



Dick Allen receives his 1972 MVP trophy at Comiskey Park in 1973. Photo credit Johnny Reyes.



Dick Allen – best player of his generation not in Hall of Fame

(Part 2 Dick's life and career, on and off the field, including his rebirth in Chicago.)

Editor's Note: This year's Baseball Hall of Fame Golden Era Veterans Committee votes on Sunday, Dec. 7, in San Diego to elect up to five new members of the Hall of Fame. This is the second Veterans Committee meeting to consider candidates whose main contribution to baseball came between 1947 and 1972 – popularized as the Golden Era of baseball. In Dec. 2011, at the first meeting 16-member Golden Era electorate selected Cubs (and 1974 Sox) third baseman Ron Santo, who was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in July 2012.

The results of the vote will be announced on Dec. 8. The Chicago Baseball Museum will be in San Diego covering this historic vote, which features a quintet of former White Sox players on the 10-person ballot (Minnie Minoso, Billy Pierce, Jim Kaat, Dick Allen, and Ken Boyer) – the most of any big-league franchise.

As a baseball historical non-for-profit educational institution, the CBM will be advocating for these Sox candidates. Before the vote, the CBM will feature stories on four of these players. This is Part 2 of a two-part series on Dick Allen. [Part 1 made the case that his statistics on the field alone make him Hall of Fame-worthy.](#) Part 2 focuses on his career and life, including his baseball rebirth in Chicago.

Allen topped out at 18.9 percent in 1996, in his second-to-last year on the BBWAA voters ballot. In 2003, Allen only got 13 of 85 votes in the newly-formatted Veterans Committee Ballot that was composed of all the living Hall of Famers.

In 2011, Allen did even not make the newly-constituted Veterans Committee Golden Era ballot that prompted some controversy in baseball circles, including Stuart Miller impassioned commentary: "Ken Boyer and Tony Oliva Are on the Ballot. Why Not Dick Allen?" in the Nov. 10, 2011 New York Times.

After being left off the 2011 ballot, Allen's profile was raised in June 2012 thanks to the efforts of the Chicago Baseball Museum who partnered with the Sox to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Allen's 1972 MVP season.

Articles about making the case for Minnie Minoso and Jim Kaat will be forthcoming before the Dec. 7 vote.

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Part 1 of this two-part series on Dick Allen made the case that his career statistics alone deserve induction into the Hall of Fame in July 2015.

No one can deny that during his peak from 1964-1973, Allen was the best hitter of the second half of baseball's "Golden Era".

For 10 years from 1964-73, Allen's 165 OPS+ adjusted (On-Base Percentage + Slugging Percentage adjusted for era) was better than any other MLB player.

OPS+Adjusted 1964-73	
Name	OPS+
Dick Allen	165
Hank Aaron	161
Willie McCovey	161
Frank Robinson	161
Harmon Killebrew	152
Willie Stargell	152
Roberto Clemente	151
Willie Mays	148
Frank Howard	147
Carl Yastrzemski	145
Al Kaline	140
Boog Powell	140
Billy Williams	139
Tony Oliva	137
Ron Santo	136

Seventeen Hall of Famers played 1,000 or more games during those 10 years. Allen had a better OPS+ than all of them. His career OPS+ adjusted stat of 156 is tied for 19th all-time in the majors.

His career numbers are undeniably Hall of Fame-caliber: seven All-Star Game appearances, six times hitting more than .300, twice leading the league in OBP, seven times being in the top three in the league in slugging, twice ranking as league home-run champ and twice runner up in home runs, and three times being the league leader in Adjusted OPS (OPS+).

Throw in a National League Rookie of the Year season in 1964, which was one of the most dominant rookie seasons of all-time with a 9.6 WAR. Add in for

good measure his historic 1972 MVP season, where he nearly got the White Sox into the 1972 postseason. One would had believed Allen would be an automatic lock for the Hall of Fame.

Unfortunately, statistics alone often time don't get you into the Hall of Fame (ask Barry Bonds or Pete Rose).

Allen's chances were hurt by playing on five teams and a perception as the quintessential rebel through much of his career, throughout which he often clashed with some sportswriters (who are the judge and jury in regards to getting elected by the BBWAA).

Now it is time for a historical revision of his career and what he meant to the game of baseball to overcome the misperception of him as ballplayer that has largely stemmed analyst Bill James' near-condemnation: Allen "did more to keep his teams from winning than anyone else who ever played major league baseball." James opined Allen was the second most controversial player in baseball history, behind Rogers Hornsby. Furthermore, James claimed that Allen "used racism as an explosive to blow his own teams apart."ⁱ

While baseball writers labeled him a clubhouse cancer, many others on the other side of the typewriter — including his teammates and managers — thought he was a good man who was just misunderstood.

