

Popularity over performance dictates success, according to research

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The reputation of players has a significant impact on their election to the Baseball Hall of Fame, new research shows.

According to new research, reputation trumps [performance](#) in the world of baseball.

The game of baseball is full of [statistics](#) that allow comparisons between players. But the reputation of [baseball players](#) -- independent of their performance -- has a significant impact beyond on-field performance on their election to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Andrew Ward, associate professor of management at Lehigh University, and Scott Graffin of the University of Georgia reviewed 1,042 eligible Major League Baseball players who retired between 1931 and 1990. Their findings were the basis of a research paper titled "Certifications and Reputation: Determining the Standard of Desirability Amidst Uncertainty," which was recently published in *Organization Science*.

"Despite tangible measures for success, we found that baseball players elected to the Hall of Fame had more accolades or awards than others, but were not necessarily statistically the best players," Ward says.

"Consider the winning of an award. Many are subjective in nature, not based on a measurable statistic. Yet, we found awards can have a great impact in the evaluation of a player's career."

Ward points to the well-known baseball statistician, Bill James, who

compiles a summary statistic of a player's statistical performance over the course of his career called the James Statistic.

“Players generally get seriously considered for the Hall of Fame if their James Statistic is 35 or higher, with players above 50 generally getting in,” Ward says. “For example, Sam Rice retired with a James Statistic of 54, which should have put him safely in, but he was never voted in and only made it retrospectively through the veterans committee 30 years after retirement. He never won an award during his career. Compare this to Rod Carew with a James Statistic of 51, but also with 18 awards. He was voted in on the first ballot with 90 percent of the vote.”

Ward and Griffin also determined that the people who make judgments—the Baseball Writers’ Association of America (BBWAA) in the case of the Hall of Fame—prefer to be able to retain control of the evaluation process. As Ward and Griffin conclude in their report: “[the] criteria are often socially constructed and the people who make these judgments prefer to be able to retain control of the evaluation process and not diminish their role by making hard-and-fast rules that reduces their prerogative to determine what is acceptable and what is not.”

Provided by Lehigh University

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