

Manny Mota: Does Retrosheet Back Up My Memories?

by Joe Martini

As a kid in the 70's, I was a huge Dodger fan and Manny Mota was my favorite player.

As I remembered it, when the game was on the line in the late innings and a runner was in scoring position, the sight of #11, Manny Mota, swinging two bats in the on-deck circle created great drama and optimism in Dodger Stadium. If I rely on my memory, I imagine that he laced a beautiful line drive almost every time one was needed..

But, how often did he actually bang out a game tying or game winning hit? Looking at Mota's 1974 stats, I noticed that he had 16 hits and 16 RBI. I thought that was pretty unusual and I visualized most of those 16 RBIs as game winners.

Enter the new reality check: Retrosheet.org

At Retrosheet, I looked through the play by play for each of Mota's 52 pinch hit ABs in 1974 and found that he had only one GWRBI (game winning RBI) in 10 situations where a basehit would have put the Dodgers ahead. His one success was a "walk off" single to score Dave Lopes in the bottom of the 9th in a "Businessman's Special" vs. the Braves on Wednesday, June 26, 1974. (In the 9th, Joe Ferguson had tied the game at 4-4 with a HR. Mota was hitting for LHB Bill Buckner vs. LHP Tom House, who had caught Aaron's 715th HR two months earlier--a game Mota had appeared in as a PH. Mike Marshall, who would win the Cy Young that year, picked up his 9th of 15 relief wins.)

In the next day's Los Angeles Times, Ross Newhan explained that Buckner was sent to the plate with Lopes on first. However, Alston pinch hit for Buckner during his at-bat after Lopes stole second:

With Lopes on second and the count 1-1 on Bill Buckner, manager Walter Alston sent up the right-handed-swinging Manny Mota, who took one pitch and then singled sharply to left. Lopes, who was again running with the pitch, dodged the ball as it darted toward left and easily scored the

winning run....Of his decision to use Mota for Buckner who had previously doubled and singled and is hitting .331, Alston said: "I know Buck is hot but he hasn't been up that many times against a left-handed pitcher. I didn't want to use Mota while Lopes was still on first because Manny isn't the type of hitter who'll score a runner from first and I didn't want to just waste him.

Mota batted in six situations in 1974 where a basehit would have tied the game. In these situations, he succeeded three times.

Thus, he was 4 for 16 in game tying or game winning situations, a .250 average. Many of his other ABs were situations where he was simply hitting for a pitcher in the 8th or 9th inning, often when the game was not even close.

That wasn't nearly as good I remembered it, so, I decided to click through all of Manny's other PH AB from 1975 through 1982, when he was primarily a late inning pinch hitting specialist. Aha! 1976, that was the way I remembered it! Five game winning and two game tying hits in twelve tries. On May 22, 1976, he hit a walk off sacrifice fly to beat the Astros in the 14th. Then, for an encore, he beat the Astros again the next day with a single in the bottom of the tenth! Overall, as shown below, I found that Mota came through almost 30 % of the time with game winning or game tying hits with runners in scoring position from 1974-1980.

Year	GTRBI	GWRBI	Failed to Tie Game	Failed to win game	GT+GW RBI	GT+GW AB	Success Tying or Winning Game
1974	3	1	3	9	4	16	.250
1975	0	2	4	9	2	15	.133
1976	2	5	3	2	7	12	.583
1977	1	0	5	2	1	8	.125
1978	0	2	2	2	2	6	.333
1979	1	2	1	3	3	7	.429
1980	0	1	2	1	1	4	.250
74-80	7	13	20	28	20	68	.294

You could look it up. Here are the dates of the thirteen times Mota drove in a game winner-- play by play for each one can be found at Retrosheet:

6/26/74 ATL, 4/28/75 ATL, 7/18/75 PIT, 5/1/76 STL, 5/22/76 HOU, 5/23/76 HOU, 8/18/76 NYM, 9/13/76 ATL, 5/22/78 SDP, 8/24/78 PHI, 4/21/79 SFG, 8/4/79 SFG, 9/24/80 SFG.