The Philadelphia years, 1963-1969

After battling racism as the first African-American player in Little Rock, Ark. in 1963, Allen was brought up to the big club in late 1963 and got into 10 games. Notable is the fact that the Phillies were the last National League team to integrate when John Kennedy debuted April 22, 1957 — 10 years after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color line.

In 1964, his full rookie season, Allen played in all 162 games, having one of the best first-year performances of all time, matched only recently by the Angels' Mike Trout in 2012.

Like Trout's rookie year in 2012, Allen also nearly won the MVP in 1964, but the late-season collapse of the Phillies hurt his MVP chances.

I first saw Allen play on my 10th birthday on Sept. 30, 1964, and became hooked. I can still remember how exciting to watch him swing his big bat. He went 2-for-4 that day and scored two runs as his team ended up losing 8-5 in front of 29,920 fans at Sportsman's Park in St. Louis. His team was desperately trying to stop the Phillies' fatal losing streak. Future Kentucky senator Jim Bunning lost that game, which ran the Phillies losing streak up to 10 games, while the Cardinals had reeled off their eighth straight win, opening up a 2½-game lead with three games to play.

That 1964 collapse ("6 ½ game lead with 12 to play") has been much celebrated recently in print and other media on the 50th anniversary of what is called in Philadelphia "The Year of the Blue Snow" (similar to the emotion reaction of the 1969 Cubs collapse).

After that heart-breaking season, the Phillies leveled off, then got steadily worst as the 1960s ebbed. Young superstar Allen began to face a hostile environment in Philadelphia. In the academic baseball *Journal Nine*, noted historian William C. Kashatus wrote: "Baseball has long served as a barometer of the nation's racial climate. Nowhere is this more true than in Philadelphia, where the Phillies have suffered for their reputation as a racially segregated team in a racially segregated city. Allen forced Philadelphia baseball and its fans to come to terms with the racism that existed in this city in the 1960s....He may not have done it with the self-discipline or tact of Jackie Robinson, but



Too many Phillies fans did not realize what kind of player they had in Allen.

he exemplified the emerging independence of major league baseball players as well as growing black consciousness...While his unexcused absences, candid opinions and pre-game beer drinking earned him some of the harshest press in Philadelphia sports history, his tape-measure home runs and exceptional speed gained for him the tremendous admiration of fellow players — both black and white.”ⁱⁱ

From 1965-69, Allen experienced a turbulent time in Philadelphia, but still continued to be one of the best hitters in baseball, launching homers over the famous Coke sign in Connie Mack Stadium (earlier known as Shibe Park.) During those five seasons, despite turbulent upheaval from injuries and racism, Allen hit .300 and averaged 30 homers and 90 RBIs.

On July 3, 1965, he had the infamous fight with white ballplayer Frank Thomas (nicknamed “The Old Donkey”) that led to Thomas’ sudden departure from the team. Phillies fans blamed Allen for causing the scuffle. In fact, Thomas — a two-time Cub — had instigated the fight after taunting Allen with racial slurs, such as calling him Mo Clay (in reference to boxer Muhammad Ali’s original name of Cassius Clay).

In Aug. 1967, Allen injured right throwing hand when it went through a headlight while he tried to fix his car (see more about this injury below in the section “Injury and Illness Cut His Career Short”). He had to dodge rumors he got hurt in a bar room brawl as Phillies fans were well aware that their first black superstar had a drinking problem, often coming late to games after stopping off at a bar before a game. After he successfully rehabbed his hand (mostly his own rehab program and with sheer will), he returned in 1968 playing left field since he still had issues with throwing accurately. Though he had a small ardent cult following in Philadelphia, the “fans in the left-field bleachers at Connie Mack Stadium” had other plans. Apparently, they began arming themselves...At first I began wearing a batting helmet in the outfield for protection. For the rest of my career, I wore that helmet for protection.”ⁱⁱⁱ Earning his nickname “Crash,” by 1969, Allen openly voiced his desire to get traded and leaving this hostile work environment.

When his repeated requests for a trade were rejected by the Phillies, Allen — who did not enjoy the option of free agency since the iron-clad reserve clause was still in force — tried to engineer a deal by resorting to unexcused absences, arriving late to games and scrawling words in the dirt around first base, like “Boo”.

He just wanted out. He just wanted to return to his hometown of Wampum, Pa., “where the game had been fun” and he had not endured racial indignities in his small home town. Allen finally got his wish as the Phillies traded him to the Cardinals in a blockbuster trade after the 1969 season that saw Curt Flood dealt to the Phillies. Flood declined to report, his refusal leading to his landmark lawsuit against Major League Baseball that eventually led to free agency.

