

The Proposed Reform in Batting Records

How a System Built Upon Toted Bases Rather than Hits Seems to Offer Certain Advantages Over the Present System

By JOHN J. WARD

THE present system of batting averages rates a player according to the percentage of a hit made per time at bat. Thus if a player had an average of .333 he made one-third of a hit per average time at bat, or, in other words, hit safely once out of three times. In many ways it would be preferable, however, to show the average number of bases hit for per time at bat. Such an average would rate singles according to their face value but would also give increasing credit for doubles, triples and home runs, which, under the present system, unjustly receive no greater credit than scratch singles.

FOR several years THE BASEBALL MAGAZINE has agitated a revision of the present system of scoring batting averages, which should faithfully and fully record actual batting ability. The trenchant comment on another page of this issue by Cactus Cravath, mightiest of living sluggers, vividly recalls this campaign to mind.

Cravath has suffered more than any other player now in baseball, from the absurdity of a system which gives a batter as much credit for a scratch single as for a home run with three men on bases. He has suffered from this cause more than any other player, because he has been the most prolific hitter of extra base wallops in captivity. He has driven in more runs, broken up more games by sheer batting power than any other batter in the National League during his years with the Phillies. And what has been his reward? Long considered by the pitchers the most dangerous hitter in his circuit, he has never yet received the recognition which is his due or the proper rewards to which his talents have entitled him.

What has robbed Cravath of the fruits of his career? The system of batting averages now in vogue. That system is the sole culprit an arbitrary, unscientific, inaccurate system which entirely fails to express genuine batting ability.

And what is batting ability? What gauges and measures this ability? Of what does it consist? The present records

say that it is ability to beat out a hit in some way or other, so as to arrive safely at first base without the instrumentality of an error or other misplay. This is all very well so far as it goes, but obviously it goes but half far enough. For every pitcher and every manager and every player knows that batting ability is something much wider, broader, and deeper than this. Batting ability can hardly be better defined than as Cactus Cravath himself defined it on another page of this issue. Said Cravath, "batting means smashing offensive work for your own club and ability to demolish the defense of the opposing club. In proportion to his success in these two aims a player is a good batter."

Does a scratch single, a bunt beat out, create offensive for a player's club? To some extent. Does it demolish the defensive? To some extent. But it certainly accomplishes neither of these two aims to anywhere near the degree that a double or triple or home run would do. The present records give credit for the comparative numbers of hits made which is proper. Any batting average should do no less. But they give credit for nothing else which is wholly improper, for a great part, if not the major part of batting ability is expressed in other ways.

Teasing left hand jabs bother a boxer, but the blows which count are the smashing right hand wallops which jar him to his heels and sooner or later send him to



"Cactus" Cravath

the floor for the fatal count of the referee. An extra base hit has precisely the same effect on the opposing pitcher that a smashing right hander has on a boxer. It jars him, it rattles the offense, it heartens the club at bat, with men on bases it frequently wins the game. The player who is capable of delivering such clinching wallops with due frequency, is the player with genuine batting ability of the type prized by all managers. For, the managers and the players themselves recognize batting ability and can tell you the particular sluggers they fear most of all, whatever the paper averages of those sluggers may be. The pitchers have less respect for .300 records than they have for the who perhaps doesn't hit so frequently, but is always liable to come through with a smashing double, which clears the bases and breaks up the game. The managers and the players understand and respect batting ability at its true worth. Isn't it about time the general public followed suit? Isn't it about time the statisticians

HOW THE BATTING KINGS WOULD RANK UNDER THE PROPOSED SYSTEM AS COMPARED WITH THE PRESENT SYSTEM

PROPOSED SYSTEM				PRESENT SYSTEM			
PLAYER	A.B.	H.	AVE.	PLAYER	A.B.	T.B.	AVE.
Cobb	588	225	.383	Cobb	588	336	.571
Sisler	539	190	.353	Speaker	523	254	.485
Speaker	523	184	.352	Hornsby	523	253	.484
Roush	522	178	.341	Cravath	503	238	.473
Hornsby	523	171	.327	Ruth	123	58	.471
Ruth	123	40	.325	Veach	571	261	.457
Veach	571	182	.319	Roush	522	237	.454
Wheat	362	113	.312	Sisler	539	244	.452
Kauff	559	172	.308	Jackson	538	231	.429
Groh	599	182	.304	Wheat	362	153	.423
McInnis	567	172	.303	Groh	599	246	.410
Jackson	538	162	.301	Robertson	532	208	.391
Cravath	503	141	.280	Chase	602	237	.390
Chase	602	167	.277	Kauff	559	217	.388
Robertson	532	138	.259	Pipp	587	223	.379
Pipp	587	143	.244	McInnis	567	199	.351

modified a system which so far violates the proper standard and scope of statistics?

