

Dick Allen: 351 HR, 1,119 RBI, 1,848 Hits, .292 AVG, .378 OBP, .534 SLG, .912 OPS, 58.7 WAR*



*WAR (Wins Above Replacement) is a newer advanced statistical metric which attempts to estimate how many wins a player added to his team by looking at the totality of his contributions (batting, fielding, base-running, and position importance)

Allen was clearly (by far) the most talented of the nine players on the ballot. Contemporaries compared his skills to those of Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, and Frank Robinson. If you look at his 11-year peak (which was from his rookie year in 1964 through 1974), Allen's statistics measure up quite nicely with the aforementioned legends and several other Hall of Famers. Below is a chart, culled from www.baseballreference.com (the greatest website ever created), which shows how Allen ranks in the critical statistic of OPS (On-Base + Slugging Percentage from 1964-1974. This is one of the best measurements of a player's worth as a hitter because it adds up all of the times the player reached base and also (with slugging percentage) the productivity of those hits.

Best OPS from 1964-1974 (minimum 3,000 plate appearances):

<u>Player</u>	<u>OPS</u>	<u>Years Played</u>
1. Hank Aaron	.941	1964-1974
2. Dick Allen	.940	1964-1974
3. Willie McCovey	.937	1964-1974
4. Frank Robinson	.914	1964-1974
5. Willie Stargell	.905	1964-1974
6. Roberto Clemente	.892	1964-1972
7. Willie Mays	.890	1964-1973
8. Harmon Killebrew	.887	1964-1974
9. Carl Yastrzemski	.883	1964-1974
10. Billy Williams	.877	1964-1974
11. Reggie Jackson	.866	1967-1974
12. Frank Howard	.853	1953-1973

I took this all the way to twelve names because you have to go 12-deep to find a player on this list not in the Hall of Fame (Howard). Obviously, Mays would be higher on this list if it was for his prime years but he was age 33-42 during these years. Anyway, no matter how you slice it, that's an amazing run for Dick Allen. If you use the advanced metric of OPS+ (which adjusts for ballpark effects and the league and era the hitter played in), Allen is actually #1 on this list (barely) because Aaron benefitted from playing in Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium (affectionately known as the "launching pad.")

Now let's take a look at where Allen ranks in other key statistical categories during that 11-year stretch:

<u>1964-1974 category</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rank</u>	
Home Runs	319	5th	(behind Aaron, Killebrew, Stargell, McCovey)
Runs Batted In	975	7th	(behind Aaron, B. Williams, Stargell, Ron Santo, Killebrew, F. Robinson)
Runs Scored	968	7th	(behind Brock, Rose, B. Williams, Aaron, Yastrzemski, F. Robinson)
WAR	58.3	6th	(behind Aaron, Yastrzemski, Clemente, Santo, Brooks Robinson)
*Runs Created	1171	4th	(behind B. Williams, Aaron, Yastrzemski)

*Runs Created is an advanced statistical metric developed by Bill James and others which estimates the total contributions to a team's run total.

Whether you like the advanced metrics or the more easily understood traditional metrics, Allen is high on every list and topped only by Hall of Famers and Pete Rose (who certainly had Hall-worthy statistics).

The problem with Allen's Hall of Fame resume is two-fold. First, his entire career value as a player occurred during this 11-year period. He was a September call-up in 1963 (he had just 24 at bats) and, for the final three seasons of his career (1975-1977), he averaged .246 with 11 HR and 47 RBI amidst various injuries and some indifference to whether he wanted to play at all. So his final power "counting" stats of 351 HR and 1,119 RBI are good but not great. After his last season, he was 29th on the all-time Home Run list and 62nd in RBI. With the power explosion of the PED era, Allen's ranks are now 90th in Home Runs and 138th in RBI. What's still impressive today is his career OPS+ of 156, which is 15th all-time. (OPS+ is measured on a scale where 100 is average).

Allen finished his career with 7,315 plate appearances, which is certainly enough to be considered for the Hall. There have been 37 position players inducted with fewer. The problem is that all but four of those 37 started their careers before the U.S. entered World War II. The only four who started after the war were Jackie Robinson, Larry Doby, Roy Campanella and Ralph Kiner, three of whom were banned from the sport until 1947.