Despite all of the problems associated with Allen in Philly, his first manager, Gene Mauch, who died in 2005, repeatedly called Allen the best player he ever managed.^{iv} And when forced to talk about Allen’s flaws, his Mauch would only cite his chronic tardiness. In historical reanalysis, Mauch was really enabling Dick’s alcoholism by saying

his Allen *was* chronically tardy when he was tardy *because* he was often stopping at bars before games to drink. In effect, Mauch was covering up his illness.

Another 15 years passed before alcoholism defined as an illness became accepted and businesses (including MLB) would set up employee assistance programs that offered treatment programs to deal with this devastating disease. The acceptance of alcoholism as a medical illness was fueled by the much-publicized alcoholism of First Lady Betty Ford, who ended up establishing in 1982 one of the most preeminent alcohol abuse programs in the nation — The Betty Ford Center in Palm Springs, Calif.

Said Kashatus: “Dick had a very undeserved reputation as a malcontent. For his first seven seasons, he clashed with the Philadelphia press, the toughest in the country, and the fans believed what they read. The fact is that nearly all of Allen’s teammates and managers liked him and regarded him as a hugely valuable player. They booed him every night, threw pennies, bolts or beer bottles at him whenever he played the outfield, and sent him hate mail. Sportswriters launched their own character assault, painting the beleaguered star as a malcontent who expected special treatment.”^v

Shuffled around in St. Louis and Los Angeles, 1970-71

Allen’s time in St. Louis was brief—just one year in 1970. He got hurt the second week of the year and only played in 122 games. Even so, he put up 34 homers and 101 RBIs in spacious Busch Stadium with a .937 OPS. He entertained the St. Louis fans with his moon shots in batting practice to deep reaches of the ballpark that would not be duplicated until Mark McGuire came to St. Louis in 1997.

Allen wanted to stay in St. Louis and loved playing for the Cardinals alongside of Lou Brock, Joe Torre and Bob Gibson. But just after the end of the season, on Oct. 5, Cardinals GM Bing Devine called him to say he had been dealt again to Los Angeles Dodgers in exchange for 1969 NL Rookie of the Year Ted Sizemore and Bob Stinson.

“I was hurt by the trade. I played hard in St. Louis with Gibson and Brock,” confided Allen. He did not know that newly-minted White Sox Player Personnel Director Roland Hemond tried to get him dealt to Chicago before he went to LA, where he played for low-key manager Walter Alston.

The Cardinals were still in contention in the NL East on Aug. 14, 1970, when Allen tore his hamstring stealing second base in the bottom of the fifth against the Giants.

He did not return to the lineup until Tuesday, Sept. 8, and he still was feeling the effects of his injury. But he begged manager Red Schoendienst to let him play, which would be the final time he would ever play in Connie Mack Stadium, slated for the wrecker’s ball after the 1970 season.

Still very gimpy, Allen hit a solo shot off Rick Wise with two outs in the eighth inning to the left-center-field bleachers before less than 4,000 fans. For Allen, that final at-bat at Connie Mack, producing his 90th homer at the old ballpark, was quite emotional. “It was my own way of saying good-bye to all the gloom I had experienced there,” he said. Allen played just two more games after his classic parting shot, shutting it down for the rest of the season because of the lingering effects of the hamstring injury.

In LA, he missed out again playing on a winner. The 1971 Dodgers nearly won the NL West, losing out to the Giants by only one game. Allen hit .295 but his power was off and he clubbed only 23 home runs. Alston denied there was any trouble when he managed Allen. When asked why the Dodgers traded the slugger: “We had a wealth of outfielders and it looked like Allen’s best position was first base and we had Wes Parker there.”^{vi}

Rebirth in Chicago, 1972-74

Hemond finally got his man in Dec. 1971.^{vii} In Chicago, Dick Allen’s career was re-born and so were the Sox.

In 1970, the Sox finished last in victories with 56 and home attendance (just under 500,000) in the major leagues. The steep decline prompted talk of a franchise relocation for the charter AL team after the Sox had played a number of “home” games in Milwaukee in 1968-69.

Shortly after Allen was acquired, the Sox became a division contender, with 1971 AL HR champ, 25 year-old third-baseman Bill Melton, slated to bat behind Allen. Chicago media suggested the Sox had assembled a mini-“Murderers’ Row” in the batting order.

The strike-shortened 1972 season saw the White Sox finish second, 5 ½ games behind the eventual World Champion Oakland Athletics in the West Division race with the second-best record in the American League. The South Siders went 87-67 (only 154 games were played due to the strike) and attracted almost 1.2-million fans, more than twice their total of two years earlier.