Cravath suggested that a new system ought to be devised to show not only the comparative number of hits, as does the present system but also their comparative worth figured in extra bases. The suggestion is a good one, perhaps as accurate as any that is ever likely to be installed in the face of the prevailing antagonism against new innovations. Let us examine this suggestion and apply it to the averages of a number of well-known batters.

The present system divides the number of times a player appeared at bat by the number of hits he made. If he appeared at bat three hundred times and made one hundred hits his average would be .333, the quotient obtained by dividing one hundred by three hundred.

Now it would be just as simple and far more accurate to use instead of the number of hits the number of total bases. One operation is no more difficult than the other. And as in baseball statistics simplicity is a virtue, such a system would have no disadvantage over the present one. But whereas the present system records only the number of hits made the proposed system would record not only the number but the quality of those hits. For the number of hits is contained in the number of total bases while in addition the quality that is to say the length of those hits is also recorded.

Let us apply this system to a number of well-known hitters. Let us take Cactus Cravath himself. Last season was by no means the slugger's best. In fact he was not so good as he had been in former years by a perceptible margin. Last season Cravath batted for an even .280. Seventeen other batters in the National League, according to the records exceeded

that figure and were presumably superior to Cravath in batting powers. Were they? Most emphatically they were not. Cravath was at bat 503 times. He made 141 hits. Our dopesters divide 141 by 503 and get .280 as Cravath's batting average. But isn't it a little unjust to the "Home Run King" to put his savage wallops on a par with some fleet footed sprinters bunts? We think so. Cravath hit for a total of 238 bases. Why not use that figure for our division instead of the arbitrary number of hits? At least we will try it out. Making the division we find that Cravath hit for .473. What does that new and unusual figure mean? It means that Cravath hit for an average of .473 of a base for every time he appeared at bat. This figure then tells us Cravath's general average as a slugger, as well as a mere tapper of the baseball. If he made singles they appear in the result. But they do not appear on a par with triples or home runs, nor should they. Cravath hit for an average of .473 bases per time at bat. What did some of the other notable sluggers accomplish?

Bennie Kauff hit present style for .308. Here we have a true .300 hitter. Although Kauff hit for .308, however, he hit for fewer total bases than did Cravath by a wide margin. In short, completing our division, we find that Kauff hit for an average of .388 of a base per time at bat. Cravath we have seen, hit for .473. In other words, although Cravath hit for many points less than Kauff according to the present record, he actually averaged considerably more bases per time at bat. Hal Chase hit for but .277 present records. But he actually hit to better advantage than Kauff with a mark of .390 of a base per time at bat.

Robertson though his name appears far down the line for but .259 was even better

than Chase with, .291 of a base per time at bat. Groh's average was .304 present records. He hit for .410 of a base per time at bat. Zach Wheat hit for .423 of a base, very good, but note that while some of these players are three hundred hitters, they were far under Cravath's average in batting power. And how did the notable Roush, league champion, perform? Roush hit for .341. Cravath for .280. But Roush hit for .454 of a base per time at bat while Cravath hit for .473. What do we make of this? When the old veteran said that he had done as much damage with his bat as any man in the National League these past few years, he spoke the absolute truth.

But did anybody give Cravath a run for his money? Yes, one player Hornsby. This coming star, whom Cravath himself styles as a formidable batting opponent, hit for an average of .484 of a base per time at bat. In other words Hornsby was first in the National League last season in all round batting power while the crumbling Cravath, the failing hero, instead of a berth far down the list as number 18, was actually second. Had the averages done what they should have done, shown a batter's actual batting ability, Cravath would have led the National League most of the time since he joined that circuit. And instead of being a player rather void of notoriety he would have been one of baseball's drawing cards and high salaried men. Truly the records have been very unkind to Cravath.

