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Should Sadaharu Oh Be in Cooperstown?

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AUTHOR

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DATE

# Should Sadaharu Oh Be in Cooperstown?

**W**ith the influx of Japanese players to the majors, interest in Japanese baseball has risen. One outgrowth of this interest is the question posed by the title of this article. I want to present a thorough examination of Oh's qualifications for Cooperstown, and then report the findings together with my conclusions.

The evidence is divided into three parts: (1) the actual Japanese record, (2) the subjective record, and (3) projections from the statistical record.

## THE ACTUAL RECORD

**A. Regular Season.** It is clear that any candidate from a league of less than major league caliber *must* be dominant in his own situation to even be considered for a plaque in Cooperstown. The Hall of Fame is properly for those who show they were able to dominate major league caliber opposition for a sufficient period of time to be considered great players. While not all of Cooperstown's inductees meet this standard, I have no desire to add to the number of mistakes made in the ranks of Hall of Famers.

Oh was quite dominant in his time and place. He won two consecutive Triple Crowns in 1973 and 1974. He won nine MVP Awards, 18 Best Nine Awards at first, All-Star selections in 20 of his 22 seasons, and nine Gold Gloves. Best Nines are given to one the best player at each position in each league at the end of the season. The Gold Gloves were awarded only in the last nine years of his career, so he won all of them for which he was eligible. He led his league five times in batting average, 15 times in runs scored, three times in hits, 15 times in homers, 13 times in RBI, 18 times in walks, once in doubles, and 14 times in slugging percentage. The triple crown categories are the only ones I have complete top five finishes for, and Oh was in the top five 11 times in average, 20 times in homers, and 19 times in RBI. Another way to look at his seasonal marks is to count how often he met certain standards:

<b>BA</b>	<b>Qty.</b>	<b>OBP</b>	<b>Qty.</b>
≥ .300	13	≥ .400	17
≥ .320	0	≥ .450	11
≥ .340	2	≥ .500	2
<b>SLG</b>	<b>Qty.</b>	<b>HR</b>	<b>Qty.</b>
≥ .500	18	≥ 30	19
≥ .600	14	≥ 40	13
≥ .700	9	≥ 50	3
<b>RBI</b>	<b>Qty.</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>Qty.</b>
≥ 100	14	≥ 100	10
≥ 120	3		

Don't forget that these standards were achieved in seasons of no more than 140 games, and usually of 130 games.

Another way of looking at Oh's record is to consider his career marks. Here Oh is 14th in batting average, first in runs scored, third in hits and doubles, first in homers, RBI, slugging percentage, total bases, and walks, fourth in at-bats, and second in plate appearances. Not only that, but his first-place finishes are often by large margins, such as 311 runs scored, 211 homers, 182 RBI, 547 total bases, 43 points of SLG, and 915 walks. Oh's on-base percentage would be another career record by a significant margin if only the Japanese used it as an official statistic. However, his .445 career on-base percentage is an excellent mark, especially in a good professional league. Oh's actual record appears in a chart at the end of this article.

**B. Japan Series.** Oh's dominating regular season performances helped his teams win the Central League 14 times, thereby earning a berth in the Japan Series against the best team from the other Japanese league, the Pacific League. Oh's teams won 11 of those series, and he was the MVP of the series once. He played in 77 Japan Series games and hit .281 with 29 homers in 242 at-bats, an on-base percentage of .465 and a slugging percentage of .665. He scored 58 times and drove in 63 runs. Clearly, his performance against the best teams in the Pacific League in those 14 seasons was dominant as well.

**C. Exhibitions Against Major Leaguers.** Oh played 110 exhibition games against major leaguers in official major league tours of Japan, usually in October or November. He had 338 at-bats

BIO NEEDED

and hit for a .260 average with 88 walks for a .413 on-base percentage. He also slugged 14 doubles and 25 homers among his hits, for a .524 slugging average. A list of the pitchers he took out of the park is below. These numbers include a 0 for 12 in 1960, but it would be appropriate to eliminate those results, since I do not project Oh to have been ready for the majors until 1962. If you eliminate the 1960 results, his marks in the MLB exhibitions will improve somewhat. This performance may have come mostly in parks that were not of major league dimensions. However, it is a dominant performance against pitching which appears to be above the average quality of pitching he would have faced in the majors.

