

# Ryan inducted into Hall of Fame after stellar career

By Jaime Aron  
The Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Before Nolan Ryan joined the Texas Rangers in 1989, he was known as one of the game's hardest throwers, a guy who could strike out 15 or toss a no-hitter every time he took the mound.

It was during his five years in Arlington, however, where his reputation — and stats — really soared.

There with the Rangers, he reached unheard of milestones such as 5,000 strikeouts and seven no-hitters, as well as winning his 300th game. And there, Ryan became revered as one of baseball's all-time greats.

Ryan officially joined that group Tuesday by being elected to the Hall of Fame on his first try along with fellow rookie candidates George Brett and Robin Yount.

"I never really viewed myself in that light," Ryan said from his hometown of Alvin, Texas. "It probably wasn't until the last three or four years of my career

that I gave it much thought."

It's obvious which teams Brett and Yount will be identified with on their plaques because they played their entire careers in one city.

Ryan, however, won a World Series on the New York Mets, threw four no-hitters for the California Angels and became the majors' strikeout king with the Houston Astros before coming to Texas.

But Ryan said Tuesday he'd like to be remembered for what he did as a Ranger, so he'll have a "T" on his cap when he's inducted in Cooperstown, N.Y., on July 25.

"I think that brought my career and my presence in the game to another level," said Ryan, who seemingly defied nature by remaining a power pitcher at 46. "I feel like those were very special years."

Rangers president Tom Schieffer said Ryan's last five seasons set him apart.

"I think when Nolan came to Texas he was a superstar and

when he left he was a legend," Schieffer said. "He came to epitomize everything that was good in baseball, all the values that are enduring and why the people hold the game with so much affection."

"You can't think of anybody you'd rather have in the Hall of Fame."

Ryan had the most strikeouts in a career (5,714) and in a season (383), the most no-hitters and the most seasons (27). He even holds the record for most records (53 held or shared).

He almost set another mark Tuesday, but came just short of Tom Seaver's record for being named on the highest percentage of ballots. Ryan was named on 491 of 497 for 98.79 percent, leaving him only one vote shy of eclipsing his former teammate's total.

Those who voted against Ryan likely held against him the things that kept him from being fully appreciated earlier in his career: the most walks (2,795), a career record (324-292) barely above .500, no Cy Young Awards and

only one World Series appearance, made as a second-year reliever.

But Ryan was the most dominant pitcher of his era — and that spanned several eras. He struck out everyone from A to Z — from Hank Aaron to Paul Zuvella, actually — and is the only pitcher to have fanned home-run heroes Roger Maris, Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa.

Attendance was higher at games he pitched because fans knew that Ryan on the mound could mean magic.

"When he was on, forget it," said eight-time NL batting champion Tony Gwynn. "You talk about guys being tough. When he was throwing the fastball, change and curve for strikes, it was a victory just getting the bat on the ball."

Reggie Jackson described trying to hit Ryan's 100 mph heater as being "like eating coffee with a fork." Jackson also said Ryan was the only pitcher he feared.

"Not because he could get me out, but because he could kill

me," Jackson said.

Ryan broke into the majors with the Mets in 1966, a year out of high school. In fact, he left a minor league ballpark with a no-hitter in progress in the sixth inning when he got the call from the big leagues.

Ryan fanned the first batter he ever faced in the majors, Atlanta pitcher Pat Jarvis, and was on the Miracle Mets that won the 1969 World Series.

But the Mets tired of waiting for him to develop and sent him to California in December 1971 in a deal for Jim Fregosi.

Ryan won 19 and struck out 329 his first season as an Angel. The next year he threw his first no-hitter, won 21 and set the strikeout record. He had two more no-hitters in '74 and tied Sandy Koufax's record with a fourth in '75.

But after the Angels won their first division title in '79, general manager Buzie Bavasi said Ryan was nothing more than a .500 pitcher and let him go as a free agent.

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