But if the system we propose appeals to the slugger will it not meet with the steady opposition of the man who already profits by the present system and who, jealous of the prominence he has gained would naturally oppose any innovation which might rob him of his honors? Before attempting to analyze the attitude of such a ball-player, let us see how the proposed system would affect him.

Take the case of Ty Cobb most illustrious star on the circuits. Cobb led both leagues last season by a wide margin according to present records. How would he fare under the proposed system?

Cobb appeared at bat 588 times. He made 225 hits. Dividing 225 by 588 the dopester arrives at the fact that Cobb batted for .383. But Cobb hit for 336 total bases far more than any other player. Dividing 336 by 588 we find that Cobb averaged .571 of a base for everytime he appeared at bat. Examination shows us that this far exceeded the record of any other player in the game. Ty Cobb then, has justly won his laurels. He is king of batters by actual right, king by virtue of the quality of his hits as well as their frequency.

Tris Speaker hit under the old system for .352. He hit under the new system
(Continued on Page 298)



A NEW SYSTEM

(Continued from Page 284)

for .485. That is more than any player in the National League could do. Sisler hit under the old system for .353 a point above Speaker's. In actual fact the St. Louis wonder was not so valuable a hitter as Speaker, did not make so many long hits or drive in so many runs. Under

the new system he hit for .452 of a base for every time at bat, very good to be sure, but excelled by the record of several other players including the redoubtable Cravath. The proposed system does not work havoc among the present leaders, but it does show conclusively that several of them are occupying a higher place than they should, while others are being robbed by a system which does not give them the credit they have fairly earned.

In the American League, Cobb is easily first by both methods, Speaker is second, he was third in the old list by a single point. But everyone in the American League knew that Speaker was a more dangerous hitter last season, than was Sisler, a youngster who is just beginning to find himself. Everyone knew this fact and yet everyone bowed to the records when those records said Speaker was third. Babe Ruth was virtually fourth

Cravath. Cactus should have been second last year, instead of away down the list

Roush instead of occupying first place was really number three on the list. Yes, Cactus Cravath the man who hit .280 was a more valuable batter than Roush who hit for .341. Such are the iniquities of the records.

In the accompanying table the records of sixteen well-known batters of both leagues are given in the order of their prominence, according to the old system. Accompanying this list is the record of the same batters as it would have appeared according to the proposed system. Certain gross inequalities occur. For instance Cravath, a .280 hitter was a better man according to any sane method than Roush who led him by more than sixty points. Stuffy McInnis a first baseman last season hit for .303. Walter Pipp also a first baseman hit for .244. Now .244 is a poor average especially poor for a first baseman. .303 is a good average for anyone. But according to the proposed system, McInnis hit for .351 of a base per time at bat. Pipp hit for .379. In other words Pipp whose name appears far down the list but who hits for keeps when he does hit, was a more dangerous slugger than McInnis, a true three hundred batter.

When Cravath tried to state what the records have cost him he mentioned no precise figure. But the stalwart old slugger is entitled to write down on the debit side of the ledger, a good many thousand dollars. In strict equity he has a case against the records which entitles him to such liberal damages. But let old "Wooden Shoes" reflect, as philosophically as he is able, that he can never collect this money. It is gone past redemption, a tribute wrung from the old veteran by the harsh, arbitrary and iniquitous system of which he has been the unfortunate victim.



LA84 Foundation

last year, under the old system. According to the new system he should have been third. Veach was fifth. He should have been fourth while Sisler instead of second place was number five in the list of really valuable and dangerous hitters. It will be noted that no great shake up occurs from allowing credit where it is due, but it will also appear that the present system is inaccurate to a degree.

In the National League Hornsby was

second best according to the old system. Again everybody in the National League knew that Hornsby was a more valuable all round hitter than Roush. Everybody in the whole circuit knew that Hornsby made more long hits, drove in more runs, in fact did more damage with his bat than Roush. Why not admit what was common knowledge in the records? Hornsby should have been first not second, and close on his heels is old Wooden Shoes Cactus