The Sox almost won the AL West, but lost out for two reasons. No. 1, in June Melton was lost for the rest of the year because of an aggravation of a back injury he had suffered in the off-season, requiring surgery. Without Melton, Allen lost his lineup protection. No. 2, A’s owner Charley Finley picked up five players late in the season, including Matty Alou and Dal Maxvill, to push his team over the top.

The Sox were Allen’s fourth team in four years. He knew that he was expected to carry the Sox on his back in 1972, and he was as better than advertised.

Initially, Allen also expressed doubts about playing for the Sox as he was unsure that he wanted to continue to play baseball after being shuffled around. He failed to report to spring training camp in Sarasota, Fla. But Sox manager Chuck Tanner, a resident of nearby New Castle, Pa., had known Dick and his brothers since they were kids growing up in coal country outside Pittsburgh and knew all about their remarkable talent and un-quenching desire to win. Tanner’s handling of Allen made his time in Chicago successful.

In his first year at old Comiskey Park, Allen led the league with 37 homers, a career-high 113 RBI and 99 walks, earning the 1972 MVP award. He led the league in batting average going into September, but finished third, barely missing the Triple Crown.

Allen told me on several occasions he wished his whole career was in Chicago. When he came to the Sox in ’72 he was like Capt. Kirk in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn* be-

cause he led a bunch of fresh-faced recruits on a training mission—including a pair of hard-throwing 20-year-old pitchers. Rich Gossage, later earning his more famous nickname “Goose,” made the team out of spring training after going 18-2 at Appleton, Wisc. in Class A ball in 1971. Joining Gossage in the bullpen for his second season was lefty Terry Forster. Allen and his 42-ounce bat turned a young, inexperienced club into a winner.

“It was the best time of my baseball career,” Allen said of his three seasons in Chicago.

In contrast to Philadelphia, Allen became beloved in Chicago. When he stepped to the plate, legendary organist Nancy Faust would play “Jesus Christ Superstar”. Famed movie critic Richard Roeper, who wrote the book *Sox and the City*, was 12 when Allen came to the Sox and he fell in love. “Dick Allen was Fonzie before anyone heard of Fonzie. He was that cool, mysterious, slightly dangerous loner, who had a unique style without ever once appearing as if he were trying to affect a style.”^{viii}

In 1972, Allen essentially became “co-manager” with Tanner, acting as a veteran who wanted to impart his knowledge of the game on the younger players. “He was the leader of the team. He taught the kids how to play the game. They loved him, they listened to him. He was the best player I ever had and he should be in the Hall Of Fame. I can’t say enough about the things he did for me and for the team. He understood the game and the way it’s supposed to be played,” Tanner said in 2005.^{ix}

After the 1972 season, Allen became baseball’s highest-paid player at \$250,000 a year.

Allen also helped Harry Caray kick his Chicago broadcasting career into an even higher gear. Allen’s monster 1972 season helped the Sox re-gain a radio contract with 50,000-watt WMAQ (670 AM). Caray had broadcast for his two years in the city on low-wattage WTAQ, a LaGrange AM station that could not be heard even throughout Chicago. Evanston-based WEAW (105.9 FM), another Sox carrier in 1971-72, had a superior signal broadcasting off the John Hancock Center to WTAQ – but at a time most cars did not have FM receivers.

During this three-year stint in Chicago, in contrast to Philadelphia, Allen became beloved by the fans and the sportswriters. Jerome Holtzman, then the dean of baseball writers and later Major League Baseball’s first historian, said in 1992 that Allen “is a member of baseball’s royal family, one of the great sluggers of his time, perhaps of all time.”^x

In 1973, Allen was on track to repeat as MVP. He started out batting .316/.394/.612. But Allen suffered a fractured fibula in his left knee with a freak play at first base on June 28 in a collision with the Angels’ Mike Epstein in the bottom of the sixth in Anaheim and appeared in just three more games that year. At the time of his injury, the Sox were one game out of first with a 37-32 record. Without Allen, the Sox tumbled to 77-85 and finished fifth in the AL West.

In 1974, Allen put up numbers that put him in contention to win another MVP crown. He played hurt with a left shoulder injury and feuded with new teammate Ron Santo, who had come over to the Sox late in 1973. Santo was one of the first players to invoke

the new “5&10” rule, nicknamed the “Santo Clause,” when he blocked a trade by the Cubs to the Angels and ended up going to the Sox thanks to Hemond.

Allen ended up leaving the team with two weeks left in the '74 season on Sept. 14. The Sox were mired in fifth place at the time at 72-75 and 11 games back. Allen had not played since Sept. 8. He had a serious shoulder injury. Also acting up was the left leg injured in 1973 as well as his lower back. Yet, in just 128 games, he had clubbed 32 homers, which was enough to win the AL home-run crown.

