How was George Foster the last to hit 50+ HRs until Cecil Fielder came along? But statistics are lore and lore is the basis for legend. And legend is the root of immortality, a title bestowed upon baseball players sometimes by those that have never played the game professionally and other times by their peers. Let's start from the beginning.

The church of baseball has a holy city and it is Cooperstown, NY, site of the Baseball Hall of Fame. It is arguably the most revered HoF of the four major sports, and quite possibly the most debated, regarding

qualifications for entry. While there have been several different variations allowing entry, the two main means over the years have been the Baseball Writers Association (BBWAA) and the Veteran's Committee (VC). Author Jay Jaffe leaves NO stone unturned in his analytics. A statistician's dream (or sabermetrician, if you're into new wave baseball speak), Jaffe proposes a three tiered system of peer and era specific evaluative analysis. In other words, compare players to the contemporaries of their time and position on the diamond. The first tier was Career WAR (Wins Against Replacement) compared to the average HoFer at that position. The second tier was Peak WAR, a compilation WAR score of the candidate's best seven seasons. The final tier was the author's JAWS (Jaffe WAR score) stat. This compared the player's HoF value by "comparing him to the players at his position who are already enshrined."

What transpires is a fascinating, albeit HEAVILY DETAILED, historical context of baseball history and a short blurb about every enshrined player. What's more, several cases are made for who belongs in that is not, such as Minnie Minoso, Larry Walker, and Dick Allen to name a few. Cases are made for who is in that do not belong such as Bill Mazerowski, Phil Rizzuto and Fred Lindstrom. Some of these, chosen through a system of cronyism. And anecdotally, Jaffe provides some of the best takes on some controversial issues, acknowledging the legitimate candidacy of old timer Tony Mullane while simultaneously calling him out on his racism. As a journalist, he also acquiesces to the inevitable enshrinement of Curt Schilling but beautifully includes this quote from Schilling's former GM, Ed Wade:

"Schilling is a horse every fifth day and a horse's ass the other four."

Naturally, this is a must read for statistical minded baseball fans everywhere.

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## **Paul Carr says**

If you're a Baseball Hall of Fame junkie (and I am), this book is your de facto Bible. Jay Jaffe uses advanced and traditional statistics and a well-honed sense of history to examine the careers and Hall worthiness of every inductee, and he goes deep on flashpoint candidates like Edgar Martinez and Alan Trammell. He also traces the labyrinthine history of the voting process to better understand how the Hall has evolved over 80 years.

I haven't seen a better compendium on the honorees; the book is like a written version of the Hall's plaque gallery, suitable for both perusal and deliberate study. Jaffe's analysis of potential inductees is measured and nuanced, looking at all the angles voters and fans might take. Published in 2016, the book remains very relevant, and it's a must-read for those passionate about Cooperstown.

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## **Lance says**

One topic that is certain to ignite debates among baseball fans is the Baseball Hall of Fame. Pick any year, and the voting by the Baseball Writers Association of America (BBWAA) will certainly draw praise and criticism. Similarly, there are arguments whether certain players who are already inducted truly belong there. These types of debates will be conducted as long as there is a Hall of Fame.

While this book by Jay Jaffe is not intended for casual fans, it is one that every serious baseball fan should pick up. There is statistical information on every player currently enshrined in the Hall and a brief career bio

on each one that explains why Jaffee believes whether or not the player is a worthy inductee. He uses advanced statistical analysis to make these decisions with a formula he names JAWS (Jaffee War Score). The score is primarily derived from the Wins Above Replacement (WAR) statistic, using each player's peak performance and allowing for factors such as different ballparks and eras where either offense or pitching may be more dominant than at other times. It isn't perfect, but certainly a fair method to evaluate each player.

However, before ranking each player within his position (and, spoiler alert, there are some big surprises on the rankings of some of these players) Jaffee does his best work in the book in two areas. One is that he does a very nice job of breaking down some of the advanced statistical categories such as WAR, OPS+ and other statistics so that fans can better understand them. There is also a full chapter devoted to the argument the author makes on why players who have been suspected of using performance enhancement drugs, such as Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens, should not be kept out of the Hall of Fame. The only part of this argument that seemed flawed to me was not about these players, but he does not allow the same type of leeway for the inclusion of players who have been banned from the game for gambling, specifically Pete Rose and Shoeless Joe Jackson. This isn't a criticism of his opinion – just that the two specific situations seem to be approached differently when they may not be all that different.

