

Criteria Used by Fans in All-Star Game Selection

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One of the more controversial issues in major league baseball involves the selection of players to the annual All-Star Game. Although fans defend their right to choose the starting team for the All-Star Game, players and the media argue for a shift in the selection rights from the fans to either the players or the media. The major argument in favor of fans is that they pay the salaries and thus deserve the right to choose the team. The major argument in favor of the players or media is that both groups have the opportunity to see more games and thus are in a better position to make educated selections. Moreover, the media and players have argued that the fans do not make selections based upon merit, but instead, base them upon popularity. Thus, this investigation examined possible criteria used by the fans in their choice of the all-star team to provide inferential data as to whether the selections are based upon merit or popularity.

Method

Eighty-nine players whose all-star vote totals were listed in a local newspaper during the 1980 season were included in the analysis. The players current batting average (taken at voting time), runs scored, runs batted in, and home runs, along with lifetime batting average, lifetime home runs, current winning percentage of the player's team, and the attendance of the player's ball club were entered into a regression analysis using the Statistical Analysis System (Barr, Goodnight, Sall, & Helwig, 1976) in an attempt to predict the number of all-star votes received by the player.

Results and Discussion

A stepwise procedure was used with an inclusion level of .05. The order of the significant predictors of All-Star Game votes was lifetime batting average, home attendance, lifetime homeruns, and runs scored at voting time of the 1980 season. The equation was significant at the .001 level, $F(4, 84) = 15.76$, and accounted for 42.9% of the variance in voting.

Table 1—Intercorrelations of the All-Star Selection Variables

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Current average (1)	1.00	.16	.37	.37	.03	.00	.22	.24	.22
Current homeruns (2)		1.00	.83	.26	.28	.25	.17	.57	.38
Current RBIs (3)			1.00	.27	.19	.09	.26	.41	.29
Current runs scored (4)				1.00	.05	.18	.18	-.05	.22
Home attendance (5)					1.00	.52	.13	.25	.52
Team wins (6)						1.00	.02	.11	.29
Lifetime average (7)							1.00	.24	.32
Lifetime homeruns (8)								1.00	.39
All-Star votes (9)									1.00

Note. $N = 89$; correlations greater than .28 are significant at .01.

The results seem to indicate that the fans may not be using the current year's statistics in selecting the all-star team. Instead, they are selecting players who have consistently performed well over the years. The high weighting of home attendance seems to indicate that fans are also choosing the players from their home teams. Thus, the teams with the highest home attendance will place the most amount of players on the all-star team, and the correlations shown in Table 1 seem to suggest that the high weight assigned to home attendance is not an artifact of the best players drawing the most fans.

This investigation strongly suggests that baseball fans are not selecting the all-star team on the basis of current performance alone. Although this finding is not that surprising, it brings to mind the question of what the criteria for all-star selection should be.

One argument is that the All-Star Game is a showcase and that fans prefer to see their favorite players rather than the players with the most productive half-season. The data from the present study suggest that this is in fact the case.

Another argument, however, is that the All-Star Game is a reward for current performance, not a popularity contest. Davey Lopes' apology for his selection to the 1981 team after hitting under .200 and Gary Templeton's anger for not being selected in 1979 and 1980 may suggest that this argument is the way that most players view the game.

The difference between the two arguments may be the result of an ambiguous voting system in which fans are not given specific criteria and in which many ball clubs encourage mass voting for home team players. More specific criteria may decrease the amount of player discontent. In addition, a separate player vote based upon merit might be another way to recognize and reward achievement while still allowing fans to watch their favorite players perform.

The effect on player motivation of fan failure to select all-star teams based upon current performance needs further empirical investigation, because it is possible that the frustration of not being selected to the team after having an excellent year may cause a loss in job satisfaction and/or a reduction in motivation and perhaps performance. Another possibility, however, is that not being selected causes a player to try harder in order to prove the selection process was in error. These possibilities must

be examined in order to determine the importance of All-Star Game selections on player performance and satisfaction.

Reference

Barr, A.J., Goodnight, J.H., Sall, J.P., & Helwig, J.T. *User's guide to SAS76*. Raleigh, NC: SAS Institute, 1976.

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