I haven't compared Mota's success rate to other pinch hitters, but I think it would be hard to find someone who did as well over such an extended period. To compare Mota to other pinch hitters, I took a look at their career numbers with runners in scoring position (RISP). Retrosheet shows Mota with 970 career AB with RISP. Here's full career RISP data for him and other notable pinch hitters, (not limited to PH AB) (Data available from 1960 to present):

Player	AVG	OBP	SLG
Manny Mota	.314	.384	.394
Jerry Lynch	.296	.383	.504
Tommy Davis	.286	.332	.386
Smokey Burgess	.284	.400	.436
Terry Crowley	.282	.392	.430
Jose Morales	.282	.342	.446
Vic Davalillo	.275	.321	.363
Greg Gross	.267	.368	.334
Lenny Harris	.253	.303	.319
John Vander Wal	.242	.371	.423
Mark Sweeney	.241	.361	.431
Dave Hansen	.239	.372	.386

Of the top career pinch hitters I checked, Mota does not have the best OPS, but this is one place, arguably, that BA is an important indicator. Mota is the one most likely to drive in those runners with a single. However, Alston might have liked to have had Lynch if the winning run was on first base!

Did Mota Drive In More Runs Than Expected?

To analyze Mota's value as a late inning RBI guy, I checked out Tom Ruane's interesting work on RBI production.

http://www.retrosheet.org/Research/RuaneT/rbipro_art.htm

LEGEND:

RBI - runs batted in

ERBI - expected RBIs

RPRW - RBI Production Wins

RPRW for the best seasons ever fall in the range of 7 to 9. The worst seasons ever--guys like Enzo Hernandez and Neifi Perez--range from -3.5 to -4.6. Here's the data for Mota's main years as a pinch hitter and for his full career:

Year	RBI	ERBI	RPRW
1974	16	17.2	-0.0
1975	10	11.9	-0.1
1976	13	13.8	-0.1
1977	4	7.3	-0.4
1978	6	5.9	0.0
1979	3	6.2	-0.4
1980	2	2.2	-0.0
Career	426	447.9	-0.6

Ruane's data shows that Mota was very close to the exact number of expected RBIs for each of those years. Why? As noted above by Alston, Mota was a pure singles hitter who was saved for RISP situations. If I understand correctly, the theory is that even a league average hitter would have a high expected RBI rate if he batted so often with runners in scoring position. I did not find any other professional pinch hitters with higher averages in RISP situations. I guess the question then becomes: What is a good RPRW for a career pinch hitter? Interestingly, the other eleven pinch hitters listed above, also have RPRW very close to 0 for most seasons when they were pinch hitting regularly. I won't reproduce the data here. You can view

Tom Ruane's RBI production data for every player since 1960 at:

http://www.retrosheet.org/Research/RuaneT/rbipro_dat.htm

Two Inside the Park Homers in One Game?

Retrosheet also helped me prove that one of my Mota memories was almost accurate: I incorrectly remembered seeing Manny Mota and Willie Davis hit back to back inside-the-park homeruns. As it turns out, on June 11, 1972, while attending Camera Day at Dodger Stadium, I did see Mota hit an inside-the-park homer in the third and Davis hit one in the fifth, two in the same game vs. the Pirates. According to the Los Angeles Times account of the game, Mota drove his into the left field corner and Rennie Stennett fell down attempting to chase it down. (Stennett who was primarily a second baseman, did play 48 games in the OF in his career, and apparently not well.) The drive by Davis was to nearly the same place down the RF line, perhaps as classic a match-up as could be imagined, with one of the speediest players in the game motoring around the bases and one of the greatest arms of all time, Roberto Clemente trying to throw him out.

And, one more Mota Retrosheet Moment:

In 1973, at age 10, I called Bud Furillo's KABC talk radio show and advocated using Mota full-time in LF instead of platooning him. For much of his career he had a reputation for only hitting LHP. Well, guess what? Retrosheet's career splits show there wasn't much of platoon differential:

.308 .350 .387 vs. RHP

.302 .362 .392 vs. LHP.

It's been a great trip down memory lane with Retrosheet and Manny Mota. It's my hope that Retrosheet data will provide more answers to how valuable Mota and others like him were to their teams.

Retrosheet.org

[Wikipedia List of Notable Pinch Hitters](#)