One other aspect of the book's structure that I appreciated was that each chapter on the players inducted at a specific position gave an example of a player that should be inducted but has not been voted in by either the BBWAA or a committee, of which there have been several throughout the history of the Hall. (Note: there is also an excellent chapter on the flaws of the voting over the years by both the committees and BBWAA.) Using JAWS, traditional statistics and some old-fashioned logic, Jaffee makes a good case for each of these players. That was a nice touch to add to each chapter as a lead-in to the breakdown of each player's write-up at each position.

The Hall of Fame may be a source of debate among baseball fans as long as it exists, but there should be no debate about the worthiness of this book. Every serious baseball fan should read this for a better understanding of some of the advanced statistics that have been used to bolster the chances of some Hall of Fame players such as Bert Blyleven and Tim Lincecum as well as just gain some valuable information to use the next time an argument breaks out about the worthiness of some player who supposedly doesn't belong there.

I wish to thank St. Martin's Press and Thomas Dunne Books for providing a copy of the book via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

<http://sportsbookguy.blogspot.com/201...>

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## Dave says

Why care about the Hall of Fame, Jay asks. In a word - justice. The best deserve to be rewarded and those who come up short do not. That Clemens and Bonds, the best pitcher since Walter Johnson and the best left handed hitter since Ted Williams, are out is a travesty. That Jack Morris and Bruce Sutter are in is a joke. If you care about the Hall you'll no doubt have a few players you see on each end of that spectrum - the unjustly excluded and the unjustly included. What Jaffe attempts to do is make an objective case for all those who are in and many of those who are out.

So, the good - the war against WAR argument, featuring Bert Blyleven vs. Jack Morris - is a great example

of old school vs. new school stats and how the latter finally got a deserving Blyleven in and how the writers were just barely wise enough to keep Morris out before the Veterans Committee overruled them. That a number of people, Bill James the pioneer amongst them, have attempted to apply objective criteria regarding baseball's two true aims - run prevention and run creation - as to which candidates are deserving of enshrinement is admirable.

In addition, the expose' on the Frankie Frisch Veterans Committee, which for all intents and purposes started electing members' buddies on the basis of friendship rather than merit, is an interesting historical piece that shows why the 20s and 30s are overrepresented in the Hall.

Also, as my knowledge of pre-Ruth baseball is rather limited, I was glad to learn of 19th century greats and their impact. And seeing stats like 400+! IP in a single season, or finding top flight players who drank their way out of baseball or had to leave in order to care for a family ranch is eye-opening, from that to today's hyper-specialization and incredible pay.

The bad, however, drops any chance the book has at 4 stars. First, there's the typos, so many of them. Greg Maddux led the league in wins 14 times! (No he didn't) Mark McGwire hit 1626 home runs! (Really? I don't care if he was injecting himself in the on deck circle. If he hit more homers than Ruth and Aaron combined then put that man in the Hall post haste!) And it's clear that someone's Excel file kept taking three digit decimals that ended in a zero and shortening them to two. You may have batted .310, but not .31. It just gets distracting and gives a hint of laziness.

Secondly, Jaffe's subjective political views obscure the objective analysis he claims to bring. He tries to shame the conservative Curt Schilling's association with Breitbart, but his appeal to authority is to a hate group that calls female genital mutilation victims "anti-Islam extremists". Yikes! He goes full on creep mode with bashing pre-integration guys who did not properly genuflect in the presence of black players and then with Frank Robinson he virtue signals so hard he comes across as an actual white nationalist. Robinson hit 586 home runs and is 23rd all time in OPS+. Outstanding accomplishments, but Jaffe only mentions them once, while noting Robinson's skin color three times. I'm betting if David Duke were a sportswriter he would have employed a similar ratio.