Kiner, who debuted at 23 years old in 1946 after serving as a Navy pilot in the war, is actually a good point of comparison to Dick Allen because his entire career value is based on 10 years. Kiner may have lost a couple of years to the war and had to retire at the age of 32 because of a back injury. So let's compare Kiner's entire 10-year career to Allen's 11-year peak, where they had a nearly identical number of plate appearances:

<u>Player</u>	<u>PA</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>HR</u>	<u>RBI</u>	<u>Runs</u>	<u>OPS</u>	<u>OPS+</u>	<u>WAR</u>	<u>Years</u>
Ralph Kiner	6256	.279	369	1015	971	.946	149	49.3	1946-1955 (10 years)
Dick Allen	6270	.299	319	975	1099	.912	156	58.7	1964-1974 (11 years)

This is really, REALLY close and a compelling case for Allen. Allen's WAR is higher because he added more defensive value (he played his first four seasons at 3rd base) and was a better and faster base runner. Strangely, the Hall of Fame voters from the BBWAA were not initially impressed with Kiner's career, even though, at the time he retired, he was 6th on the all-time Home Run list (behind only Babe Ruth, Jimmie Foxx, Mel Ott, Lou Gehrig and Ted Williams). On the 1960 ballot, Kiner received 3 total votes (out of 269) for a 1.1% total. That is not a typo, Kiner received 3 total votes! Under current rules (which require at least 5% of the vote to maintain eligibility), Kiner would have been booted off the ballot. Fortunately, that rule didn't exist in 1960 and voters started warming to Kiner. Still, it wasn't until his 13th year of eligibility that Kiner finally got the 75% votes necessary.

Allen's initial appearance on the 1983 ballot was almost as inauspicious as Kiner's. Allen was named on just 14 out of 374 ballots (3.7%). Allen was not on the 1984 ballot but the 5% rule didn't take effect until 1985 so he was back on the ballot then. Still, Allen never even reached 20% of the BBWAA ballots in 13 tries and was dropped off the ballot for good in 1998. Let's remember that, while Allen was on the ballot, most baseball writers were still invested (from a statistical standpoint) in "counting" stats such as Home Runs, RBI, Hits and Runs Scored and the "rate" stat of choice was Batting Average. The use of OPS (On-Base + Slugging Percentages) did not really gain mainstream awareness until the 21st century. Both Kiner and Allen, because of their short careers, didn't have the sexy "counting" stats.

Kiner, however, in his history on the BBWAA ballot, had an enormous advantage over Allen. Kiner was universally liked and became and beloved member of the New York Mets broadcasting crew in their inaugural 1962 season. In the first vote after he joined the booth in New York, his vote total spiked five-fold, from 3.1% to 15.4%, which started an upward trend culminating in his induction with the Class of 1975.

Allen, on the other hand, was one of the most controversial players in baseball history. He had a long litany of run-ins with fellow players, managers, general managers and owners. When he retired in 1977, he had no goodwill whatsoever. Allen debuted in September 1963 with the Philadelphia Phillies, which was not a great place for him. This was after spending most of the 1963 season playing in Little

Rock, Arkansas, where he experienced a level of racism that was a shock to a young man who grew up in a small town in western Pennsylvania that was relatively harmonious for African-Americans.

Unfortunately for Allen, Philadelphia wasn't much better than Little Rock. Remember, baseball's color line had been only been broken sixteen years ago in Brooklyn by Jackie Robinson. Philadelphia was a little late to that party, 10 years late actually, with their first black player making his debut in 1957. Remember that Jackie Robinson was picked by Branch Rickey not just because of his athletic skills but because of his temperament. Remember Rickey's line from the movie "42": "*I want a man with the courage not to fight back.*" Dick Allen was not that man and Philadelphia was not that town. This is a great sports town but can be a brutal one too. The fans in Philly have long been merciless and indiscriminate in their booing, not even sparing Mike Schmidt their wrath when he was slumping.

You could write an entire piece on the incidents that dotted Allen's time in Philadelphia. An excellent full biography is available online through the Society of American Baseball Research (<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/92ed657e>). Just some a handful of lowlights: Allen punched a teammate (after being provoked by a racial slur), sometimes showed up to the park drunk, and didn't show up on time for games.

Allen was clearly miserable in his eight years of his career in Philadelphia before being mercifully traded to the St. Louis Cardinals after the 1969 season. Allen spent one year with the Cardinals and one with the Los Angeles Dodgers before having a good three-year run with the Chicago White Sox, which included an MVP award in 1972. After the 1974 season, Allen was traded to the Atlanta Braves; he refused to report, wanting no part of playing again in the south. Surprisingly, he was willing to go back to the Phillies, where he played for two years before finishing career in Oakland in June of 1977 when Allen decided to walk away from the game after a one-week suspension.