The pitchers (and the year) Oh hit his homers against (lefties are denoted with an asterisk [\*], and if a pitcher gave up multiple homers to Oh, the number appears in parentheses) were as follows: Hank Aguirre,\* 1962; Nick Willhite,\* 1966 (2); Alan Foster, 1966; Joe Moeller, 1966; Jim Brewer,\* 1966; Steve Carlton,\* 1968; Dick Hughes, 1968; Nelson Briles, 1968; Ray Washburn, 1968; Larry Jaster,\* 1968; Wayne Granger, 1968; Frank Reberger, 1970; Frank Linzy, 1970; Pat Dobson, 1971; Jim Palmer, 1971; Dick Hall, 1971; Jerry Cram, 1974 (2); Jerry Koosman,\* 1974; John Matlack,\* 1974 (3); Tom Seaver, 1978; and Tom Hume, 1978. Further, Oh was pulling even this group of pitchers: 4 to left, 1 to left center, 3 to center, 5 to right center, and 12 to right.

If you looked at the teams Oh played against, you'd think he should have faced some pretty good pitching. In fact, they had three league champions among them. If we project the records of the teams Oh faced, weighted by games against Oh to a major league schedule, the average major league team Oh faced was 92-70. The list of pitchers Oh homered off of supports the belief he was facing good major league pitching. For those who need more proof, let's look at the median (the middle of the group) pitcher Oh homered against. I use the pitcher's ERA the actual year the homer occurred unless the pitcher had less than 50 IP. In that case, I took the ERA for both the season the homer occurred and the next season as well. Oh hit two of his 25 HR against major leaguers against guys with ERAs of 5.00 or more, and there were only four more homers off of a pitcher with an ERA over 4.00. The median pitcher yielding a homer to Oh had a 2.85 ERA. The average ERA was 3.55 in the majors during the period 1962-1975, and the lowest it got for any season for the whole majors was 2.98 in 1968. Thus, one can reasonably say in the exhibitions against major leaguers, Oh got his homers off a better than average group of major league pitchers.

### THE SUBJECTIVE RECORD

Oh's critics cannot reasonably deny that he was dominant in his own place and time. Therefore, the critics downplay those accomplishments as having come against inferior pitching and/or in small ballparks. I concede there is some truth in those statements. However, Japanese baseball is a good professional league. Therefore, there are two questions we must try to answer: (1) how good was the quality of play in the Central League in Oh's time, and (2) how does Oh's performance stack up against the level of greatness one needs to achieve to merit induction into Cooperstown?

There are two ways to address this issue in the case of Japanese baseball. The first is the subjective record, namely what baseball people, namely, major league scouts, players, and managers who actually saw Oh play have to say about him. The second method is a statistical projection of Oh's record to a major league equivalent.

Before discussing any further what the *average* quality of play in the Central League in Oh's time was, there is a crucial point to be made. The average quality of opposition is only relevant in helping assess the quality of Oh's play. This point cannot be overstressed, because there is a suggestive, intuitive, and yet seriously flawed logic which operates in situations where a player played in a league described as having less than 20th century major league quality of play on average. The logic I refer to runs something like this: (1) "less than 20th-century major league quality on average" means minor league, (2) therefore, a star in such a league is a minor league star, and (3) minor league stars do not make the Hall of Fame.

The problem with this logic is when it is applied to leagues such as Japan or the Negro Leagues is that there was no major league calling up the best players to play in the majors, thereby skimming the cream of the crop. Both the Negro Leagues and Japan (until recently), no matter the exact quality of play, were the pinnacle of competition the players in those leagues could reasonably aspire to compete in. The stars of the Negro Leaguers were almost invariably major league quality players, and often of Hall of Fame quality. Perhaps the Japanese stars are not as frequently of Hall of Fame quality, but their stars surely are of major league quality. In each case, the stars of those leagues were denied the opportunity to perform on a major league stage through no fault of their own. In short, the average quality of such a league cannot be used as a shorthand method for evaluating players.