Finally, Jay's evaluation system is problematic, and the longer I read gross miscalculations of a player's value the more I found myself disdainful of the analysis. What has actually led me to reject WAR and JAWS as objective measures of a player's value is their two major flaws - they overweight the importance of a player's defensive position and straight up do not consider playoff performance. For example, Lou Whitaker, he was 334 runs above average in the regular season in his career. Fred McGriff was 331 runs above average. Pretty comparable I'd say, with McGriff an outstanding hitter but below average on the bases and in the field, with Whitaker very good all the way around but great at none. In addition, Whitaker put up a playoff slash line of .204/.350/.306 to McGriff's .303/.385/.532. McGriff played 4X as many games, and you could argue that's unfair, but the bottom line is McGriff, like Beltran, Brett, and Mantle, played better in the playoffs than in the regular season. Whitaker played worse. Should this not be incorporated in some manner in the evaluation of a player's Hall worthiness?

Either way, their regular season value was very similar, but Jay's system gives Whitaker a 56.4 and McGriff a 44.3. Whitaker gets one of the two long write-ups that begin every chapter arguing for his inclusion while McGriff gets a paragraph saying he wasn't quite up to par. Why the difference? Because Whitaker is rewarded for playing the middle infield while McGriff is punished for playing first. How is this relevant? The objective of the game is to score runs and stop them from being scored on you. If you play right field you'll have fewer chances to impact the game than at shortstop because you'll touch the ball fewer times per

game. If you're a great hitter and bat 2nd rather than 8th you'll get ~70 more chances to make a positive offensive impact in a season. That's the breaks! A player should not have runs created/saved deducted because of where he stands on the diamond. It's a double punishment, as a middle infielder has more opportunity to save runs than someone on the corners. We should increase that disparity with an arbitrary reward/punishment in addition?

And their playoff totals should count for something! A truly objective view would simply tally the runs above average created/saved, incorporate post-season totals and then provide a career figure along with a peak 7-year figure. Then you could have debates over whether someone who peaked high but didn't last long (Dale Murphy, Johan Santana, etc.) deserves to be in over someone who was more of a compiler, very good for a long time, but not necessarily great (Andy Pettitte, Craig Biggio, etc.) That's what the Hall of Fame debate should be, but for that to happen the position punishments and the lack of post-season inclusion has to be rectified. WAR and JAWS are better than just tabulating RBI and wins, and making the call on those flawed stats, but as long as these two metrics are used over the basics of adding and saving runs, from April through the end of October, then the selection process will remain unrefined. And that, ladies and gents, is an injustice.

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## **Allen Adams says**

<http://www.themaineedge.com/sports/th...>

The inroads that statistical analysis has made into baseball coverage over the past decade or so are pretty remarkable. Advanced metrics have become a much larger part of understanding the game.

But it isn't just about understanding the game now. Some of these numbers even allow us to compare players across generations, to find a shared context for players who played a century ago and those currently on the field.

Nowhere is that comparison to history more celebrated than in baseball's Hall of Fame.

Jay Jaffe's "The Cooperstown Casebook: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In, and Who Should Pack Their Plaques" takes the writer's own signature stat – JAWS – and applies it to the Hall. It's a dissection of what it means to be a baseball great and a statistically sound metric for measuring Hall of Fame worthiness from a numbers perspective.

JAWS (Jaffe WAR Score) uses numerous calculations involving Wins Above Replacement, an advanced metric designed to quantify a player's overall contributions. A player's career value and a peak value defined as the player's seven best season are brought together to produce another number.

When the score is calculated for all the players in the Hall – a score that allows for normalization of statistics between eras – it allows for comparisons across the game's history. It will also tell you that there are some guys outside the Hall who really ought to be in. And there are some guys inside who REALLY ought to be out.

"The Cooperstown Casebook" is broken down into two parts. Part I – titled "Battles and WARs" – takes a look at the Hall as it currently stands and how sabermetrics are changing that understanding. Jaffe discusses why players at certain positions have a more difficult time making it in than those at others. The divide



between old-school and new-school is illustrated via the respective candidacies of Jack Morris and Bert Blyleven. He looks at boom and bust times in terms of the ballot and the heyday of Veteran's Committee cronyism, as well as the current talent bottleneck and the impact of PEDs.

It's a compelling and comprehensive look at the state of Cooperstown and how it arrived there.

Part II – "Around the Diamond" – is something else. It is a JAWS-driven statistical breakdown of the 220 men elected to the Hall for the major league careers. Every. Single. One. Every denizen of Cooperstown gets the treatment as Jaffe goes through the list, position by position, separating the players into tiers – the Elite (self-explanatory), the Rank and File (the "average" Hall of Famers) ... and the Basement, made up of players whose plaques aren't merited by their statistical profiles. He also includes a section dubbed Further Consideration that offers capsules of upcoming or overlooked candidates.

