



How to get from pitch to plinth: modelling statue subject choice in US baseball and English soccer

Ffion Thomas[†], Chris Stride[‡], John Wilson[†] and Josh Pahigian[‡]

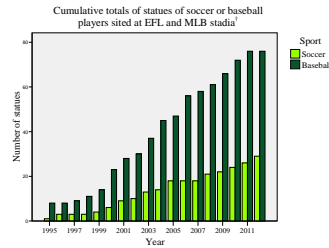
[†]University of Sheffield, UK; [‡]University of New England, US



1 Introduction

By 1st September 2011, 29 statues depicting 32 distinct English Premier or Football League (EFL) soccer players and 66[†] statues depicting 65 distinct Major League Baseball (MLB) baseball players were in situ or scheduled to be erected at the stadia or ballparks in which their subject's club plays. This form of commemoration, popularised in the past 2 decades, is bestowed upon a tiny elite. The debate on whether player X is more deserving than player Y can be seen as a nuanced version of selecting an all-time team across the generations.

This study aimed to identify characteristics related to selection as a soccer stadia or ballpark statue subject, build statistical models for selection, compare predictors of subject selection in baseball and soccer, assess whether selection is a meritocracy, and identify players who are likely to be, or deserve to be depicted in the future.



[†] Bar chart includes 10 further ballpark statues depicting players who did not represent the franchise at whose ballpark their statue is sited: 9 Negro League players, Babe Ruth (at Oriole), Ty Cobb (at Braves).

2 Theory

We first considered potential motivations for erecting a statue, since they will impact upon how the subject is chosen; from these a number of research propositions were established.

Both clubs and fans may erect statues in sympathy, to commemorate the passing of a player. *We would expect players who die younger to be more likely to be depicted.*

Success attracts and retains fans. Erecting statues depicting successful players and glorious moments supports a marketing strategy of basking in reflected glory¹. *We would expect successful players, those from successful teams, and those with a national profile/international honours to be most likely to be depicted. Soccer forwards/baseball hitters are most likely to create moments of success, and hence to be depicted.*

Heritage and nostalgia are used as marketing tools by sports organisations². By appealing to “the innate need to connect to an idealized environment”³, a statue can attract new fans and sports tourists, whilst servicing the nostalgia of existing supporters. *We would expect ex-players from within living and televisual memory (but not so recent as to not generate nostalgia) to be most likely to be depicted.*

Supporters develop a strong attachment to loyal, long-serving, and ‘homegrown’ stars. *We would expect players with lengthy careers at a single, local club to be most likely to be depicted.*

Supporters have a strong attachment to ‘home’⁴, and will want to take their history with them to a new ground. In addition a new wave of ballparks has deliberately retro-themed design features (though this is not true for soccer stadia). *We would expect newer stadia to be most likely to feature statues.*



Left: Busch Stadium, home of the St. Louis Cardinals. Opened in 2006, this is an example of retro design in new ballparks, and also features 8 statues.

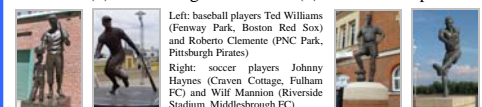
Baseball franchises can relocate. Fans from the new location will not have seen ex-players in regular action. Furthermore, the franchise may want to cast off their previous incarnation and establish a new identity. *If a retired player's franchise moves, he is unlikely to be depicted in the new city's ballpark.*

3 Sample selection, description and analysis

To assess the impact of the potential predictors, we selected samples of soccer and baseball players for whom the potential for depiction was credible. We used two independently selected lists of the best performers in each sport; the 202 former MLB players from the National Baseball Hall of Fame (HOF), and the English Football League 100 Legends list (FL100). Each player was defined as having a primary club, typically that for which they had made the most appearances.

23% of FL100 soccer players are depicted by an existing or currently commissioned statue at the stadium of their primary club. These legends are drawn from 30 different primary clubs, and account for 72% of existing or commissioned English soccer stadia statues of players.

Of the 202 HOF MLB baseball players, 49 (24%) are depicted by existing or currently commissioned statues at the ballpark of their primary franchise, and account for 75% of MLB ballpark player statues. Of the 30 current MLB franchises, 20 have one or more player statues at their ballpark; the St. Louis Cardinals (8) and Chicago White Sox (7) are the most prolific.



Left: baseball players Ted Williams (Fenway Park, Boston Red Sox) and Roberto Clemente (PNC Park, Pittsburgh Pirates). Right: soccer players Johnny Haynes (Craven Cottage, Fulham FC) and Wilf Mannion (Riverside Stadium, Middlesbrough FC)

Logistic regression was used to build models for stadia statue subject selection for each sample. Due to the small sample sizes, an initial set of analyses considered each proposed predictor in turn. The statistically significant predictors emerging from these analyses were then entered together.

For both sports, each model controlled for the number of other legends/HOF members within a player's primary club: limited space and funds may limit the number of statues at a stadium, hence where a team has a large number of legendary players, the odds of a particular player being selected will be reduced. For the baseball sample, dummy variables coded clubs with specific commemoration policies; the New York Yankees and Baltimore Orioles have alternative sculptural commemoration methods whereas the St. Louis Cardinals have a policy of erecting statues to all their HOF inductees.