With that cautionary note, the most common assessment of the quality of Japanese baseball is it is equal to the highest level of the minors, perhaps even a tad better. For examples of this assessment, see McNeil's *Baseball's Other Stars*, page 113,

or Fred Ivor-Campbell's article on Oh at page 35 of the 1992 edition of *The National Pastime*.

A problem for Oh's detractors is that he accomplished his actual record in far shorter seasons (an average of over 20% shorter). In response, they could try to argue that players wear down in a longer season, not an incorrect statement. However, this does not deal with Oh specifically, nor does it deal with the fact that the Japanese of Oh's time trained in a manner major leaguers of the same era would have regarded as fanatical. It is important to note that Oh was frequently singled out as being especially hardworking, even among the Japanese. How hard did the Japanese of that time and/or Oh train? Here's what William Chapman wrote in the July 13, 1978, *Washington Post*:

[T]he common complaint of . . . Americans who play baseball in Japan [is] fatigue. Japanese players train like demons the year round and the . . . foreigners must keep up . . . A 6:30 p.m. . . . game is preceded by five hours of exercise, practice and team meetings. It is the greatest shock for American players who come to Japan accustomed only to shagging a few fly balls and belting a couple of practice balls before game time.

Frank Deford underscored Oh's work in the August 15, 1977, *Sports Illustrated*:

For a 1:30 game, Oh arrives at 10:30 . . . Oh gets no respite from this enervating routine. After almost a half an hour in the batting cage, he goes to the clubhouse, where, lest he grow rusty, he swings a bat in front of a full-length mirror for another 10 minutes. Then he hies himself back to the diamond, where a coach spends 15 minutes or so slapping hard grounders just past his reach, so that he must run and stretch for every one. Here he is, 37 years old, the finest player in the game . . . being worked over daily in the noon heat of summer. Off days—especially after a defeat—mean grueling two- or three-hour team practices. But every player endures this schedule, and Oh-san endures it best . . . Late every season, when most players' averages are falling even faster than their weights, Oh finishes with an inhuman rush.

A guy who fits this profile could almost certainly handle a longer schedule and still maintain his level of play. Therefore it is only appropriate to allow him more playing time when we compare him to major leaguers. Thus his already heady accomplishments will be increased by another 20% before we get to the task of making the appropriate adjustments to allow

for the smaller parks and the lesser quality of pitching. Common sense dictates the difference between the majors and a AAA or better league cannot be large enough to drop Oh below the level of legitimate HOFers.

Tetsuya Usami's book *Oh and Nagashima: Every Record* also tells us Oh hit 612 homers to "right" and 140 to "right center," with the remaining 116 to all other fields. In short, Oh was a dead pull hitter. In fact, the Japanese teams routinely played a shift very much like the one Ted Williams faced in the majors. Oh managed to drive balls through or over the reduced space presented by such a shift often enough to average over .300 for his career. The larger dimensions of major league parks would have ensured that he would have had more outfield room to work with, which would certainly be to his advantage.

Another issue is whether or not Oh had a real opportunity to come to the majors. In an interview with *Baseball Weekly*, August 14, 1997, Oh said that if he had had the chance, he would have wanted to play in the majors, but that he didn't have that chance. An examination of the history of Japanese baseball's relations with American baseball shows Oh's contention is credible.

In 1967, after the Murakami affair, the major league and Japanese owners signed a "Working Agreement" which governed their relationship. A key provision was that each side would respect the other's rights to players. At the time, both sets of owners had reserve clauses they used to keep players tied up indefinitely. Both sets of players were, in Robert Whiting's apt description in *The Meaning of Ichiro*, "indentured servants". In 1975, free agency became a part of the major league scene, nevertheless, the majors continued to honor the "Working Agreement." Japanese players and their union were much more docile than their major league counterparts. Free agency didn't come to Japanese baseball until 1993, and even then player agents were banned from the negotiating process.