In addition, the openings to each of these positional chapters feature an unenshrined player or two and makes the case for (or against) that player. The names run the gamut; there are underappreciated talents like Ted Simmons, Lou Whitaker, Alan Trammell, Bobby Grich – guys whose abilities weren't as easily measured in their eras – and more recent stars like Edgar Martinez, Larry Walker and David Ortiz.

As a longish-time reader (and fan) of Jaffe's work, it's fascinating to see what he does with the room to run that a book offers. His research is exceptional and his analysis is remarkably deft; when it all comes together, it's as thought-provoking a Hall-related read as you're likely to find anywhere. It's incredible – he shines a light both on beneath-the-surface greatness and mediocrity polished by empty stats and old teammates.

Baseball fans don't have to be statheads to dig "The Cooperstown Casebook" – although it certainly helps. The sheer magnitude of this undertaking will impress any lover of baseball; most baseball lovers embrace this kind of discussion regardless of which side of the subjective/objective line they might come down upon. It is smart and thorough and wonderfully informative; advanced enough for the more statistically-minded, but still engaging and informative to the layman.

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## Casey Wheeler says

I received a free Kindle copy of The Cooperstown Casebook by Jay Jaffe courtesy of Net Galley and St. Martin's Press. St. Martin's Press, the publisher. It was with the understanding that I would post a review to Net Galley, Goodreads, Amazon, Barnes and Noble and my history book review blog. I also posted it to my Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Google Plus pages.

I requested this book as I am an avid baseball fan and the description of this book sounded interesting. It is the first book by Jay Jaffe that I have read.

This was an interesting book and a quick read. The premise of the book is accurately described in the subtitle: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In and Who Should Pack Their Plaques. The author's suppositions, while interesting, are based solely on numbers and ratios. While he presents strong arguments, he appears to want to totally take the human element out of the qualification process. There is not room for the intangibles - leadership in the clubhouse or clutch pitching, hitting or fielding as examples. He also is in favor of overlooking some of the seedier side of baseball. While I can go along with overlooking the steroid era as ballplayers since the establishment of the game have always looked for an edge, I do not agree with allowing those who gambled on the game to be allowed entrance into the hall. Joe

Jackson admitted that they threw the second game of the Black Sox series and Pete Rose has denied betting on the Reds while he was manager, there is not proof of it or that he may have manipulated the lineup to lose games.

This is not a book for the casual or even more than casual baseball fan. It is intended for hard core fans, but does not really present anything new (other than additional numbers) to the arguments of those who are in and shouldn't be and those who are not and should be.

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### **Blaine DeSantis says**

So very hard to rate this book. There are so many variables about baseball stats that a computer just cannot compute. But the system that Jaffe uses is OK compared to other analytic systems, the bottom line is that I just am not a fan of the Sabremetrics and its influence on the Hall of Fame. But I did get a big kick out of the ratings systems and some of the ratings do fall into where I stand with the players in the Hall of Fame.

Author rates Koufax is the #87 starting pitcher in the Hall because of his limited time of excellence, but then almost drools over Clayton Kershaw who may have no better stats than Koufax and is not a slam dunk in my mind due to durability issues.

This is a fast paced and easy to read and digest book. As with the Hall of Fame itself, it will help generate a lot of controversy as to who should be admitted into the Hall of Fame, and were those admitted worthy of their honors.

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### **Mark Taylor says**

Being a baseball fan means enjoying a sport that has a long history full of great players and colorful characters. Of course, you can be a baseball fan and not dive deeply into the history of the game, but it seems as though most of us afflicted with a passion for baseball feel very connected to the great players of yesterday. It seems quite natural for most of us to wonder things like, how good would Walter Johnson be if he were pitching in 2018? Would Mike Trout have terrorized pitching during the 1920's? What would Mickey Mantle's career have looked like with good knees?

