

An All-Star team of Major Leaguers who have played in Great Britain

Josh Chetwynd ★ 5 June 2009

This article has been written for Project Cobb (the Project for the Chronicling of British Baseball).

Who are the greatest Major Leaguers to have played in Great Britain? First of all, the question is not a joke. Secondly, the decision is harder than you might think: over the years, more than a dozen Hall of Famers have competed in baseball in the UK, either in a tour or in an exhibition game.

This article presents an All-Star team of Major Leaguers who have, at some point, played baseball in Great Britain. While some positions are weaker than others and a couple of players made the team because of their contribution to the game in Great Britain (rather than their Big League stats), the squad would undoubtedly be a formidable one.

Note: Players are identified with the team for which they played the largest portion of their career.

Position players

Catcher – Jerry Grote, New York Mets

A 16-year Major League veteran, Grote was the starting catcher for the 1969 New York Mets (aka “The Miracle Mets”), which won the World Series. He would go on to play in three more World Series -- one more as a Met (1973) and later two as a member of the Los Angeles Dodgers (1977 and 1978). He played in England at the Old Trafford Cricket Ground in 1989 as part of a team of Major League Alumni that played against the Great Britain national team.

First base – Willie Stargell, Pittsburgh Pirates

One of the greatest players in Pirates history, Stargell was tabbed for the Hall of Fame in 1988. The year after his induction, Stargell, like Grote, played on a

team of ex-Big Leaguers in England. A seven-time All Star, Stargell hit 475 home runs and led Pittsburgh to two World Series championships (1971 and 1979).

Second base – Quilvio Veras, San Diego Padres

In 1993, Major League baseball brought minor league squads from the New York Mets and the Boston Red Sox to The Oval cricket ground to square off. Veras, a Mets prospect at the time, was the most successful player from either squad, ultimately logging seven seasons in the Majors. (Incidentally, the Mets team won 8–3.) The speedy second baseman stole 56 bases to lead the National League in his rookie season for the Florida Marlins in 1995.

Shortstop – George Wright, Boston Red Stockings

Elected to the Hall of Fame in 1937, Wright was a member of the first travelling tour of Great Britain by Big League baseball players in 1874. Following the tour, he was described by one London paper as “generally regarded as a model base-ball player, especially in his responsible position of shortstop.”

Third base - Roland Gladu, Boston Braves

Gladu makes this team less for his brief Big League performance and more for his actions in England. Gladu, originally from Montreal, Canada, was the first player to compete in a domestic league in England and go on to make it to the Major Leagues. In England, he starred professionally for the West Ham Hammers in the London Major Baseball League. (He was dubbed “the Babe Ruth of Canada” in England.) In his one Big League season (1944), he hit .242 and one home run in 21 games.

Outfielder – Cap Anson, Chicago White Stockings

Named to the Hall of Fame in 1939, Anson is considered by many to be baseball’s greatest player

of the 19th Century. He was baseball's first player to record 3,000 hits in a career. He actually toured England twice as part of Big League world tours – once in 1874 with the Philadelphia Athletics and once in 1889 with the Chicago White Stockings.

Outfielder – Tris Speaker, Boston Red Sox

Elected to the Hall of Fame in 1937, Speaker was one of the Red Sox' first stars, winning the Most Valuable Player award in 1912. In front of King George V, Speaker was almost a hero in an exhibition game played at Stamford Bridge on 26 February 1914. The match was part of a world tour featuring the New York Giants and the Chicago White Sox (although not a Chicago player, he played for the White Sox in the tour). Speaker was robbed of a home run late in the game as the Giants triumphed 5–4 in 11 innings.

Outfielder – Sam “Wahoo” Crawford, Detroit Tigers

Crawford was a member of the world tour between the New York Giants and the Chicago White Sox in 1913–1914, which included a game at Stamford Bridge in 1914. The all-time Major League record-holder for career triples, Crawford was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1957.

Utility – Jim Thorpe, New York Giants

When the New York Giants and the Chicago White Sox came to England in 1914, the biggest star was Thorpe. A year after winning both the decathlon and pentathlon at the 1912 Olympic Games, he was a huge name and was mobbed while in London by adoring fans.

Pitchers

Starter – Bob Feller, Cleveland Indians

One of baseball's biggest pitching stars in between the mid-1930s and mid-1950s, Feller was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1962. As a 70-year-old member of the Major League Alumni team that played in England in 1989, Feller pitched to four batters, retiring three of them.

Starter – AG Spalding, Boston Red Stockings

Spalding was a player on the 1874 Big League tour and the prime motivator of the 1889 event. Spalding not only was a great seller of baseball to the world as

a sporting goods manufacturer, but he was also an incredibly effective pitcher. The Hall of Famer's .796 winning percentage is the greatest of all time.

Pitcher – Urban “Red” Faber, Chicago White Sox

A 20-year member of the White Stockings, Faber pitched all 11 innings and took the loss in the 1914 exhibition game at Stamford Bridge against the New York Giants. The 254-game winner was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1964.

Reliever – Tug McGraw, Philadelphia Phillies

The flamboyant 19-year Major League pitcher came to England in 1989 as part of the Major League Alumni team. A two-time All Star, McGraw was the 1980 World Series champion Phillies' top relief pitcher.

Reliever – John Foster, Atlanta Braves

Like Gladu, Foster makes this team because of what he accomplished in Great Britain. Other than Gladu, Foster is the only player to compete for a British team before ascending to the Majors. Foster played for the Brighton Buccaneers during a summer as a college student. Between 2002 and 2005, the left-hander made 90 Major League appearances out of the bullpen. Two of these came in the 2005 National League Division Series. Foster underwent Tommy John surgery in June 2006 and has not pitched in the Majors since.

Non-players

Manager – John McGraw, New York Giants

Nicknamed “Little Napoleon”, McGraw led Giants teams to Great Britain in both 1914 and 1924. McGraw took his teams to ten World Series, winning three titles, and was named to the Hall of Fame in 1937.

Coach – Hughie Jennings, Detroit Tigers

Jennings served as assistant manager for McGraw during the 1924 trip. As a manager in the Majors, he led four teams to the World Series and was named to the Hall of Fame in 1945.

Umpire – Augie Donatelli

Donatelli graced the British shores as a member of the 95th Bomb Group during World War II and it is likely that he was involved in the baseball action that

occurred in England during that period. (He would ultimately serve a time as a prisoner of war in Germany). As an umpire in the Majors, he was behind the plate for four no-hitters.

Honourable mentions

Outfielder – Billy Williams, Chicago Cubs

The durable Williams played 18 seasons in the Big Leagues, smacking 426 career home runs. Picked for the Hall of Fame in 1987, he played in England in 1989 as a member of the Big League Alumni team.

Outfielder – Sammy Sosa, Chicago Cubs

Although he did not play in a game, the current Baltimore Orioles superstar took swings (with both a baseball bat and a cricket bat) at The Oval in 2000 as part of an exhibition of baseball.

Starter – Christy Mathewson, New York Giants

Chosen alongside the likes of Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb for the inaugural Hall of Fame class in 1936,

Mathewson is considered one of the greatest pitchers of all time. A 373-game winner, Mathewson's career earned-run average was an amazing 2.13. He was a member of the Giants team that played at Stamford Bridge in 1914, but he did not see action in the game.

About Project Cobb

Project Cobb has been established to unify and publicize the various efforts to publish historical details on baseball played in Britain under modern rules. In addition, it serves to promote the preservation of British baseball history as it happens. Further details are available on the Project Cobb webpage, which can be found at the following URL: <http://www.projectcobb.org.uk/cobb.html>.



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