

# What the Batting Records Have Cost Me

*Why I Think the Present System of Keeping Batting  
Averages Does a Gross Injustice to the  
Man Who Can Really Hit*

By "CACTUS" CRAVATH



"Cactus" Cravath the  
true home run king

I AM an old veteran as ball players go, and no doubt on the far edge of my active career. I am nearly thirty-eight years of age and thirty-five is about the dead line in this game. In fact at thirty-five most big leaguers have long since gone back to the minors or to hoeing corn. The experience of Hans Wagner and a few other fossils doesn't change matters either. Hans had a huge, wiry frame and while he was heavy, his weight was in bone and muscle rather than in fat. On the other hand I am inclined to take on surplus weight which gets to be more and more of a handicap as the years go by. So I suppose I am in the position of one of those old geezers who sit down and philosophize a while for the younger generation, before they take the final plunge. I have said these few words about my own advanced age, a touchy subject with all ball players, to prove that what I am now going to suggest is not done from a self-fish motive. There is one thing which has kept me from getting either the notoriety or the money that I believe I should have been entitled to. If that particular thing, which I refer to, had been unjust to me alone I would not say anything about it now. For I have had my day and it is too late for any eleventh hour changes to do me any good. But there are a lot of young fellows growing up in the majors who are handicapped somewhat as I was.

Very likely many people will look upon what I am going to say as the crabbing of an old fossil. It makes very little difference to me, however, what they think. I am going to state a few facts which anyone can verify at the expense of a few moments time. And facts are pretty stubborn things. Here they are:

The batting averages more than any other one thing, determine, in the public mind, what a ball player, outside the battery and perhaps one or two infield positions, is really worth.

The batting averages determine more than any other one thing, a player's value as a drawing card and his ability to secure a good salary for himself. His batting average then, is the ball player's principal stock in trade and is immensely important

to him in a personal and business sense as I shall presently try to show. But where the records, through no fault of the batter himself, fail to give him the credit which is due him then he has a just grievance for he has suffered a genuine loss.

What do I mean by this statement? Just this. And because I know more about my own record than I do about some other player's record, I will illustrate from my own personal experience at the risk of being accused of blowing my own horn.

In 1915, not my best year by any means, but a good one, I made 24 home runs a modern record. I also made 31 doubles, in fact hit for 266 total bases although I made but 149 hits. That is to say I hit for 117 extra bases. Although I am a slow man on the bases and many paragraphs have been written about my wooden shoes, I scored more runs that season than anybody else on the circuit. In addition I drove in more runs than any other batter. I led all batters in number of total bases. I also hit for 117 extra bases. The man who was second best in our league hit for 76. I led him by 41 bases. In short in all the really effective work of the batter, I should have led the league by a very fair margin. But what actually happened? According to the absurd system in present use, which gives a man as much credit for making scratch single as a home run, I hit for an average of 285. True, that isn't a bad average, but how did it compare with others? According to the dope books, I was number seventeen on the list. Sixteen players hit for a better average than mine. Is there any particular sense in that kind of a situation?

There is a certain charm about the phrase ".300 hitter" which seems to appeal to the crowd. If a man is a .300 hitter he is a star. If he doesn't rank that well according to existing standards, he isn't a star. Now if batting means anything at all it means smashing offensive work for your own club and an ability

to demolish the defense of the opposing club. In proportion to his success in these two aims, a player is a good batter. Every owner, every big league manager, almost every player will admit as much. But the records don't admit it. They claim that where a man hits a little more frequently than another, regardless of the quality or the importance of his hits, he is a superior batter. Why don't they say that the pitcher who allows the fewest hits in a game is the winning pitcher regardless of which team scores the most runs? It would be just as sensible.

Most of my seasons with the Phillies, I have hit under .300 and therefore have not been a particular good batter according to the numbskull system. But in 1913 I hit for .341. I made more hits than any other batter. I was second in doubles, third in triples, first in home runs. I led the league by a wide margin in total bases. I hit for 119 extra bases. I drove in more runs than any other batter by a wide margin. Surely that record ought to have counted for something.