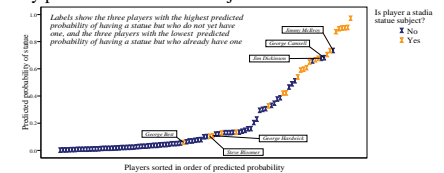
4 Results

The key predictors of statue subject selection were similar for both sports; career era, loyalty and ‘international’ honours. For baseball, career longevity, stadia age and franchise relocation also feature. Sympathy (early death), locality, playing position and (for baseball) raw performance measures were non-significant, hence dropped from the optimal models.

Soccer: Optimal logistic regression model and predicted probability plot for stadia statue subject selection

Predictors (control variables, italicized, entered in 1 st step, other variables in 2 nd step)	B	Wald Stat [†]	Exp (B)	Model: Δy ² Δdf	Correct Classif [‡]
Control: FL100 legends at player's primary club	-0.26 [*]	7.30	0.77	11.0, 1 [*]	77%
Top 3 scorer for primary club? (1 'Yes', 0 'No')	1.46 [*]	4.72	4.29	32.5, 5 [*]	88%
Any major international honours? (1 'Yes', 0 'No')	3.06 [*]	7.38	21.30		
Years since midpoint of player's career	0.14 [*]	3.09	1.15		
Years since midpoint of player's career (squared)	-0.01 [*]	3.83	0.99		
% Career appearances made for primary club	0.04 [*]	6.58	1.04		

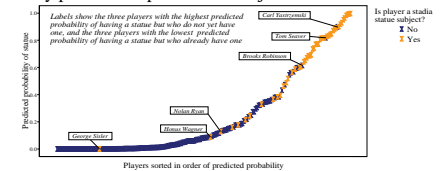
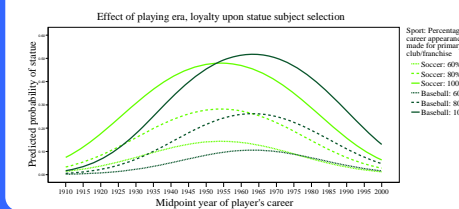
N = 100 soccer players from FL100 list, ^{*} p < 0.05



Baseball: Optimal logistic regression model and predicted probability plot for ballpark statue subject selection

Predictors (control variables, italicized, entered in 1 st step, other variables in 2 nd step)	B	Wald Stat [†]	Exp (B)	Model: Δy ² Δdf	Correct Classif [‡]
Control: HOFers at player's primary franchise	-0.01	0.21	0.99	18.8, 4 [*]	76%
Control: Yankees player (1 'Yes', 0 'No')	-5.42 [*]	12.24	0.01		
Control: Orioles player (1 'Yes', 0 'No')	-3.21 [*]	4.24	0.04		
Control: Cardinals player (1 'Yes', 0 'No')	0.42	0.24	1.52		
Number of All Star roster appearances by player	0.19 [*]	9.07	1.21	90.5, 7 [*]	90%
Years since midpoint of player's career	0.14 [*]	3.88	1.15		
Years since midpoint of player's career (squared)	-0.01 [*]	5.93	0.99		
Log age of ballpark at player's primary franchise	-0.82 [*]	7.88	0.44		
Franchise located in same city (1 'Yes', 0 'No')	2.15 [*]	5.62	8.61		
Length of player's career (years)	0.19 [*]	5.71	1.22		
% Career appearances made for primary franchise	0.06 [*]	16.16	1.06		

N = 202 MLB baseball players from the baseball Hall of Fame, ^{*} p < 0.05



The optimal model correctly predicted 7 of the 9 soccer statue subjects who were not FL100 legends, and 8 of the 16 non-HOF baseball statue subjects.

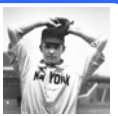
Top 3 players not predicted as subjects by optimal model who are predicted subjects under temporally meritocratic conditions (i.e. no era effect in model)

Soccer Player	Baseball Player	
	Club	Franchise
Bloomer	Derby Co.	Johnson Senators
Crompton	Blackburn	Wagner Pirates
Bassett	WBA	Crawford Tigers

5 Conclusions

Statue subject selection is not meritocratic. Era plays a critical role, with players from the 1950s and 1960s most likely to be depicted, as clubs use statues to nostalgically brand themselves and their stadia. Current players have a low probability of depiction, though this will increase as their career regresses in time. However, pre-1950s players, marooned beyond living and televisual memory, will always be unlikely candidates, especially if they are baseball players from franchises with alternative commemoration methods, older ballparks, or that were relocated (e.g. pre-1957 Dodgers, Giants).

Performance is critical in selection; our samples of the best players from each sport account for three-quarters of player statue subjects. However, distinguishing factors amongst these greats in predicting selection were loyalty and national fame. The odds of a ‘one-club’ player being depicted are 3 times those of a player with 80% of his appearances for his primary club. Mis-prediction is in part due to the difficulty in measuring ‘X-factors’ that affect a player's appeal to fans, such as style or personality.



Christy Mathewson (above) and Jackie Robinson (below); unlikely to be depicted at the Giants' or Dodgers' ballparks



6 Notes and references

- Heider, F. (1958) *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: Wiley
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- Ramshaw, G. & Gannon, S. (2005) More than just Nostalgia? *The Journal of Sport Tourism*, 10, 229-241.
- Dunning, E. (1999) On Problems of the Emotions in Sport and Leisure. In *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport*.

A further 9 English soccer stadia statues and 27 US ballpark statues depict Negro League players (excluded due to the lack of accurate team and playing records), managers, executives or broadcasters. For both sports there also exists a statutory of roughly equal size located in subject's home towns and sporting museums. Scan this QR code for time-lapse maps showing statue locations. Contact/Further details: info@sportingstatues.com, www.sportingstatues.com

