

After a thorough examination of the Hall of Fame resumes of Gil Hodges and Dick Allen, let's take a brief look at the other 8 candidates. I'm going to put them in the order that I would rank them if I were the grand poo-bah of Cooperstown. Incidentally, I would put Hodges #1 and Allen #5.

**#2 - Luis Tiant (P):**

228-172 W-L record (.571)  
 3.30 ERA  
 1.199 WHIP  
 3,486.1 innings pitched  
 2,416 strikeouts  
 187 complete games  
 49 shutouts  
 66.1 WAR (wins above replacement)



Despite spending just eight seasons with the team, Luis Tiant is one of the most popular players in the history of the Boston Red Sox. Tiant pitched for five other teams, most notably the Cleveland Indians, for whom he logged his best season in 1968, going 21-9 with a 1.60 ERA. With his trademark Fu Manchu moustache and tornado-style delivery, El Tiente was a true showman. If you're not old enough to have seen Tiant pitch, a 1990's-era similar delivery could be seen in Japan's Hideo Nomo.

I'll admit it, I'm a bit biased here. I became a Red Sox fan at the age of 8 in 1975 and Tiant was my favorite player. Putting bias aside, Tiant's numbers stack up very well with many Hall of Famers, including contemporary Catfish Hunter. The notable difference between them that Hunter pitched on four World Series champions, which is significant. The comparison was first made by Bill James in his excellent book "Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame." Here are the numbers:

<u>Player</u>	<u>Wins-Losses (%)</u>	<u>IP</u>	<u>ERA</u>	<u>WHIP</u>	<u>SO</u>	<u>CG</u>	<u>SHO</u>	<u>WAR</u>
Luis Tiant	229-172 (.571)	3486.1	3.30	1.199	2416	187	49	66.1
Catfish Hunter	224-166 (.574)	3449.1	3.26	1.134	2012	181	42	36.6

Now, when James made his "Catfish vs Luis" in his 1995 book, the statistic WAR (Wins Above Replacement) did not exist. The 66.1-to-36.6 spread is a rather staggering difference between two men with similar ERA's and WHIP's. I can't fully explain the difference beyond Tiant's superior strikeout rate and the fact that Catfish pitched in a favorable pitcher's park (Oakland Alameda Coliseum) while Tiant spent 8 seasons at Fenway Park. I'm still warming slowly to the WAR stat but it's noteworthy that Tiant's career WAR is better than those of Hall of Famers Bob Feller, Juan Marichal, Don Drysdale, Jim Bunning, and Hunter (all with similar number of innings pitched).

**#3 – Minnie Minoso (OF):**

186 Home Runs  
1,023 RBI  
1,963 Hits  
.298 AVG  
.389 On-Base Percentage  
.459 Slugging Percentage  
.848 OPS (On Base + Slugging)  
50.1 WAR



When I started researching Minnie Minoso's career, I was really surprised how good he was. His career essentially ended in 1964 but had two brief cameos with the Chicago White Sox in 1976 (at the age of 50) and 1980 (at 54) which gave him the distinction of having appeared in the majors in five different decades. That was all I really knew about him.

Minoso lost a few prime years at the beginning of his career because of the slow process of integrating the major leagues and didn't become a full-time big leaguer until he was 25 years old in 1951. His overall numbers are a bit short of normal Cooperstown stature but, given the fact that he was good enough to be fourth in the MVP voting as a 25-year old rookie and first black player on the White Sox, I'm inclined to give him a statistical benefit of the doubt as an integration pioneer. Minoso just turned 89. How fun would it be to see him on stage in Cooperstown next summer?

**#4 – Jim Kaat (P):**

283-237 W-L record (.544)  
3.45 ERA  
1.259 WHIP  
4,530.1 innings pitched  
2,461 strikeouts  
180 complete games  
31 shutouts  
-----



Jim Kaat has the fourth most wins (283) in the post-1900 history of baseball for a pitcher who is not in the Hall of Fame. One of them (Randy Johnson) will almost certainly be inducted next year. The others are Tommy John (with 287) and Roger Clemens (354). We all know why Clemens isn't in yet.

Kaat has suffered by the fact that he pitched well into his 40's and there's a perception that he was just "hanging around." This is a fair point: Kaat ceased to be a full-time starter after 1978 but he stayed in the game as a part-time starter and mostly situational relief pitcher from 1979-1983. This is a borderline case but I would reward his longevity, career wins with his 16 Gold Gloves are a nice bonus.

**#6 – Ken Boyer (3B):**

282 Home Runs  
1,141 RBI  
2,143 Hits  
.287 AVG  
.349 On-Base Percentage  
.462 Slugging Percentage  
.810 OPS (On Base + Slugging)  
62.8 WAR



Boyer is the 6<sup>th</sup> player on this ballot that I feel has a very solid case to be a Hall of Famer. He was a 7-time All-Star and the 1964 NL MVP. He has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest career WAR (Wins Above Replacement) of the nine players on this ballot (next to Tiant). It's been a perpetual struggle for Hall of Fame voters to evaluate third basemen in the context of offense vs. defense. It's an important defensive position but not at the level of catcher, 2<sup>nd</sup> base, shortstop and centerfield. Boyer's numbers are not as good as those of Ron Santo, who retired in 1974 and didn't get inducted into Cooperstown until the summer of 2012 (by the first "Golden Era" committee). Sadly, Santo missed the ceremony, having passed away in December 2010 at the age of 70.

