ATTENDANCE AS A PLAYER STATISTIC

By Steve Scott
5/7/2025
Email: stevescott00@comcast.net

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to use game attendance as a player statistic and compile a list of the most watched ballplayers in major league history.

Data Sources: Retrosheet, Baseball Almanac

"The information used here was obtained free of charge from and is copyrighted by Retrosheet. Interested parties may contact Retrosheet at 20 Sunset Rd., Newark, DE 19711."

Background:
Since childhood there are two statistics I have always looked at when reading a box score: time of game, and official attendance. These stats help me to gain a feel and flavor for the game. I have always been interested in and fascinated by baseball fans at a baseball game, so I am always interested in the attendance.

A few years ago, I was thinking about attendance as a statistic and was looking at team attendance records throughout baseball history. I realized that attendance was always associated with individual games (sometimes a series or homestand total), a team's season, or an entire MLB season. Then it struck me – what if attendance was a statistic that could be attributed to players? What if you could add up the attendances of every game of a player's career? How many fans showed and watched that player play? Who are the most watched players in baseball history? What would a top-25 list look like? Who is the most watched player of all time?

I immediately took to Google and other baseball statistics sites with numerous searches. I found…nothing. I have done stats projects using Retrosheet before, so I set out to research this for myself. I knew I couldn't do this for all 20,000 players who ever played, so I had to create a limited list of potential candidates. I figured that players would have to have a decently long career, would be position players, more likely played in the last few decades when attendance was higher. Also, winning teams or teams that had new ballparks, or players that were involved in record chases would have a higher likelihood.

Research procedure:
- Reference a list of all-time games played, minimum 1000 games, by Baseball Almanac.
- Compile a list of game IDs for each player from their Retrosheet Player Log files
- Extract attendance data from Retrosheet Game Log files for each game of a player's career by matching the data with the player's games played, and calculate a total.
- Attendance totals for likely candidates are compiled and sorted into an all-time leader list.
- This all-time list shows players with more than 70 million in career attendance

Use of the attendance statistic:

- Game attendance will count only for games officially played in by the player.
- Game attendance for traditional double headers (single gate entry) counts once for that day, whether the player plays in only one or both games. It is assumed that the same fans see both games, so should not be counted twice for a player who plays both games.

Results:

	Player	Games	Tot. Att. (millions)
1	Derek Jeter	2,747	107.5
2	Albert Pujols	3,080	104.7
3	Alex Rodriguez	2,784	101.6
4	Adrian Beltre	2,933	95.1
5	Omar Vizquel	2,968	92.4
6	Cal Ripken, Jr.	3,001	88.1
7	Barry Bonds	2,986	86.5
8	Rafael Palmeiro	2,831	86.2
9	Ichiro Suzuki	2,653	83.6
10	Carlos Beltran	2,586	82.8
11	Gary Sheffield	2,576	82.7
12	Jim Thome	2,543	82.7
13	Rickey Henderson	3,081	81.3
14	Manny Ramirez	2,302	81.3
15	Chipper Jones	2,499	80.6
16	Robinson Cano	2,267	79.9
17	Craig Biggio	2,850	79.2
18	David Ortiz	2,408	79.0
19	Roberto Alomar	2,379	79.0
20	Yadier Molina	2,226	78.2
21	Johnny Damon	2,490	77.5
22	John Olerud	2,234	76.9
23	Bobby Abreu	2,425	76.3
24	Ken Griffey, Jr.	2,671	76.1
25	Eddie Murray	3,026	75.9
26	Steve Finley	2,583	75.8
27	Miguel Cabrera	2,797	75.7
28	Jimmy Rollins	2,276	75.5
29	Ivan Rodriguez	2,543	75.1
30	Pete Rose	3,562	75.1
31	Luis Gonzalez	2,591	74.7
32	Sammy Sosa	2,354	74.3
33	Jeff Kent	2,298	74.1

34	Fred McGriff	2,460	73.9
35	Harold Baines	2,830	73.5
36	Bernie Williams	2,076	73.5
37	Jorge Posada	1,829	73.3
38	Todd Helton	2,247	73.0
39	Dave Winfield	2,973	72.8
40	Aramis Ramirez	2,194	72.4
41	Andruw Jones	2,196	72.2
42	Jason Giambi	2,260	72.0
43	Edgar Renteria	2,152	70.4

Other players of note:

Player	Games	Tot. Att. (millions)
Babe Ruth	2,503	33.1
Ty Cobb	3,035	19.8
Willie Mays	2,992	52.7
Stan Musial	3,026	41.3
Ted Williams	2,292	34.2
Reggie Jackson	2,820	57.7
Honus Wagner	2,792	11.9
Mickey Mantle	2,401	48.7
Nolan Ryan	807	17.1
Roger Clemens	709	23.1
Hoyt Wilhelm	1,070	14.1
Walter Johnson	802	5.0
Mariano Rivera	1,115	43.6

Notes:
- NL and AL used different methods for counting official attendance prior to 1993. NL counted paid customers while AL counted tickets sold. Since 1993, MLB has used tickets sold as official attendance.
- I had calculated career attendance for a top few as early as 2023, and discovered that if Albert Pujols had decided to play one more year in 2023, he would have likely passed Jeter before the All-Star break.
- There were 24 players who debuted and played their entire careers during the 2020 season, and because of COVID restrictions have a career fan attendance total of zero. Four of these players, however, are in the minor leagues but have not yet been called up again.