One of the most hotly debated issues throughout baseball history is: who should be in the Hall of Fame? It's a question that I've spent a lot of time thinking about, which is why I was excited to read Jay Jaffe's 2017 book *The Cooperstown Casebook: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In, and Who Should Pack Their Plaques*. As a young boy, I had several books that presented short biographies and stats about the members of the Hall of Fame. I devoured those books, but I didn't spend much time thinking about why those players were in the Hall of Fame. I knew that great players like Hank Aaron and Babe Ruth were in the Hall of Fame, but I also knew that Chick Hafey was in the Hall of Fame as well. Hafey's biggest claims to fame were collecting the very first hit in an All-Star Game, winning the 1931 batting title by .0002, and being one of the first players to wear glasses. As an adult, I look at Hafey's career and come to the conclusion that while he was an excellent player for several years, ultimately his resume is a little thin for the Hall of Fame.

In 82 years, the Hall of Fame voting process has not changed much. The various iterations of the Veterans Committee have changed considerably, but the basic premise behind the non-Veterans Committee selections—writers vote for retired players, if you get more than 75% of the vote, you're in—remains the

same.

For all of the controversies surrounding the Hall of Fame, I would argue that the BBWAA writers have done a pretty darn good job. You could argue that their job isn't actually that hard—it's pretty easy to say that Mickey Mantle is a Hall of Famer and Placido Polanco is not. Of course, there are more difficult decisions the writers have to make about players who are on the bubble—recent candidates like Steve Garvey, Dale Murphy, and Dave Parker, who spent fifteen years on the ballot without getting elected. (Or just think about all of the ink that was spilled over Jack Morris during his time on the ballot.) Still, their track record is pretty good. Nearly all of the truly awful Hall of Fame selections have come from the various versions of the Veterans Committee. Jesse Haines? Travis Jackson? Ray Schalk? Rick Ferrell? Freddie Lindstrom? All Veterans Committee selections. Of course, the Veterans Committee has also made some excellent selections of players who were unjustly overlooked by the writers, like Johnny Mize, Goose Goslin, Ron Santo, and one of this year's inductees, Alan Trammell.

Jay Jaffe has been thinking about who should be in the Hall of Fame for a long time, and he's developed a metric, called the Jaffe WAR Score, or JAWS for short, that tries to assess whether or not a player meets the standard for his position for the Hall of Fame. In *The Cooperstown Casebook* Jaffe goes through every player who has been inducted to the Hall of Fame, and assess whether or not they meet the standard. Jaffe's knowledge about these players runs very deep, and unless you're a baseball historian yourself, you'll definitely learn something new.

The subtitle makes the book sound more opinionated and controversial than it really is. Jaffe is pretty even-handed, and he's certainly not disparaging of those players he feels were unworthy of induction. And there's usually some reason that helps explain why those players were inducted. Chick Hafey was inducted in 1971 by the Veterans Committee, which was headed at that time by Frankie Frisch, himself a Hall of Fame second baseman. Who did Frisch play for? Why, the New York Giants from 1919 to 1926, and then the Saint Louis Cardinals from 1927 to 1937. Say, who did Chick Hafey play for? The Cardinals from 1924 to 1931, and the Reds from 1932 to 1935, and also in 1937. Coincidence? Not likely, as Hafey was just one of several Cardinals and Giants players who were teammates of Frisch's to be inducted during his tenure on the VC. So there's a reason Hafey was inducted, even if it wasn't a good reason.

Jaffe's writing style is straightforward, and his analysis throughout the book is solid. *The Cooperstown Casebook* is a deep dive, and as such will probably only appeal to serious Hall of Fame fanatics. That being said, it is an excellent addition to the literature on the Hall of Fame, and one that is sorely needed, as new statistics and metrics to evaluate players gain more and more prominence as baseball fans continue to argue and debate over who deserves the sport's greatest honor.

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## **Tara says**

I went into this book with an open mind, but I doubt I'll ever "get" sabermetrics. I appreciate that people took the time to come up with a "better" way to measure greatness, but I just have trouble fully embracing measurements that I can't understand how they're calculated or seem to vary wildly depending on whose version of the statistic you use. JAWS, Mr. Jaffe's own invention that's basically an enhanced version of WAR (Wins Above Replacement player) emphasizing a player's "peak" seasons, exemplifies everything I hate about sabermetrics -- it's malleable (in that a player's ranking changes based on whatever position you decide to classify him) and arbitrary (it started off including 5 "peak" seasons, and it became 7 -- could it be 6 or 4 or 8 one day?), and not really comprehensible how to compute.