The Prodigal Son Returns

Allen left Chicago to retreat on his farm in Wampum, Pa. and recover from his various injuries, including the sixth serious injury in his career. He was contemplating a career as a horse-racing entrepreneur. He rejected a \$2 million offer to play baseball in Japan.

Convinced that the racial climate had changed in Philadelphia, Allen was seduced by future Hall-of-Famer Mike Schmidt and Dave Cash to come out of retirement and rejoin the Phillies.^{xi} At the time, the Braves owned the rights to Allen since the Sox had sold his contract to Atlanta after he left the Sox and had never formally filed his retirement papers. Baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn began to investigate the Phillies for tampering. On May 7, 1975 the Phillies completed a trade to Atlanta for the right to resign Allen, who agreed to a \$225,000 contract.

On May 14, 1975, 30,908 fans came to Veterans Stadium to see the prodigal son's return to Philadelphia. He was given a standing ovation when he stepped into the batter's box in a Phillies uniform for the first time since the final game of the 1969 season. Allen lined a two-out single to center, prompting another standing ovation.^{xii}

He helped the Phillies win the NL East crown in 1976, but suffered two injuries that cost him up to two months of playing time. He did make his only postseason appearance, but the Phillies were swept three in a row by the Big Red Machine in the NLCS.

The End

Allen was told he would not be asked to return to the Phillies in 1977, but he still felt there was some baseball left in his body.

After the 1976 season, he was approached by Sox owner Bill Veeck who was looking for a new manager to replace Paul Richards. He offered Allen a player-manager role for the



As an Oakland player in 1977, Allen wore his “WAMPUM” emblazoned jersey.

1977 Sox. But Allen turned it down, believing it was gimmick. Veeck ended up hiring Bob Lemon for the job.

During spring training on March 16, 1977, Allen was offered a Oakland A's job by Finley. Instead of his familiar No. 15, he wore No. 60 with "WAMPUM" across the back of the jersey. He ended up feuding with Finley, who had promised him he would not be a DH.

Following a June 19, 1977 doubleheader in Chicago, where he had enjoyed his greatest success, Allen walked away again from baseball and retired for good after 54 games with the A's. In his final at-bat, as a pinch-hitter in the top of the seventh inning, Allen struck out. How fitting his final at-bat was at Comiskey Park, where he had gone 2-for-5 on the day.

Tanner unsuccessfully tried to lure him out of retirement and join the 1979 "We Are Family" Pirates.

The Retirement Years

Allen's retirement years have been challenging. He makes an income off his appearances at card shows and sales off his website.

In 1979, a destructive electrical fire that engulfed his home also destroyed his horse stables.

He turned over his MLB pension to his first wife Barbara after their divorce in 1981. Barbara Allen raised their three children, who all went to college.

Allen did return as a hitting instructor with both organizations for which he had his most career success, the Sox and Phillies.

He married his second wife Willa.

But the worst part of his retirement was the loss of his first-born daughter Terri, who was tragically murdered by an ex-boyfriend at age 27 in May 1991.

Allen honored on 40th anniversary of '72 season

Forty years after Allen and the 1972 Sox quite possibly saved the franchise, the Chicago Baseball Museum paid tribute to him in a two-day event at U.S. Cellular Field. In conjunction with Sox, Allen threw out the ceremonial first pitch prior to the game against the Milwaukee Brewers on Sunday, June 24, 2012. One night later, the 1972 MVP and several of his former teammates, including Hall of Famer Gossage, were honored at the Stadium Club.

In addition to Allen, Hemond, who won the MLB executive of the year award in 1972, was among the dignitaries in attendance for the tribute.

After his retirement as a player in 1977, Allen had been a reluctant hero. His last public appearance in Chicago took place at SoxFest prior to the 2000 season.

For several years, I had urged Allen to step forward and be recognized for his many contributions to the franchise and the city. Needless to say, the time and effort were worth it because Allen was responsible for a turnaround at a crucial time in the Sox franchise history. The Allen tribute was one of most significant baseball events of 2012 in Chicago. He finally got the recognition and love that he deserved.



Allen at the U.S. Cellular Field Press Conference June 11, 2012.

It was clear that Allen was still the team leader 40 years later. Riding on the team buses to events from the Palmer House to the ballpark for all the events, he sat in the front seat and would periodically stand against the front rail talking to his '72 teammates like they were ready to go battle the A's. "I will go back to being the skipper..."

Nearly 38 years had passed since Allen had left Chicago. But on the city's streets, he was treated like a rock star. Large number of fans came up to him and gave him high fives and hugs. He did non-stop media appearances on Monday, June 11, 2012 and ended up on the front page of the *Chicago Sun-Times* with the article "Sox Savior Returns" His return to Chicago got him national exposure.