So this leads us to the Hall of Fame question. The Golden Era ballot is meant to compare players who played a significant portion of their career between 1947 and 1972. If you compare Allen's statistical accomplishments to his peers, he was clearly one of the top players in baseball during his 11-year peak, which by historical precedent is a long enough peak career to be Hall-worthy. The question is whether the gaudy statistics, deflated by the modest career numbers, are enough to overcome the perception that he was a bad teammate and a malcontent. Baseball historian Bill James, in his 1995 book *What the Hell Happened to the Hall of Fame*, wrote that Allen "did more to *keep* his teams from winning than anybody else who ever played major league baseball. And if that's a Hall of Famer, I'm a lug nut."

On this Golden Era ballot, Allen's candidacy will be evaluated by a 16-man panel than includes three former teammates (Jim Bunning, Don Sutton and Fergie Jenkins --Jenkins was a teammate for a very short amount of time), the former GM of the White Sox when Allen played there (Roland Hemond) and two other players who played against him (Al Kaline and Rod Carew). Bunning, Sutton and Hemond all

should know Allen very well and I would think that the other committee members would be very curious to get their opinions.

My guess is that Allen will not be selected and that's based on both ancient and recent history. In 2003, only 13 out of 81 (16%) living members of the Hall (including broadcasters and writers) saw fit to give him a vote. In 2005, he fared no better and in 2007, his support was just 11 of 84 (13%). To me, his only chance would be if Bunning, Sutton, and Hemond are unanimous in their endorsement and passionately try to sell 9 of the other 13 members of the committee. I would be really curious to know Jim Kaat's opinion. Besides being a "competitor" with Allen on this ballot, Kaat was Allen's teammate in 1973, 1974 and 1976 and is a long-time TV analyst who is not shy with his opinions on things.

The sixteen-member committee can vote for a minimum of zero and a maximum of four out of the ten candidates. I doubt many of the sixteen members will use the maximum four. Personally, I would vote for four. In general, I tend to like a bigger Hall than most. Some feel that the Hall of Fame should be only reserved for the crème de la crème, the very best players in the game. But the reality is that the Hall of Fame already boasts 306 members, including 211 former major league players, 22 managers (most of who also played in the major leagues), 35 Negro Leaguers, 28 executives and 10 umpires. Also, there is also a disproportionate number of players representing the early part of the 20th century (pre-World War II) compared to the latter half. Since the Golden Era represents players from 1947 to 1972, this group is underrepresented compared to their predecessors.

Having said all that, I would not list Dick Allen as one of my four players for this year's ballot. I would be pleased if someday he gets into the Hall of Fame but there are four other members on this year's ballot I feel are more deserving. When you start talking about borderline players (those who don't have the big career numbers), I believe that intangibles start to deserve more weight, things like being a team leader or coming through in the clutch in the post-season. The body of evidence that I've seen is that Allen was not a good teammate. Maybe he was misunderstood, that's possible. But the sheer number of incidents is too great to ignore. Allen was traded five times before his 33rd birthday, five trades for a premier player in his prime! I couldn't find another Hall of Famer who was traded more than four times before their 35th birthday.

One final thought: although the voters are supposed to compare these players on this Golden Era ballot with their peers but it's interesting to compare Allen's 11-year peak performance with some more recent players who had similarly short but impactful career peaks, ranked by OPS+.

<u>11-year peak</u>	<u>Years</u>	<u>PA</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>HR</u>	<u>RBI</u>	<u>OPS</u>	<u>OPS+</u>	<u>WAR</u>
Dick Allen	1964-1974	5423	.299	319	975	.940	165	58.3
*Jeff Bagwell	1991-2001	7236	.303	349	1223	.969	157	67.9
**Vladimir Guerrero	1998-2008	7038	.325	380	1227	.972	149	54.9
**Lance Berkman	2001-2011	6900	.297	333	1111	.959	148	49.1
Albert Belle	1991-2000	6442	.298	374	1202	.943	146	40.0
Juan Gonzalez	1991-2001	6211	.298	392	1263	.919	137	35.7
*Don Mattingly	1984-1994	6254	.310	211	1017	.840	131	42.0
Dale Murphy	1979-1989	6970	.273	329	986	.849	131	47.1
**Andruw Jones	1997-2007	7163	.263	363	1104	.841	114	60.8

*Still on the Hall of Fame ballot

**Not yet eligible for the Hall of Fame