



New Jerseyans in Baseball's Hall of Fame

by Jay Jorgensen

The Garden State has had a long history of involvement with the National Pastime.

From the first officially recorded baseball game at Elysian Field, Hoboken on June 19, 1846, to Jackie Robinson performing against the Newark Bears in 1946, to the Yankees' AA minor league team in Trenton, baseball's rich tradition has provided fond memories and enjoyment to New Jerseyans for over 150 years. Even though there have been no major league baseball teams located in New Jersey, the franchises in New York and Philadelphia have led to many major league players living in New Jersey. Hall of Famers Yogi Berra (Montclair), Larry Doby (Montclair), Phil Rizzuto (West Orange), and Monte Irvin (grew up in Orange) fit that category. The Newark Eagles of the Negro National League played in Ruppert Stadium in the Ironbound section of Newark. The team was owned by Effa Manley,



the only female inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Playing for the Eagles were Ray Dandridge, Leon Day, Monte Irvin, Raleigh "Biz" Mackey, and Willie Wells, all of whom have been elected into the Hall of Fame. There have even been some Hall of Famers who died in New Jersey: Harry Wright (October 3, 1895) and John Henry "Pop" Lloyd (March 19, 1965) both died in Atlantic City, George "Mule" Suttles (July 9, 1966) died in Newark, and Dan Brouthers (August 2, 1932) died in East Orange. In spite of this rich history, there have only been three native born New Jerseyans enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame: Leon Goslin, William Hamilton, and Joseph Medwick.

The ultimate pinnacle of success in baseball is election to the Hall of Fame, located in



William "Sliding Billy"
Hamilton

Cooperstown, New York. There are currently 297 people enshrined. Selection to the Hall is determined in several ways. The Baseball Writers' Association of America holds an election each year. Eligible retired players receiving 75% of the vote are elected into membership in the Hall. There have been 111 candidates inducted through this procedure. The Veterans Committee decides what managers, umpires, executives and long-retired players are worthy of induction. This process has added 160 members to the Hall of Fame. Nine men were admitted during 1971–77 by the Committee on Negro Baseball Leagues (a committee that no longer exists). The remaining 17 inductees have been elected by the Special Committee on Negro Leagues (which came into existence in 2006).

The first Garden Stater elected to the Hall of Fame was **William "Sliding Billy" Hamilton**, in 1961. He was born in Newark, New Jersey on February 16, 1866. At the age of 22 he played his first season with the Kansas City Cowboys in the American Association league. The following year he had a breakout season by hitting .301 and scoring 144 runs. It was his daring romps on the base paths that year, when he stole 111 bases, that led to his nickname "Sliding Billy." The following season Hamilton was sold by the Cowboys to Philadelphia.

For six years he patrolled center field for the Phillies, establishing himself as a star player. In 1891 he topped the century mark in thefts once again, stealing a career high 115 bases. The following year he became the first player in baseball history to hit a leadoff home run and a walk off home run in the same game (only 4 others have done it since then). On August 31, 1894 he stole seven bases in one game, still the record for most bases swiped in a single game. He set two other all-time records that year as well—scoring 196 runs during the season, and scoring one or more runs in 24 consecutive games. It is easy to see how he could be so successful in 1894—his 223 hits translated into a .399 batting average, helping him achieve a hefty .523 on-base percentage. In addition to his 99 stolen bases, Sliding Billy had a 46-game hitting streak. That impressive year is even more remarkable considering he missed much of the 1893 season due to a bout of typhoid fever.

The Boston Beaneaters obtained Hamilton's services as a player beginning in 1896. He played in Boston for six seasons, finally retiring at the end of the 1901 season. During his career he amassed a .344 batting average, and an on-base percentage of .455.



Leon "Goose" Goslin

He stole a record 937 bases. Only Rickey Henderson and Lou Brock have stolen more bases during their career than Sliding Billy. In the 1,591 games he played, he scored 1,690 runs (only two other players in baseball history have averaged more than a run per game played).

Billy Hamilton was a stocky player, weighing in at 165 pounds on his 5'6" frame. He was a devoted husband and father of daughters. He typically scanned the grandstands to see where they were sitting for the game. When his career ended in 1901 he settled into his home in Worcester, Massachusetts. Feeling slighted by something published about him in *The Sporting News*, Hamilton sent a letter to the paper in December 1937. In it he exclaimed, "I'll have you know, sir, that I was, and will be the greatest stealer of all times. I stole over 100 bases on many years and if they ever recount the record I will get my just reward."

On December 15, 1940 Billy Hamilton died at his home on Lucian Street in Worcester, Massachusetts. He was elected into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1961. His Hall of Fame plaque reads: "Holds records for single season: runs scored, 196 in 1894; stolen bases, 115 in 1891; lifetime stolen bases, 937. Batted .395 in 1893, .399 in 1894, .395 in 1895. Led National League in 1891 with .338 average. Lifetime batting average of .344. Scored 100 or more runs during 10 seasons."

Leon "Goose" Goslin was born on October 16, 1900 in Salem, New Jersey. He was the third of four children born to James and Rachel Goslin. Leon was raised on the family farm in Salem County. At the age of 16 the future Hall of Famer left home to play semi-pro baseball. Three years later he signed a minor league contract, and started his career playing in the Sally League. Within two years he was brought up to the major leagues with the Washington Senators.