Jake Daubert is one of the best fellows in the game and I begrudge him none of the success which has been his. He deserves it all. Nevertheless Jake's success recalls to my own mind one more grievance. That season, a well-known manufacturing concern gave away an automobile to the man who had done the most valuable-services to his club. Jake Daubert hit for an even .350 according to the records. And he was given the automobile. Now I had rather

see Jake get it than anybody else. But the timing I always wondered about was this. Just how do they figure that thing? The automobile was to go to the man who did the best service for his club. The Phillies finished in second place. One of the prime reasons for that high position, so all authorities admitted, was my batting.

Brooklyn finished in sixth place very close to seventh. Now Jake's service to his club was undoubtedly very great. But nevertheless in spite of all he could do, the club was far down the second division. What did Jake do for them, keep them but of last place? Perhaps he did, but they wouldn't have been much worse off there than where they did finish, whereas the Phillies finished in second place. Now I led Jake in number of hits made. I led him by a margin of just 84 in total bases. I led him by 81 in extra bases, I drove in many more runs. I also scored more runs than he. But although I hit for .341 he beat me out by 9 points, according to the present batting system. Therefore he was a more valuable man to his team.

Someone will say I am complaining because I didn't get the automobile. True I think I earned it, but that isn't the main thing. Jake led his league in batting. He led it again the following year according to the dope sheets. Then on the strength of the reputation he had secured, he was able to sign a five-year contract with his club at several thousand dollars more money each year than I was ever able to get. Jake is a good fielder and a very valuable man on the club. But his main celebrity has come from leading the league two years at the bat. There is no question about this. And he led the league two years at the bat because, through no fault of his, the batting averages gave him that championship.

This is my seventh season with the Phillies. Most of the time I have been with them, I have done more damage with the bat than any other batter I know of. I will take off my hat to none of them in this respect. Nevertheless, I have never led the league in hitting. It follows automatically since I do not pretend to shine on the basepaths or as a fielder, that I have never been a star, therefore I have never been able to command a high salary.

Ever since I went to Minneapolis, ten years ago, I have been capable of doing as much execution with my bat as any man in the National League, bar none.

The failure of the batting averages to give me credit for the work I have

done in the past ten years, has cost me several thousand dollars a year. I know it. But that is all water past the mill.

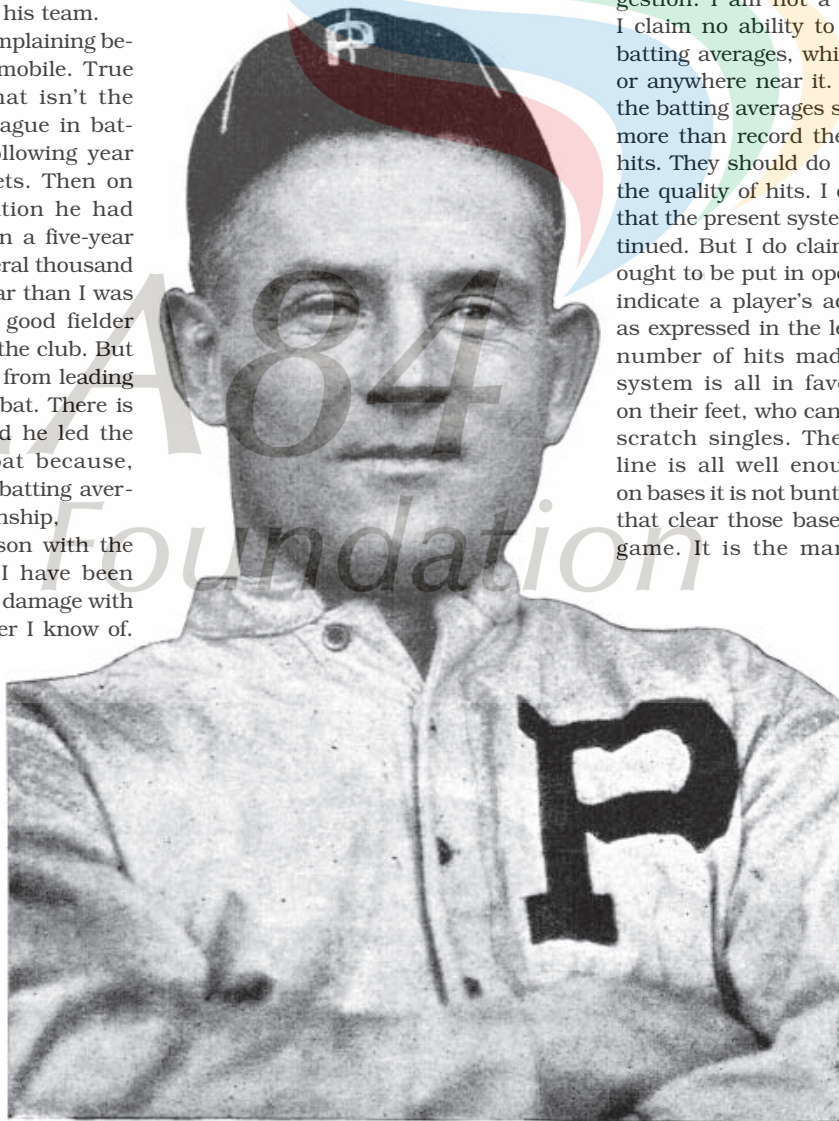
Why do I say that when I was at Minneapolis, I was capable of playing good ball for the National League? I know that too. What is the main difference between a Class A Minor and a Major League? It is pitching and batting mainly. In the Minors you get a bang up pitcher once during a series. In the Majors you get crack pitching all the time. That, of course, handicaps the batter in the Majors. But fielding is little different, in my opinion. Of course, the very top notch fielders drift into the Majors sooner or later. But the woods are full of clever, capable fielders and the high grade Minors are crammed with them. The thing which gets the Minor Leaguer out of the bushes is batting. It is literally true that a Minor Leaguer has to bat his way into the Majors. Now at Minneapolis, I got good money for a Minor Leaguer. I received \$2,400 a year. But you will all