"He was the single most knowledgeable baseball guy I've ever been around and the greatest player I've ever seen in that MVP season," Gossage said repeatedly during the two-day celebration.

Allen's baserunning prowess underappreciated

One aspect of Allen's career that does not translate well with statistical analysis, but really helped his teams win, was his baserunning prowess, even late in his career.

Nolan Ryan was robbed of a eighth no-hitter by Allen in his final year on the Sox. On Aug. 7, 1974, pitching in Chicago, Ryan was within two outs of a no-hitter when Allen hit a slow roller to a charging third baseman Rudy Meoli and hustled down the line despite the lingering effects of the previous year's left-leg fracture. The Sox came back and won the game 2-1. For 10 minutes post-game, Harry Caray lauded Allen as the best player in baseball.

Sox teammate Carlos May said of Allen: "He was the best player that I ever saw. I tried to emulate him the way he set pitchers up, the way he ran the bases. He'd be out at the

park at 6 a.m. in spring training hitting. He knew the game and he was a leader... guys didn't sluff off when he was around."

Injuries and illness cut his career short

Like several other ballplayers whose full potential were cut short, injuries and illness took their toll on Allen's career. He really only played 12 full seasons when one subtracts his time for the 1967 right-hand injury, games lost to his alcoholism in 1969 (including a 28-game suspension for being late to a game) and earlier years, his torn hamstring in 1970, his June 1973 freak fibula injury, his 1974 left shoulder injury and his two injuries in 1976.

He got accused of being a malinger by former White Sox team physician Hank Crawford after he only played in a few games late in the 1973 after attempting to return back from his late June 1973 leg fracture. Allen told me Crawford never examined him because he liked to rehab on his own just like he did following his 1967 injury.

Dick's issues with alcohol were well-known, but he was never accused of abusing cocaine or taking performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). In comparison, Dennis Eckersley underwent an intervention for alcoholism after his 6-11 1986 Cubs record with a 4.57 ERA and got the necessary treatment for his illness. But Allen was not afforded the resources for help that other latter-day MLB players like Eckersley enjoyed. After successful treatment, Eckersley saw his career rebound after he left the Cubs and joined the A's to allow him to extend his MLB career to 24 years and gain entry to the Hall of Fame.

Allen's 1967 injury was potentially career-devastating. I examined Allen's right hand when he was in Chicago in 2012. I was amazed that he could have ever returned to competitive baseball. His fourth and fifth fingers (which are innervated by the ulnar nerve) were basically non-functional and he had lingering effects of chronic neuropathy. He could not make a full grip with his hand. It is amazing that he even returned to baseball. He had to change positions because it was still difficult for him to grip and throw a ball with his injured right throwing arm.

He rehabbed privately on his own, squeezing a rubber ball constantly while he dealing with psychological demons that this injury caused him. Allen was determined to not let his career end with a freak accident. He took a construction job laying bricks. His will to recover from this type of injury demonstrates what kind of character he has. He arrived in 1968 spring training wearing a golf glove for extra support to protect his hand



Allen's old injured right hand shown in June 2012 with an eight-inch-long surgical scar on the surface of the forearm and wrist.

form the vibratory shocks from his damaged ulnar nerve (“funny bone”). At first, he got fined for using unlawful equipment via the batting glove. But later that year, other major leaguers began wearing the gloves as he started a trend.

Allen as a real person

I spent five intense days with Allen in June 2012 when he returned to finally get his due from the city in which he had saved the Sox from leaving town and we have spoken several times since.

During my time with him, he readily admitted he occasionally drank too much and still was hoping to quit smoking, which as a physician I urged him to do. Something must have registered, because he left a unfinished pack of Natural American Spirit cigarettes in my car.

While he could be outgoing and world-class charming, it was clear that Allen the individual was still a very private person, uncomfortable with self-promotion. I did not find him an enigma at all as others have suggested. He was a modest, private person who disliked being the center of attention.

He grew up in Wampum, Pa. where his family growing up did not experience much prejudice in the town of roughly 1,000 inhabitants even though there were only a handful of African-American residents. Until his baseball career started, he really had not experienced Jim Crow.

It was clear that he was very spiritual and has strong Christian values. He prayed before every meal. The importance of family was obvious as we surprised Dick and brought in his son Richard, Jr. and his grandson, wife Willa as well as brothers Hank and Ron to the 2012 Tribute.

I found him a man whose most valuable lasting possession was his family and that his life-story was a reflection of America in the 1960s as our society struggled with integration and racial harmony. He was a survivor of the ‘60s.

