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Baseball's Great Debates

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Baseball is a fascinating game sparking the interest of many people. Some have played the game and others are just fans. For as many that enjoy the game, there are just as many who think the game is too slow. The concept of baseball is unlike many other team sports. Out of the three major team sports in America, baseball is the only one where the defense controls the ball and the tempo of the game. Although a baseball game is divided into segments called innings, basketball and football are divided into timed quarters and halves; time is not assigned to any inning. Because of these differences and many others, and the fact that baseball is played nearly every day, there is always something to debate, analyze and criticize. The debate between baseball fans and non-fans centers on baseball being the ultimate team sport. This is a question that can never be answered to satisfaction; therefore the debate will continue. Baseball is a team sport that depends heavily on the skills- both offensive and defensive- of the individual players. It is more difficult for a single player to dominate a game because the opportunities to impact the game are distributed equally among the nine players on offense and defense. Every player shares the burden of the outcome.

Other interesting debates occur between the fans of the game, baseball people (the ones who play and manage the game) and the baseball TV and radio analysts. No matter who is involved in the debate or conversation, the questions discussed are the same; which is the best team? Does the best team always win? Who is the best player? What is the most important offensive stat? What's the most important stat for a lead-off hitter? Who is the best pitcher? What's the most important pitching stat? Who is the best manager? While these questions can never be answered with absolute certainty, they do test your knowledge and insight toward the game.

The best team is not always determined by the more gifted athletes on the field. The ability to make quick decisions, adjustments and execute a desired task with consistency usually reveals the best team. The best team is established on a day to day basis. The best team always wins.

The argument of who the best player is can go on for hours because opinions which are usually based on tangible numbers, but for this debate other things should be considered such as decision making, value of each hit, run, homerun, stolen base, strikeout or defensive play. Generally speaking, as most offensive stats mean little by themselves in a team concept, run production is the true value of an offensive player.

It's long been stated that good pitching will always beat good hitting. In my opinion, this is not altogether true. What they are really saying is that good pitching will beat the best hitting a particular team has to offer on a given day. Besides, only two or three hitters on a team will be considered good all-star caliber hitters. In other words, it is my belief that a team of good hitters has just as much of chance of beating a good pitcher on any given day. To my knowledge, no pitcher, all-star or Hall of Famer, has gone undefeated. Because hitting is so difficult, "good pitching will always beat good hitting" is a safe statement to make.

Debating players is all about stats. This brings us to the discussion of managers. Managers are rated on one tangible number: season victories or championships. My argument is that victories are not a true measure of a manager. Stats are the orchestrators of many baseball debates. These stats are important and serve a valuable purpose. ERA, hits, strikeouts, stolen bases, victories, etc only give part of the equation to generate an energetic if not valid argument.

-Mookie Wilson