Goslin played left field for the Senators from 1922–1930. The hard hitting lefty led the Senators to the American League pennant in 1924 and 1925. Indeed it was the slugging exploits of the young Goslin (.344 batting average and a league-leading 129 runs batted in) that helped the 36 years old pitching great Walter Johnson capture his first and only World Series championship with the Senators in 1924. In 1928 Goslin beat out Heinie Manush of the St. Louis Browns on the last day of the season to win the American League batting championship, hitting a career best .379. Two years later the two future Hall of Fame outfielders were traded for each other. Goslin finished the 1930 season by smacking 30



Joseph "Ducky" Medwick

home runs and driving in 100 runs, while batting .326. His time with the St. Louis ballclub was limited to two years, after which he was traded back to the Senators. He led them to their last American League pennant in 1933. The following year he was traded to the Detroit Tigers. Joining an already impressive roster (three other Hall of Famers played for Detroit—Charlie Gehringer, Hank Greenberg, and Mickey Cochrane) Goslin found himself in the World Series once again in 1934 and 1935.

Goose (a nickname he picked up early in his career for his long neck, large nose, and gangly running style—reminiscent to some of a goose) finished his playing career back with the Senators in 1938. At 5'11.5" tall and 185 pounds, the solid slugger had a .316 lifetime batting average while collecting 2,735 hits. He drove in 100 runs or more in eleven different seasons, leading the league in that category in 1924 (thereby depriving Babe Ruth of winning the Triple Crown). In later life Goslin spent much of his time fishing in the Delaware Bay, especially after his wife (the former Marian Wallace) died in 1960. He died on May 15, 1971 in Bridgeton, New Jersey, and is buried in his hometown of Salem. In 1968 he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. His Hall of Fame plaque reads as follows: "Batted .344 in 1924, .334 in 1925, .354 in 1926, .334 in 1927. Led American League in batting in 1928 with a .378 average, runs batted in for 1924–1929. Hit .300 or better in 11 years. Lifetime total of 2735 hits, batting average .316. Made 37 hits in 5 World Series."

Joseph "Ducky" Medwick was born in Carteret, New Jersey on November 24, 1911, the fourth child of John and Elizabeth Medwick. The nickname "Ducky" was foisted upon him as a result of the way that he waddled when he walked, and he never liked the name. He preferred the nickname "Muscles" and urged his teammates to use that. An outstanding athlete, Medwick played four sports (football, basketball, baseball and track) at Carteret High School. Turning down scholarship offers to play football in college, the 1930 high school graduate chose baseball as his career. He spent three years in the minor leagues, terrorizing Texas League pitchers with his powerful hitting.

In September, 1932 Medwick was called up to play for the St. Louis Cardinals in the National League. He would be a fixture in the major leagues for the next 17 years. Medwick played left field and quickly established himself as an integral part of the fabled "Gas House Gang" of the 1930s. In the final game of the 1934 World Series against the Tigers, the Carteret native slid into Tiger

third baseman Marv Owen too aggressively, starting a brawl. When Medwick went to take his position in left field the Detroit fans pelted him with garbage for his transgression. Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis was at the ballpark and quickly removed Medwick from the game for his own protection.



The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, New York.

In 1937 Medwick won the Triple Crown, batting .374, driving in 154 runs, and smashing 31 home runs. For his efforts he was named Most Valuable Player, and he remains the National League's last Triple Crown winner. Powerfully built at 5'10" and 187 pounds, Medwick continued his assault on National League pitching as a member of the Cardinals for the rest of that

decade. In 1940 the splendid outfielder was traded to the Brooklyn Dodgers. Six days after being traded he was knocked unconscious by a bean ball thrown by his former Cardinal teammate Bob Bowman. He returned to play several days later, and helped the Dodgers to the National League pennant in 1941. Medwick also played for the New York Giants and Boston Braves before returning to the Cardinals in 1948, his last year in the majors.

In 1968 the Baseball Writers Association of America finally voted Joe Medwick into the Hall of Fame, sending him in with 84.81% of the vote. On March 21, 1975 he died from a heart attack in St. Petersburg, Florida at the age of 63. He had been working as a batting instructor with the Cardinals in spring training. Joe was survived by his wife Isabelle, his son Joe, Jr., and his daughter Susan. He was buried in the St. Lucas Cemetery in St. Louis, Missouri. His Hall of Fame plaque reads as follows: "Led N.L. in batting in 1937 with .374 average, batted .353 in 1935, .351 in 1936, .332 in 1939. Lifetime total 2471 hits. Batting average .324. Named to All Star Teams 1935-6-7-8-9. Most valuable player N.L. 1937. Led N.J. in runs batted in and two base hits 1936-7-8. Batted .300 or more 15 times."

There you have the three New Jersey born members of Baseball's Hall of Fame. Undoubtedly there will be more in the future...after all Derek Jeter was born in Pequannock, New Jersey, and he's putting together some impressive statistics that should have him enshrined in the Hall when his career's over.

