



The Hall of Fame

**Phil Niekro**

W L PCT ERA G 63 CG IP  
318 274 .537 3.35 864 716 245 5403.1

H BB SO SHO  
5044 189 3342 45

It seems that all of us have forgotten all too quickly just what a pitcher this cat was. His induction into The Hall has induced paroxysms of outrage from the S.I. Cognoscenti, as well as the wizened old geezers of the "Baseball Monthly" persuasion, such as myself.

"It's like watching Mario Andretti park a car."  
-- Ralph Kiner, on Niekro's knuckleball

Who belongs in the Hall of Fame and who doesn't is an eternal argument, as it should be; when we all agree who is the greatest then baseball has lost its spice, savor, and verve.

But there are some keys to the gates of logic here. Again, Bill James has much to say. Let's benefit from his work and take a closer look at Mr. Niekro.

The party line of the Anti-Niekro Lobby, repeated ad nauseum, went something like: "Niekro's record (318-274) is more of a testament to longevity than excellence."

It would make someone a nice challenge to write a research paper quantifying the value of long life and quality, and the exclusion of the two, and then explaining Spahn, or Churchill, or maybe your mother.

In the Second Historical Abstract, one of James' more memorable passages detailed a conversation between a writer & an 80 year old fan in the Fenway seats. This man, having seen every Sox from Ruth to Rice, responded to the obvious question; "The Best? Fred Lynn. Don't think much of him now, but for a few years there, he was the best."

Possible. But consider, Fred Lynn was eliminated from Hall of Fame contention this year.

He is not alone, of course. The rigors and awful demands of this game reap a grim harvest every year. Fred had a real problem with outfield walls. Others of similar caliber have fallen victim to fast cars, women, drugs, booze, insanity, disease, suicide and so on. Niekro lasted. And lasted. Give him some bloody credit.

James correctly points out the difference between "peak value", of the one or two year phenom, and "career value", the whole of the man's worth over the years. Obviously, Koufax would have a huge peak value compared to Jesse Haines, while both are Hall of Famers. But, how to compare on a season to season basis?

What you do is compare the pitcher's record over his career to his team when he wasn't pitching. If you accept James' figures the results are stunning in Niekro's case. Consider also that this guy pitched in front of inferior teams virtually his whole career, and in a ball park that was nicknamed "The Launching Pad."

The upshot of this whole muddle is, Phil Niekro, by James' math, is this: given the team he played for, the yard he pitched in, and the league ERA, during his career this guy won 39.6 games more than he should have. Unimpressed? Check this partial list of right handed pitchers already in the Hall of Fame.

Phil Niekro	39.6
Juan Marichal	36.7
Dazzy Vance	36.3
Bob Feller	34.3
Robin Roberts	33.4
Bob Gibson	31.7
Jim Palmer	26.5
Dizzy Dean	24.8
Gaylord Perry	23.1
Catfish Hunter	16.2
Don Drysdale	4.8
Red Ruffing	-2.8

The longevity issue is backward. Any player that can survive twenty-four years of Major League Baseball deserves serious attention, not vilification.

I get the feeling I'm preaching to the choir here. Youth is wasted on the young, comets are idolized, granite is grudgingly venerated but then we get old, and start to speak in curious metaphors and similes.

Epilogue:

"It's the end of the world as we know it."  
Michael Stipe

"The world is just a finite sphere, a spinning mudball that defines our sense of reality, unless there's something we don't know, and then it doesn't."

Yogi Berra  
(No, not really.)

You've been a great room, Thanks for your attention.

Mr. Baseball

All power corrupts, but we need electricity

8 UPPER LEFT EDGE MARCH 1997



ANOTHER FICTIONAL EVENT POSTER FROM THE OSBORNE STUDIO & GALLERY

They also surf who only stand on waves.

**MOTHER NATURE'S**  
Organic Produce, Nancy's Yogurt, Bulk Grains, Cereals, Flours, Herbs, Snacks, Organic Coffee Beans, Healthful Snacks, Nutritional Supplements, Health & Beauty Products, Special Orders Welcome.

Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Juices  
Whole Grain Waffles  
Made to Order

Howell Plaza Manzanita  
Mon-Fri 7:30-5:30 & Sat-Sun 8:30-5:30  
368-5316

Whole Foods Juice Bar

Donald Osborne, who's works these fictional San Castle Day poster are, will be honored March 6th with two special showings in Portland. The Sacred Circle Gallery at 12th and Hoyt will show 12 mixed media pieces dealing with symbols of wholeness, and Little Wing Cafe, Bakery and Salon at 13th and Hoyt will feature 40 pieces, large and small, including his fictional shell series.

**THE RIVERHOUSE**  
Casual Dining  
Overlooking the Nestucca River  
Spirits • Hot Sandwiches  
Fresh Seafood Dinners • Home Baked Desserts  
Live Music Every Saturday Night  
(503) 965-6722 PACIFIC CITY, OREGON

BLUE SKY  
MANZANITA  
368-5316



ANOTHER  
**STARTLING!**  
& ASTOUNDING SANDCASTLE DAY!  
100th ANNIVERSARY  
UNOFFICIAL COMMEMORATIVE  
1929-2029

**Manzanita News & ESPRESSO**

Starbucks Coffee & Espresso Drinks  
Homemade Pastries, Sandwiches and Soup  
Magazines, Local News, Maps and Calendars

Open Daily 7:30 A.M. - 5:00 P.M.  
500 Laneda Ave. Manzanita 368-7450

**CASSANDRA'S PIZZA**  
OREGON

GOURMET PIZZA  
A selection of OREGON WINES & fine BEERS always on hand.

Come join us for dinner near the pounding surf at Laneda & Carmel in Manzanita  
503/ 368-5593