What I enjoyed most is when we he talked about his time in Little Rock, Ark., when he essentially became the Jackie Robinson of baseball in that state without a Branch Rickey to protect and mentor him. The Phillies sent him to Little Rock to play Triple-A ball, thus making him the first black pro ballplayer in Arkansas history.

Gov. Orval Faubus threw out the first pitch at the 1963 Arkansas Travelers’ home opener six years after he participated in a more famous “opening day” in 1957. Then, Faubus had blocked the entrance to Little Rock Central High School to prevent black students from entering. Faubus had openly defied a unanimous decision of the U.S. Supreme Court to desegregate Little Rock schools and ordered the Arkansas National Guard to stop African-American students from attending Little Rock Central. Little wonder that a Little Rock policeman put a gun to Dick’s head after he was suspected of stealing a soda from a Pepsi machine. He talked about how hard that season was for him and how his arrival in Little Rock was a life-changing event for a black man who had grown up in an integrated town in Western Pennsylvania.

Instead of being bitter, Allen chose to forgive and forget and channel his anger into excelling on the field. He told me how gotten through the experience with prayer and Bible passages that his Ezra, his mother, had ingrained in him. While he endured considerable hardship, he had transformed the community with his stellar play that attracted black fans to come out to the ballpark and got them to sit anywhere in the stands, instead of the “Coloreds Only” section. During that transformative year, he led the International League with 12 triples, 33 homers and 97 RBIs, along with .289 batting average earning a late September call-up to the Phillies.

“Dick won over the Little Rock fans with his play,” recalled Hall of Famer Fergie Jenkins, who joined Allen later in 1963 on the Travelers. Reflecting back nearly 50 years later, Allen said “I learned to persevere in Little Rock.”

While I enjoyed hearing about his Little Rock experience, it was very hard to hear him talk about his daughter Terri. He broke down on two occasions when he began speaking about losing her. He kept his pain about her tragic death to himself. Very few people in the baseball community were aware that Allen’s daughter had been murdered, including ex-teammate Gossage, who was shocked when I told him about the tragedy at the 2012 Tribute.

Allen’s chances of getting selected

All candidates receiving at least 12 of 16 votes (75 percent) will gain election into the Hall of Fame for a July 26, 2015 ceremonial induction. Eight of this year’s electorate are former ballplayers who are either Hall of Famers or MLB team executives. While baseball players are generally not baseball historians and may not know statistics that well, all of these former ball-players with the exception of Ozzie Smith played with or against Allen.

In competition with the nine other candidates on the ballot—including three other players with strong White Sox connections, Allen should have several strong allies in the room among the 16-person electorate:

- Former Sox GM **Roland Hemond**, who pulled off the blockbuster 1971 Tommy-John-for-Allen trade with the Dodgers, will clear up any issues on Dick’s character.
- Former Kentucky Senator **Jim Bunning**—who has vast experience in twisting arms—can educate the Golden Era on the ’64 Rookie of the Year, lest anyone think he was a factor in the Phillies’ legendary collapse. Allen batted .341/.434/.618 in September/October, including 17-for-41 during their 10-game losing streak — and played in all 162 games, putting up a 9.6 WAR that has not been matched by rookie until Mike Trout did it in 2012.
- Fellow Arkansas Traveler teammate **Fergie Jenkins** who can shed light on Allen’s character as the first African-American player who played in Little Rock, just a mere seven years after the Supreme Court desegregation decision and having to deal with a gun pointed at his face by the Little Rock police for allegedly stealing a soda.

- Elias Sports Bureau VP **Steve Hirdt** is one of the 16 voters and he can help focus the group on Allen's stats alone and not any side issues in his career.
- **Joe Morgan** has gone on record in *ESPN The Magazine* saying he will vote for Allen.

With five seemingly solid votes that will be inside the room making the case for Allen, he only needs to garner seven of the remaining 11 votes: Dick Sutton was his 1971 teammate on the Dodgers. Al Kaline saw Allen in his first AL year when he won the MVP. Rod Carew witnessed Allen slash two inside-the-park homers in one game off fellow Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven on July 31, 1972 in old Metropolitan Stadium.

If Allen gets selected?

If he is elected, which hat do I think Allen will pick to choose to wear on his plaque now that the players once again get to choose, not the Hall of Fame? I really don't care -- I just want to see him get him because he deserves it. He could follow the trend set by Tony La Russa or Greg Maddux in 2014 and go in without a cap that identifies which team, and instead honor all of the franchises for which he played.

For a long time, I urged Allen to do some limited public speaking about his career, especially talking about his time in Arkansas, when he was a pioneering African-American player. In 2012, I had lined him up with a gig at Notre Dame to speak about his experiences in Little Rock and Philadelphia. He passed on this speaking engagement because he is so private.