While it is true the loophole Nomo exploited in 1995 existed from the beginning of this agreement, it was a fine enough legal point that no one discovered for 28 years. Even if a daring Japanese player had found it and tried to exploit it before free agency came to the majors in 1975, it is unlikely major league owners would have been receptive to aiding a threat to anyone's reserve clause. Once their own reserve clause became ineffective, it is possible they would have been more open to such a possibility. However, by that time Oh was 35 and would not have been a good candidate to succeed in such a maneuver. Thus, Oh would have had to find the loophole early enough in his career to be an attractive free agent, retire from his well-paying job in Japan, face intense public pressure against the move, and try to get the major league owners to sign him.

COURTESY OF ROB FITTS



Sadaharu Oh

Now we can look at actual quotes. These quotes are quite impressive, and unless otherwise noted come from an appendix in Oh's autobiography. What I find even more impressive is the complete absence of quotes by major league types who saw or played against Oh indicating he wasn't a very impressive player. The most negative quotes from major league players, coaches, scouts, and executives who actually saw Oh play I was able to find were statements he was not in a class with Aaron, Ruth, and perhaps Mays. Since Oh and I don't contend he was in that class, such statements aren't tremendously revealing on their face. If such quotes reveal anything beyond generally accepted wisdom, they can probably best be seen as a backhanded way of saying he was very good, probably even HOF quality. If you want to say a guy isn't very good, you don't compare him to some of the very best guys in the history of the game. The quotes I have chosen follow:

Davey Johnson [the only man to have been a teammate of Oh and Aaron][*The Sporting News*, January 7, 1978, page 37]: "Oh would have hit 700 homers over here. He would be a good hitter anywhere in the world. Quality is still quality."

Davey Johnson again, this time from Deford's *Sports Illustrated* article: "You couldn't find a better [fielding] first baseman."

Tom Seaver: "He sure hit me. He was a superb hitter. He hit consistently, and he hit with power. If he played in the United States, he would have hit 20-25 home runs a year, and what's more, he'd hit .300. He'd be a lifetime .300 hitter. He had tremendous discipline at the plate. He knew the strike zone extremely well . . . He could pull your hard stuff, and you couldn't fool him off-speed."

Hal McRae: "Oh had tremendous patience as a hitter . . . He had good power. I don't know how many [homers] he would have hit here . . . He was a great all-star. He'd have been a Hall of Famer."

Pete Rose: "There's no question in my mind he wouldn't have hit 800 home runs if he'd played here, but if he played in a park tailored to his swing, he'd have hit his 35 [homers] a year. . . He'd hit .300, I'll tell you that."

Don Baylor: "Oh could have played anywhere at any time. If he played in Yankee Stadium, being the left-handed pull hitter he is, I have no doubt he'd hit 40 home runs a year."

Frank Howard: "You can kiss my ass if he wouldn't have hit 30 or 35 home runs a year and hit anywhere from .280 to .320 and drive in up to 120 runs a year. The point being, he rates with the all-time stars of the game."

Greg Luzinski: "There's no question he'd have been a great player in the United States, that he was a super talent."

Brooks Robinson: "He could have played right here in the big

leagues with the best players in the world. He would have hit here. Not as many home runs, but he would have hit his share and hit for average. He was just an outstanding hitter.”

Frank Robinson: “I’m sure he would have hit in the 30’s [of homers per year] and probably in the low 40’s. . . . Thirty home runs a year add up to over 600 home runs, and he’d do that if he played the same number of years here that he played there.”

Don Drysdale: “He would have hit for average and power here. In a park tailored to his swing, there’s no telling how many he would have hit. . . . He was always ready for anything we threw him. We were all impressed.”

**STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

**A. My Projection.** I will use projections because they place the accomplishments for a player from a non-major league situation into a readily understood context, namely major league performance. Once we have such a readily understood context, it is easier to get a reasonable fix on the quality of the player.