**#7 – Tony Oliva (OF):**

220 Home Runs  
947 RBI  
1,917 Hits  
.304 AVG  
.353 On-Base Percentage  
.476 Slugging Percentage  
.830 OPS (On Base + Slugging)  
43.0 WAR



Oliva was a fairly popular Hall of Fame candidate while on the BBWAA ballot. Of the nine players on the current Golden Era ballot, Oliva gained the second most votes to Gil Hodges but never collected more than 50% of the vote. I believe his primary calling card was his career batting average of .304.

While he was on the ballot voters focused on batting average much more than they do today: on-base % was not the mainstream statistic that it is today. Oliva led the league in hits five times and was a 3-time batting champion. During his 12-year peak of 1964-1975, he had the 4<sup>th</sup> highest batting average among players with a minimum of 5,000 plate appearances. However, Oliva didn't walk a lot and is just 29<sup>th</sup> in OBP during that period and 18<sup>th</sup> in OPS (thanks in part to a lot of doubles). Oliva had to retire early because of bad knees and didn't post high enough career totals to merit induction.

**#8 – Billy Pierce:**

211-169 W-L record (.555)  
3.27 ERA  
1.260 WHIP  
3306.2 innings pitched  
1,999 strikeouts  
193 complete games  
38 shutouts  
53.1 WAR



I knew very little about Billy Pierce before researching this piece. Spending most of his career with the Chicago White Sox, Pierce was a 7-time All-Star and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Cy Young Award voting in 1962 after getting traded to the Giants. He was clearly one of the better pitchers of the 1950's. Pierce never got any love from the BBWAA, spending five years on the ballot and never getting more than 1.9% of the vote. Given his low career wins and strikeouts, I couldn't possibly see how he'll get votes from this committee above better-known candidates Luis Tiant and Jim Kaat.

**#9 – Maury Wills (SS):**

20 Home Runs  
458 RBI  
2,134 Hits  
.281 AVG  
.330 On-Base Percentage  
.331 Slugging Percentage  
.661 OPS (On Base + Slugging)  
586 Stolen Bases  
208 Caught Stealing  
39.5 WAR



Among the players, Maury Wills is the least qualified Hall of Fame candidate on this ballot and it's not even close. He was not a good hitter. He could run, to be sure, and he fielded well enough to win two Gold Gloves. He has three key Hall credentials: he was the 1962 NL MVP, he led the league in stolen bases six years in a row and he played a key defensive position for three World Champion teams.

The problem is this: he also led the league in caught stealing a whopping seven times (his career SB% of 74% is poor) and he contributed virtually nothing with the bat to the Dodgers three titles.



### **Bob Howsam**

General Manager of the St. Louis Cardinals from mid-1964 to 1966.

General Manager of the Cincinnati Reds from 1967-1977.



Bob Howsam is the lone non-player on this ballot. His primary claim to fame is being the architect of the Big Red Machine Cincinnati Reds in the 1970's. His chief coup during his reign in Cincinnati was the trade he made with Houston Astros when he acquired future Hall of Famer Joe Morgan (along with Cesar Geronimo, Jack Billingham and two others) in exchange for Lee May, Tommy Helms and one other. Howsam also made the shrewd hire of Sparky Anderson as his manager.

Certainly Howsam deserves some credit for the Reds' two World Series titles in 1975 and 1976 but let's remember that, when he took the reins in Cincinnati, the Reds already had Pete Rose, Johnny Bench and Tony Perez and the team made it to the Series in 1970, 13 months before the acquisition of Morgan. I wouldn't be completely shocked if Howsam is picked because the overall Hall of Fame is a little light on executives but I don't see it here. If he gets in, it means that he had a major advocate in Morgan, who is on the committee. Howsam was generally unpopular with players so that's dubious.

So that's the final list of ten nominees for the Hall of Fame's Golden Era ballot, which will be revealed Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup>. By definition, none of the 10 nominees are at the qualification level of the main BBWAA ballot, which will contain first-time nominees Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez, John Smoltz and Gary Sheffield and too many superstar holdovers to name. I would say that this ballot may be the most stacked with Cooperstown-caliber players since the 1940's, the early years of the Hall of Fame's history.

What makes this Golden Era ballot's charge interesting is that you can make a legitimate case for all ten men on the ballot to be in the Hall and you can make an equally compelling case that none of them are worthy of induction. Seven of the 16 committee members are former players (Jim Bunning, Rod Carew, Fergie Jenkins, Al Kaline, Joe Morgan, Ozzie Smith and Don Sutton). It would not be an unnatural human emotion for these seven greats to look at the nine player candidates on this ballot and think, "I'm a Hall of Famer and they're not." It also would be human for some to make passionate cases to their fellow committee-members for or against their former teammates. It sure would have been fun to be a fly on the wall today!