admit that isn't very much, compared with somebody else's \$7,500 or \$9,000 not to mention the huge salaries that such fellows as Collins and Speaker and Ty Cobb receive. At Minneapolis, I slugged as well as I ever did in my life. I made all kinds of doubles and triples and home-runs.

I drove in all kinds of runs and scored all kinds of runs. Why in 1911, I scored 147 runs. And for those three years at Minneapolis, I averaged .325. My best season I hit for .363. No one can tell me that I wasn't hitting well enough for a berth in the Majors at that time. I know I was. I was hitting then better than I can now and I am still toteing around a battered old bat and waiting for the pitcher to give me the kind of a ball I like. I finally managed to slug my way back into the Majors, but three years were gone. And even when I did get back, I started slow and in fact never have got going as I should have done according to the records.

Now what is the result of all this. What do I propose? Nothing more than a suggestion. I am not a statistician myself. I claim no ability to devise a system of batting averages, which would be perfect or anywhere near it. But I do think that the batting averages should do something more than record the mere frequency of hits. They should do something to record the quality of hits. I do not even suggest that the present system should be discontinued. But I do claim that some system ought to be put in operation which would indicate a player's actual batting ability as expressed in the length as well as the number of hits made. For the present system is all in favor of the men fast on their feet, who can beat out bunts and scratch singles. Their work along this line is all well enough. But with men on bases it is not bunts nor scratch singles that clear those bases end break up the game. It is the man with the wallop,

the man who can drive out a crashing double, who can knock the opposing pitcher out of the box now and then with a well-placed home-run; who, even though he does not connect safely with the ball, drives it for a long fly to the outfield, such a fly as will score a man from third anyway. It is the real batter, according to my



"Cactus" Cravath in his prime, when he was still the greatest slugger on the diamond

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way of thinking, the man who wins games with his bat, who is being discriminated against by the present system.

I have tried to show in a brief way how my own career has suffered from this discrimination in the batting records. I repeat I am an old veteran, a player who is already on the sunset side of his career, a player who has little to gain from any proposed reform, little more to lose from the continuation of a system as absurd as it is unjust. But I am not alone in my class. There are many other players who also have the wallop, notably young Hornsby, who looks as though he would develop into the best clean-up man in the business. It is for the sake of such players as these, and because the whole system is inequitable anyway, that I am running the risk of being called a knocker and a sore head. Look at old Sam Crawford for nineteen years considered the hardest slugger in his circuit, and he never yet led the league in batting. There is something wrong with a system which doesn't give more credit to a man like Sam Crawford. For forty years the records have been all in favor of the scratch hitter. Lets be fair about this thing and give the man with the wallop, the man who delivers the goods, the man who really bats his innings. It's been long overdue.



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