Still, I applaud the effort, that this tool makes sense to him and perhaps will help refine the HOF selection process, even if I don't find all his arguments convincing. He makes a case for Ted Simmons by repeatedly saying what a bad defensive backstop he was, for instance, and his points about Ortiz not being "that good" at DH, while revelatory to an extent, ultimately don't mean much when his bottom line is, "well, he'll get in on intangibles." I did find interesting the little nugget on Mariano Rivera's "long saves" being so far ahead of other contemporary closers, but his bottom line was "he should get in on the first ballot, because he was really friggin' good," which is what all the media has pretty much said ad nauseum. In other words, very little in this book strikes me as being something we haven't heard before -- his position on the Steroid Era is ground well-trodden (e.g., writers should stop being so self-righteous and just let these guys in), and his ranking of certain players not really so surprising (under JAWS, Babe Ruth is still the greatest all-time, and Tommy McCarthy, Rick Ferrell, and Lloyd Waner should probably be kicked out of the Hall for being terrible choices, for instance).

Perhaps my biases in reading about math and then thinking, "this is hard to contextualize for non-math people and it isn't always about the math, anyway" got me here. There is a lot to like, in that the writing is colorful and sardonic (I definitely laughed out loud once or twice), and the survey is comprehensive. (Though it became tougher to hold my interest the further I went into this book -- in that the cases and "round-ups" of every player felt repetitive; perhaps it would have been better appreciated as a reference book on my shelf than one read cover-to-cover in one shot.) And I hope literature like this for the statheads out there will aid in settling the debates over who's in and who's out. It's just not my cup of tea.

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## **Ryan Norton says**

Hard to classify this book--both an encyclopedia and a book of essays--but it's expansive, enlightening, and detailed.

Jaffe is comprehensive and fair in applying players' merits according to his JAWS model (which is remarkably genius), and he even changed my mind on a player--I am now a proud "Pro-Alan Trammell for the HOF" guy.

A couple of drawbacks for me are when Jaffe veered into areas where he was clearly self righteous and judgmental in areas he has clear opinions on. He's entitled to his opinions, and I respect them, but I was turned off when he put down others perspectives. One example was during his essay on Edgar Martinez (which in my opinion was the strongest essay in the entire tome, which is saying a lot), where he makes a comment "the Designated Hitter continues to rankle purists who would rather watch pitchers risk injury as they flail away with ineptitude," a comment whose tone is immature, judgmental, and holier than thou. The vast majority of the book is not like that, which is why it's so out of context. For the record, I enjoy NL games without the DH because the strategy involved in non-DH games is deeper and more complex, and I enjoy that part of the game over the benefits of a DH. Sure, I don't enjoy watching pitchers hit, but the benefits outweigh this drawback.

Another time this crops up is the Performance Enhancing Drugs essay, and to Jaffe's credit, I feel like he does an admirable job of detailing the variety of perspectives, divisions, and reasonings regarding how to rank those players who cheated w/ steroids. But I always bristle when every person who doesn't support PED users being in the HOF are written off with a broad brush as moralists--Jaffe uses the term "moral judgment"--because one can't deny the disproportionate effect that PEDs have on players' statistics, more than any "greenie," sign stealer, corked bat, spitball, ball scuffer, or any other cheater, no other issue has

impacted statistics the way PEDs have, and because of that you just can't know whether the player is deserving or not. And that sucks, cause love McGwire. But he, and the other users knew what they were doing was wrong, because they hid it, still deny it (Clemens, Bonds), and are continually ashamed of what they did. For the record, my opinion on the matter is that once Commissioner Selig was elected, it seems silly to keep out the users, since Selig was their chief enabler. The HOF President should tell the users who were definitively proven to have used or whom have admitted, that their PED use will be put on their plaque.

Anyways, a truly great book, one of those that you'd want to refer back to again, and again, and again.

