



## ***HOF inductee Big Hurt ranks near top in Chicago all-around offensive seasons***

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Did newly-minted Hall of Famer Frank Thomas rack up the best all-around season for a hitter in Chicago baseball history?

If he didn't, then he's in close contention, the proverbial two games out going into September.

Thomas has to be in the center of conversation when compared with the all-time numbers men with both the Cubs and White Sox with measurements of home runs, RBIs, average, on-base percentage and walks. Actually, The Big Hurt is almost singular in South Side annals. He really only has Albert Belle's onetime outburst in 1998 and Dick Allen's 1972 Most Valuable Player season in the same conversation.



**Frank Thomas is proud of his peak production featuring power and patience. Photo credit [clare and ben](#).**

First off, we'll eliminate Sammy Sosa's now-outlandish 1998, 1999 and 2001 seasons. All the evidence points to an inflated Sosa taking advantage of some kind of performance enhancing drugs contribution to his numbers. That would not be fair in comparing with the militantly "clean" Thomas.

The White Sox's greatest-ever runs producer, through his own conscious choice of hitting approach, ranks as one of only four players in major-league history with a career .300 average, 500 home runs, 1,500 RBIs, 1,000 runs scored and 1,500 walks. The others are Babe Ruth, Ted Williams and Mel Ott.

Thomas also is the only player in baseball history to bat .300 or better with at least 20 home runs, 100 RBIs, 100 walks and 100 runs scored in seven consecutive seasons (1991-97).

“I took a lot of pride in that,” Thomas said of his combination of power and patience. “Fortunately when I got here, Walt Hriniak was the hitting coach. He told me the first day: ‘I don’t want you coming in here thinking you are going to hit home runs every day. I don’t want to see another one of those players. They are a dime a dozen in the big leagues.’”

“I told him right away that I’m not that guy. I’m a hitter. I like to hit. I’ll beat you with a single, I’ll beat you with a double. I’ll beat you with a walk. That was my goal. The more I felt I got on base, the more this chance had a chance of scoring runs and winning ball games. Walks to me felt like we were going to score runs.

“That’s where I prided myself. Just getting on base or getting the big hit.”

### **Thomas best Giambi, but was robbed of MVP**

Start the comparisons with the season in which Thomas likely was robbed of his third American League MVP award in 2000. Losing out to eventual PED-confessor Jason Giambi, he had career highs of 43 homers, 143 RBIs, 191 hits and 115 runs scored. Thomas also had a .436 on-base percentage, batted .328 and drew 112 walks.

Belle virtually knots a tie with Thomas in overall offensive dominance from his '98 season, in which the often-hostile slugger dramatically picked up the pace at the plate in the second half after all was lost for the Sox. He has the Sox season records with 49 homers and 152 RBIs. He had 200 hits, a .399 OBP, a .328 average, 81 walks and 113 runs scored.

Allen was MVP in a much tighter offensive era, the year before the designated hitter was introduced. He had 37 homers and 113 RBIs, with a .420 OBP, a .308 average and 99 walks. The numbers don’t quite measure up to Thomas.



**Hack Wilson (left) and Rogers Hornsby hit under more favorable conditions than Frank Thomas in running up even greater seasons in 1929-30.**

Four Cubs merit consideration with Thomas – Rogers Hornsby, Hack Wilson, Ernie Banks and Billy Williams.

Hornsby recorded the highest season batting average -- .380 -- in Cubs history in his one full, healthy season in Wrigley Field in 1929. The irascible Rajah slugged 39 homers with 149 RBIs with 229 hits, 156 runs and a .459 OBP. Hornsby hit his away on base daily, but still drew 87 walks.

Wilson had two seasons for the ages starting in 1930, when he set the all-time major-league season RBI record with 191. The stubby Wilson took

a run at the then-new home-run record with 56. He also had 208 hits, 146 runs, 105 walks, a .454 OBP and .356 average.

Wilson had a good prep in '29 with 39 homers and 159 RBIs, with 198 hits, 135 runs, .425 OBP and .345 average. The besotted slugger probably gets a slight edge on Hornsby through his stratospheric RBI numbers.

### **Hornsby, Wilson had advantage vs. pitchers**

Both Hornsby and Wilson were better than Thomas, but you also need to keep their competitive edges on the Big Hurt in perspective. They hit off tired starters in their final at-bats and in all day games, compared to Thomas working largely after dark against relatively fresh setup men and closers.

Banks and Williams have competitive comparisons with Thomas in many ways.

Mr. Cub's best overall season was the first of his two consecutive NL MVP campaigns in 1958 with 47 homers and 129 RBIs. Banks had 193 hits, 119 runs, a .366 OBP and .313 average. Strangely, he was not pitched around much with just 52 walks. In '59, Banks had 45 homers, 143 RBIs. A .374 on-base percentage and .304 average. Again, a low walk total with 64.

Williams just missed out on the Triple Crown in battles against the Reds' Johnny Bench in 1970 and 1972.

In '70, Williams was very Thomas-like with 42 homers, 129 RBIs, 137 runs and 205 hits. He had a .391 OBP with a .322 average (up near .340 in mid-September). Two years later, Williams came within three homers and three RBIs of the Triple Crown with 37 and 122. His 191 hits helped amass an NL batting title with .333, complemented by a .398 OBP.

For a home-run hitter, Williams made amazing contact. He had just 65 strikeouts in '70 and 59 in '72. The Sweet Swinger's career high in whiffs was 84 in 1964.

Belle, Allen, Hornsby, Wilson and Williams had tremendous upticks in performance for short periods in Chicago. But only Banks rivaled Thomas for long-term premium production. Banks was more prolific than Willie Mays and Henry Aaron with at least 40 homers and 100 RBIs in all but one season from 1955 to 1960.



**Ernie Banks is the only other player in Chicago baseball history who had a longer continuous run of high run production as Frank Thomas. Photo credit [Leo Bauby](#).**

With only a dip in 1999, Thomas had nine 100-RBI seasons from 1991 to 2000 with four 40-homer campaigns.

He batted .353 in strike-shortened 1994, which would have been his best-ever season if not for the interruption in mid-August. Thomas batted .349 in 1996 and an AL-leading .347 in 1997.

Thomas' ability to put the bat on the ball consistently in an era when 150 to 200 strikeouts were no shame might be his greatest feat. Starting with just 54 whiffs in 1993, he had 74 or fewer strikeouts in each season through 1997, then had 66 strikeouts in 1999.

Age and injuries changed Thomas into a more conventional slugger as the 2000s progressed. But that level of production cannot change the stellar nature of his prime.

“As a player you start thinking about your last four or five years,” Thomas said, “and not really what you did earlier in our career when you were a young buck. So I had an impact and I'm proud of that impact.”



**Billy Williams rivaled Thomas as a power hitter who had relatively low strikeout totals.**