I compared the records of all players who played in Oh’s Central League during his career who also played in the majors. I matched the lesser total of at-bats to those nearest in time in the league with more at-bats, prorating totals within a season. I was able to add a home park home run adjustment, but not none for the other statistics. The reason for this is the only available data resembling home/road splits is for Oh’s homers, because apparently home/road split data is rarely if ever kept in Japan. If you need a more detailed explanation of the methods used to arrive at my adjustment figures, see [www.baseballguru.com/jalbright/analysisjalbright8.html](http://www.baseballguru.com/jalbright/analysisjalbright8.html).

The adjustment factors derived from the study of players who played in both the majors and the Central League during Oh’s time are as follows:

Hits	2B	3B	HR	BB
0.904	0.829	2.149	0.524	1.148

I will use Oh’s actual Japanese total of walks without any upward adjustment for playing time because he already has what would be a major league record number of walks. If I used the adjustment figure given above multiplied by the factor for additional playing time instead, he would be projected for 39% more walks than he actually got. This seems too high, so I chose a much more conservative evaluation. Similarly, I chose to use Oh’s actual career stolen base figure of 84 because stolen bases are of no real import in assessing his career.

In order to deal with playing time issues, I had to use season by season data to make my projections. However, the adjustment factors are designed for Oh’s entire career, not individual

seasons. Therefore, I will not use the single-season projections to evaluate Oh’s worthiness for the HOF. Instead, I will restrict myself to working with the career totals estimated for Oh, as these totals are within the intended bounds of the adjustment figures. Lest I be accused of hiding unfavorable data, the projection is available in the tables at the end of the article.

I will drop Oh’s first three seasons on the grounds he wouldn’t have reached the majors until 1962. Even after significant downward adjustments, Oh’s career line is still most impressive:

G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	BB	AVG	OBP	SLG
2995	9939	2778	372	39	527	2235	.279	.412	.484

It is most interesting that this projection closely resembles (a) his actual performance in exhibitions against major leaguers, and (b) the anecdotal assessments major leaguers made of him.

One way to examine Oh’s career line is to determine who the most similar retired players are (as of the end of the 2003 season) to Oh’s projection using Bill James’s similarity scores. The 11 most similar players (due to a 10th-place tie) are:

Player	Similarity Score
Reggie Jackson	851
Eddie Murray	844
Willie McCovey	841
Mel Ott	823
Harold Baines	812
Frank Robinson	806
Billy Williams	803
Dave Winfield	801
Tony Perez	788
Mickey Mantle	783
Ernie Banks	783

The top eight are at the level James would describe as “somewhat similar” to the Oh projection, and the rest as “vaguely similar.” This is further proof Oh is HOF quality, in that the very best players tend to be unique and therefore do not have many players truly similar to them. If you look at the average of these 11, you’d have a player who is close to the projection for Oh. The comparison of the composite and the Oh projection are:

COMPOSITE									
G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	BB	AVG	OBP	SLG
2724	9675	2753	465	67	490	1266	.285	.367	.498
OH PROJECTION									
G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	BB	AVG	OBP	SLG
2995	9939	2778	372	39	527	2235	.279	.412	.484