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## **Dick Hamilton says**

Overall, I enjoyed the book. I thought that clearly the best portions were the case studies the author provided of candidates who may, may not, or should be elected into the Hall of Fame. An interesting point that is always left open is what are we honoring - career greatness or peak performance. A basketball analogy might be Robert Parish. Parish never averaged 20 points a game but he scored over 23 thousand in his career. Do you want the truly dominant player or the player who was very good for a long time. Bill James noted that you were more likely to win the pennant with the dominant player. If the goal is to win the pennant, aren't these the players to recognize? In terms of structure, it would have been helpful if the author listed his top 50 or 100 players, even without discussion, as this would help answer the question, who else is there and where would they rank. Last, and as a numbers geek I hate to say this, at times there were too many numbers. One of the beauties of Bill James was he integrated more commentary. Jaffe does an excellent job on this in his case studies but I wish he extended this more fully in his book. I would gladly have the book be 100 pages longer to incorporate this.

I did have a few additional points. Under the section on centerfielders, he presents a wonderful table showing WAR broken out through age 29 and after age 30. The after 30 numbers for Barry Bonds are at odds with the entire rest of the list and probably at odds with every other player except those who used PEDs. Bill James noted previously the steady decline in player performance as a player aged and I thought the author should have highlighted this. Lets just agree that Barry Bonds belongs in the HOF because of his early career and first three MVPs but lets not say he was number two all time. I am fairly certain the same can be said for Roger Clemens.

Similarly, under rightfielders, there is a nice table showing home and road OPS, demonstrating how much some players benefited from their home ballparks. Again, I think this could have been used more and used to highlight the players that were hurt by their home parks.

Under the player comments, I thought that the review of Nolan Ryan was fairly unbalanced. In terms of analyzing Ryan, yes, we can say that Nolan Ryan gave up fewer hits per nine innings than any other pitcher, quite astounding. However, it is not noted that on the career list for hits AND walks per nine innings, Ryan ranks as number 289. Not mentioned as well was that, while active, Ryan was annually one of the easiest pitchers to steal bases on, both in terms of numbers and percentages, and is the modern leader for errors by the pitcher - he was probably the worst fielding pitcher while active. While he may be the most unusual pitcher ever, lack of runs was never the problem, it was lack of performance.

I will leave the ranking of Sandy Koufax out of the discussion, but I did feel that the ranking for Wade Boggs, Tony Gwynn, and Ichiro Suzuki were far too high, numbers aside. Boggs was a station to station player at his best, while Gwynn and Suzuki were high average hitters with no power and no walks - loved by

the Hall voters but ultimately of less value to winning. And on a closing note, why do we highlight grounding into double plays but not the player on base when the double play occurred. I would hypothesize that the reason Jim Rice and Dwight Evans hit into so many double plays was the existence of Wade Boggs on first. Boggs never stole bases, hit either singles or walked, and had a minimal lead off first base. It is harder to hit into a double play when the baserunner is on second, as in Rickey Henderson or Tim Lincecum, than when he is tied to first.

With that said, I am pleased to have this book on my bookshelf, but I hope there is a second, expanded edition coming soon to neighborhood bookstores.

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## **Reid McCormick says**

Who is the best ever to play in Major League Baseball? That is an extremely difficult question to answer. There are simply way too many factors to consider. First, you have to separate pitchers from position players. They are both vital to the game yet a pitcher's contribution is categorically different from a position player. After the creating the partition, you have to assign value. Advanced metrics has helped create meaningful value to individual players however there is no consensus on the weight of each value. Additionally, do you consider this value throughout a ball players entire career or just the peak? How much should the postseason be a factor?

Even after a season has ended and the World Series champion is crowned, we argue who was the best team in baseball that year. Baseball, and all sports, work in an imperfect system.

Everything is relative, even in baseball, and especially in the Hall of Fame. There is never going to be a consensus on who should be in the Hall or not. Everyone has a bias and it shows in the voting, both the Baseball Writers Association of America and the other Veteran Committees.

The Cooperstown Casebook is another chapter in the Shame the Hall of Fame anthology. I love advanced metrics. I believe in them and I fully support teams using them to win. I believe Hall of Fame voters should consider these advanced metrics when voting. This book does a great job diving into advanced metrics and showing us who should be in the Hall and who should have never been in.

But all in all I found this book less than engaging. This first third of the book is a persistent airing of grievances towards the Hall. You get the message within the first few pages, but then you are forced to listen to the author continue his lamentations.

The rest of the book goes through the different positions around the diamond and in the dugout. You get an in depth case or two for each position, and then some briefs about others. If you are not interested in the players discussed, it can get boring really quickly.

This a decent book, but something I would not pass on to another fan.

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