A whole generation of baseball fans know virtually nothing about Allen and his unique baseball acumen is one of the best all-time. He would be a great mentor for any team that would hire him. One wonders if had accepted Veeck's offer to go back to the Sox as player-manager for the 1977 Southside Hitmen? As much as Allen is a very private, deeply religious man whose life has been touched with tragedy with the murder of his daughter and fire at his farmhouse that killed several of his prized horses, he is one of the most interesting baseball personalities of all time.

This generation of fans deserves to be exposed to one of the most baseball-intelligent stars of all-time.

He was a preview of the modern-day sports star, who is allowed to march to his own drummer as long as he delivers on the field of play.

Next to my bed is a framed copy of his infamous June 1972 *Sports Illustrated* cover—"Season of Surprises: Chicago's Dick Allen Juggles His Image" with him juggling three balls with a politically-incorrect cigarette in his mouth. He personally signed it for me: "Dick Allen MVP '1972." Finally, getting the due he has deserved since the mid 1980s to get elected the Hall of Fame will really juggle his image.

Each night before I go to sleep I look at Allen's picture and remember chiding him to finally quit smoking. But what I think the most about is how he captured my heart like no other ballplayer in my life. In my mind, I have the image of him going from first to

third on a base hit to the outfield with the majestic graceful cut around second base. I have never seen another ballplayer run the bases like he did.

Does Allen deserve a place in Cooperstown?

In summary, this two part series makes the case that Allen deserves a spot in the Hall of Fame.

As Stuart Miller wrote in his 2011 *New York Times* piece: “Allen’s story is complicated by his personality and the politics of his time. He was, at best, a prickly nonconformist who broke rules and irritated teammates. However, he was also subjected to racism, both blatant and subtle, which is what fueled some of his behavior.”^{xiii}

There have been few players whose Hall of Fame credentials have been more vigorously debated than Allen. Detractors, like Bill James, point out two main factors: that he was “a clubhouse cancer” type that hurt his teams. Second, that his career was cut short by injuries, illness and other factors and he didn’t put up big numbers like 500 home runs.

However, nearly every major player and coach who was a part of Allen’s career has stepped forward to rebut the claims of his negativity in the clubhouse, including two of the game’s greatest managers, Tanner and Mauch, who are now both deceased.

Pitcher Stan Bahnsen, a 1972 teammate, said it best. “I actually thought that Dick was better than his stats. Every time we needed a clutch hit, he got it. He got along great with his teammates and he was very knowledgeable about the game. He was the ultimate team guy.”

Arguably, one of the most interesting personalities to ever lace up a pair of baseball spikes, Allen was one of the five most dominant hitters in an era chock full of future Hall of Famers, from 1964-73. His 165 OPS-plus for 10 years led all of baseball, and was better than all of his peers and the other current candidates on the Golden Era ballot.

Endnotes

- i. Bill James, *The Politics of Glory: How Baseball's Hall of Fame Really Works* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 322-25.
- ii. Kashatus, William C, “Dick Allen, the Phillies, and Racism,” *Nine*, Fall 2000 later expanded into book form William C. Kashatus, *September Swoon: Richie Allen, the '64 Phillies, and Racial Integration* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2004), 198
- iii. Dick Allen and Tim Whitaker, *Crash: The Life and Times of Dick Allen*, New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1987 Page 69
- iv. Craig Wright, “Another View of Dick Allen,” *The Baseball Research Journal* No. 24, 2, 10 (1995).
- v. DJ Fletcher Oral Interview with Roland Hemond 2/17/07. He gave me a one-hour blow-by-blow description how the Dick Allen-for-Tommy John deal went down when

he appeared in Champaign for a “Hot Stove League” talk for the University of Illinois baseball team.

vi. William Barry Furlong, “Dick Allen: Chicago Colossus,” *Baseball Stars of 1973* Pyramid Books p 27

vii. Kastatus ibid

viii. Richard Roeper *Sox and the City*, Chicago Review Press 2006 page 97

ix. Mark Liptak Oral Interview Chuck Tanner October 25, 2005. <http://www.whitesoxinteractive.com/rwas/index.php?category=11&id=3056>

x. Jerome Holtzman “It’s never too late for Dick Allen” *Chicago Tribune*, May 3, 1992

xi. Mitchell Nathanson “Dick Allen’s Second Act” *The National Pastime/From Saw-poodle to South Philly* July 2013: 110-115

xii. Bill Conlin (December 9, 2009). "Bill Conlin: A stroll down Allen’s lane". *Philadelphia Daily News*

xiii. Stuart Miller “Ken Boyer and Tony Oliva Are on the Ballot. Why Not Dick Allen ?” *New York Times* Nov. 10, 2011