THE BASEBALL RESEARCH JOURNAL

SADUHARU OH REGULAR SEASON STATISTICS

Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	TB	RBI	K	BB	AVG	OBP	SLG
1959	94	193	18	31	7	1	7	61	25	72	24	.161	.253	.316
1960	130*	426	49	115	19	3	17	191	71	101	67	.270	.369	.448
1961	127	396	50	100	25	6	13	176	53	72	64	.253	.357	.444
1962	134*	497	79*	135	28	2	38*	281*	85*	99	72*	.272	.364	.565*
1963	140*	478	111*	146	30*	5	40*	306*	106	64	123*	.305	.448	.640
1964	140*	472	110*	151	24	0	55*	340*	119*	81	119*	.320	.457	.720*
1965	135	428	104*	138	19	1	42*	285*	104*	58	138*	.322	.488	.666*
1966	129	396	111*	123	14	1	48*	283*	116*	51	142*	.311	.493	.715*
1967	133	426	94*	139	22	3	47*	308*	108*	65	130*	.326	.484	.723*
1968	131	442	107*	144	28	0	49*	319*	119*	72	121*	.326*	.471	.722*
1969	130*	452	112*	156*	24	0	44*	312*	103	61	111*	.345*	.474	.690*
1970	129	425	97*	138*	24	0	47*	303*	93	48	119*	.325*	.472	.713*
1971	130*	434	92*	120	18	2	39*	259	101*	65	121*	.276	.434	.597*
1972	130*	456	104*	135	19	0	48*	298*	120*	43	108*	.296	.431	.654*
1973	130*	428	111*	152*	18	0	51*	323*	114*	41	124*	.355*	.500	.755*
1974	130*	385	105*	128	18	0	49*	293*	107*	44	158*	.332*	.527	.761*
1975	128	393	77*	112	14	0	33*	225	96*	62	123*	.285	.455	.573
1976	122	400	99*	130	11	1	49*	290	123*	45	125*	.325	.486	.725*
1977	130*	432	114*	140	15	0	50*	305*	124*	37	126*	.324	.477	.706*
1978	130*	440	91	132	20	0	39	269	118*	43	114*	.300	.444	.611
1979	120	407	73	116	15	0	33	230	81*	48	89*	.285	.413	.565
1980	129	444	59	105	10	0	30	205	84	47	72	.236	.343	.462
Total	2831	9250	1967*	2786	422	25	868*	5862*	2170*	1319	2390*	.301	.445	.634*

JAPAN SERIES

Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	TB	RBI	K	BB	AVG	OBP	SLG
1959	3	5	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	3	2	.200	.429	.400
1961	6	16	1	5	0	0	1	8	2	4	8	.313	.542	.500
1963	7	27	6	6	0	0	4	18	7	1	3	.222	.300	.667
1965	5	15	6	4	0	0	3	13	4	3	6	.267	.476	.867
1966	6	22	6	7	1	0	2	14	4	5	7	.318	.483	.636
1967	6	17	6	4	1	0	2	11	6	2	9	.235	.500	.647
1968	6	20	4	7	1	0	3	17	8	4	6	.350	.500	.850
1969	6	22	6	5	0	0	2	11	7	1	4	.227	.346	.500
1970	5	15	5	5	0	0	2	11	3	1	8	.333	.565	.733
1971	5	14	5	3	0	0	2	9	5	4	6	.214	.450	.643
1972	5	16	4	7	1	0	1	11	2	1	6	.438	.591	.688
1973	5	14	2	4	0	0	2	10	5	2	6	.286	.500	.714
1976	7	20	4	7	1	0	3	17	7	2	9	.350	.552	.850
1977	5	19	2	3	0	0	2	9	3	4	3	.158	.273	.474
Total	77	242	58	68	6	0	29	161	63	37	83	0.281	0.465	0.665

VERSUS MAJOR LEAGUERS

Year-Opp.	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	TB	RBI	K	BB	AVG	OBP	SLG
1960-SF	8	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	.000	.000	.000
1962-Det	10	31	6	7	2	0	1	12	4	11	4	.226	.314	.387
1966-LAN	18	61	15	21	3	0	5	39	14	14	14	.344	.467	.639
1968-StL	18	59	13	21	6	0	6	45	15	12	17	.356	.500	.763
1970-SF	1	3	3	3	0	0	2	9	3	0	3	1.000	1.000	3.000
1971-Bal	18	54	6	6	1	0	3	16	5	12	16	.111	.314	.296
1974-NYM	18	59	11	19	2	0	6	39	14	12	18	.322	.481	.661
1978-Cin	17	53	4	11	0	0	2	17	7	9	15	.208	.382	.321
1979-ASG	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	.000	.143	.000
Total	110	338	58	88	14	0	25	177	62	81	88	.260	.413	.524

