

Allen deserves better in Hall of Fame bid



Dick Allen had a complex career, but its merits cannot be ignored.

By Paul Ladewski

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Former Cubs great **Ron Santo** said it was "a travesty" for the Hall of Fame Veterans Committee to stand pat for the fourth consecutive time recently, but the far greater one was its steadfast refusal to recognize **Dick Allen** and his many similar accomplishments.

Statistically, there's not a lot to choose from between Allen and Santo in their careers. At the plate, Allen had a higher batting average (.292-.277) and slugging percentage (.534-.464) and more home runs (351-342). Santo totaled more hits (2,254-1,848) and was superior in the field. Even so, as the top vote-getter, Santo was approved by 60.9 percent of the panel, while Allen received a mere 10.9 percent of the vote, dead last among the 10 persons on the ballot.

Similar to that of Santo, Allen had 11 peak seasons that covered the 1964 to 1974 seasons. In that period, he hit .299, averaged 29 home runs and 89 RBI per season and ranked with Hank Aaron, Orlando Cepeda, Harmon Killebrew, Willie Mays and Frank Robinson as the most feared right-handed power hitters in the game. All except Allen is a Hall of Fame member among them. He led the league in RBI and runs scored once each, home runs twice and slugging percentage three times. His resume also includes seven All-Star Games selections.

Like Santo, Allen is associated with a monumental meltdown in the final weeks of the season. In September, 1964, the Philadelphia Phillies dropped 12 of 13 games to squander a 6 1/2-game lead. In that stretch, Allen hit .407 and was pitched around so often that he was moved to either second or third in the batting order eventually. On the final weekend, with his team still in the pennant race, Allen responded with four hits, two homers and six RBI in a two-game split against the Cincinnati Reds on the road.

Also like Santo, Allen had to endure a hardship that had no small effect on his life on and off the field. In his case, it was being one of the first black members of the Philadelphia Phillies, a team that was based in a city that had segregist overtones. The racial slights caused the bitter Allen to rebel against authority early in his career and undoubtedly contributed to his erratic behavior and reputation as a troublemaker around the league.

In three seasons with the White Sox, Allen showed how dominant he could be in a more tranquil environment. After his arrival from the Los Angeles Dodgers in December, 1971, the first baseman was given more leeway by manager **Chuck Tanner**, and he immediately carried an otherwise ordinary team to a second-place finish. Not only did Allen pace the league in homers (37), RBI (113), slugging percentage (.603) and on-base percentage (.420) that season, but he played a key role in the transformation of the struggling franchise.

"Never in my life have I been associated with a better person," Tanner said at the time. "I want this fellow to play for me the rest of his career."

More recently, former teammate **Rich (Goose) Gossage** said at his Hall of Fame induction last summer, "He taught me how to pitch from a great hitter's standpoint. No amount of money could have paid for that kind of experience or advice. I didn't realize it at the time, but Dick Allen was the greatest player I ever played with."

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that two athletes so alike would clash as White Sox teammates in the 1974 season, which marked their Chicago farewells. Far less easy to explain is why Allen and Santo are viewed so differently by the Hall of Fame voters.