MAJOR LEAGUE EQUIVALENTS

Year	G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	TB	BB	AVG	OBP	SLG
1962	162	601	148	28	5	24	258	72	.246	.326	.430
1963	162	553	153	30	12	24	279	123	.276	.408	.504
1964	162	546	158	23	0	33	280	119	.289	.416	.513
1965	156	495	144	19	3	25	244	138	.291	.446	.493
1966	156	479	134	15	3	30	245	142	.281	.445	.512
1967	161	515	152	21	8	30	279	130	.295	.437	.542
1968	158	534	157	28	0	31	278	121	.295	.425	.521
1969	162	563	176	24	0	29	287	111	.312	.425	.510
1970	161	530	155	24	0	31	272	119	.294	.423	.514
1971	162	541	135	21	5	25	241	121	.250	.387	.446
1972	155	544	145	19	0	30	254	108	.268	.389	.468
1973	162	533	171	20	0	33	290	124	.321	.449	.544
1974	162	480	144	19	0	32	259	158	.301	.474	.539
1975	159	490	126	13	0	22	205	123	.258	.407	.419
1976	152	498	146	11	3	32	259	125	.294	.435	.520
1977	162	538	158	14	0	33	271	126	.293	.427	.503
1978	162	548	149	22	0	25	246	114	.271	.397	.449
1979	150	507	131	14	0	22	211	89	.258	.368	.416
1980	129	444	95	7	0	16	150	72	.214	.323	.338
Total	2995	9939	2778	372	39	527	4809	2235	.279	.412	.484

Another use for the list of most similar players is to look at how many of them are in Cooperstown. The list has 10 men already in the Hall. Seven of those already in were first-ballot selections, and it is likely Ott would have been also except that he came up for consideration while they were still catching up with the greats from earlier times. Baines *may* get in, but he's a long shot. However, he is inferior in quality to the Oh projection. Frankly, no matter how one looks at the list of most similar players, the conclusion is the same: Oh is clearly HOF quality.

**B. Other Projections.** Bill McNeil did a similar projection of Oh's career stats for his book, *King of Swat*. His projection was based on 550 at-bats, and I will put my projection in the same terms.

	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	AVG	SLG
McNeil	550	156	30	6	23	.283	.485
Albright	550	154	21	2	29	.280	.484

As you can see, they are rather similar. We both project Oh to be worthy of the HOF. In fact, Mr. McNeil in *Baseball's Other Stars* rates Oh as the third best first baseman of all time, behind Gehrig and Foxx.

**THE "NATIONAL" HALL OF FAME**

One last argument against Oh's induction: the contention that Cooperstown is the National Hall of Fame and is therefore limited to those who have contributed to the game in North America. There is no formal restriction on those the Hall of Fame may honor. Even if such a restriction exists, it certainly can be changed as easily and rapidly as the sudden decision to allow

Negro Leaguers to be honored on an equal basis with the major leaguers. In fact, the Hall's own Mission Statement discusses a "global audience." Further, the Hall should honor *all* the best players in the game, no matter where they played or who they played against, because they all have helped to make it the great game it is.

Moreover, the game is becoming increasingly international in scope. In 2002, nearly one in four major leaguers was born outside the United States—17 different countries are represented in the majors, and 31 in the minors. About half of all minor leaguers were born outside the U.S.A. We now have major league all-stars from the Orient, and we will undoubtedly have more now that those outside North America may vote for the all-star teams. Under such circumstances, the "national" argument seems to me to be hopelessly parochial.

Oh has had a tremendous influence on Japanese baseball as its greatest player, as one of its goodwill ambassadors, and as a successful manager. He came into contact with many major leaguers, and his career has touched modern major league managers like Jim Tracy, Davey Johnson, Charlie Manuel and Bobby Valentine.

The "national" argument is at best a dinosaur, doomed to extinction by the existing trend toward international growth in the game. Eventually, I believe the majors will have a permanent presence in Japan, and at that point baseball will need to please its Japanese fans. When that occurs, the "national" argument will surely fall.

For all the reasons set forth above, he richly deserves a plaque in Cooperstown, and I submit it is likely that it will happen.