

Hank Aaron

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Hammerin' Hank Aaron set more major league records than any other player in history during his twenty-three-year career. Although Aaron was not particularly large, his power was generated by strong wrists and a finely crafted swing.

Career Highlights:

ý 755 home runs, breaking Babe Ruth's longstanding record of 714 on April 8, 1974

ý .305 batting average, fifth-best among expansion-era players

ý 2,297 RBIs, first on the all-time list

ý 3,771 hits, third all-time behind Pete Rose and Ty Cobb.

ý Elected to the Hall of Fame in 1982 by nearly a unanimous vote I've had a lot of wonderful moments in baseball. It's impossible for me to rank them in order, one-two-three. When I signed my first major league baseball contract, that was a great moment. It was especially significant because there were so few black players who had made it to the big leagues in 1954. It was a last minute thing. I broke camp and went to Milwaukee with the team, but I was still on a Toledo contract. I was prepared for the worst when they called me into the front office to tell me the decision. It was a big thrill, and a very proud moment, to put my name on a big league contract. A lot of people assume that hitting a home run to tie or break Babe Ruth's record must have been my greatest moment. Hitting those home runs was very special. So was my 3,000th hit. They stopped the game and Stan Musial, the best hitter in the National League when I came up, very graciously participated in that ceremony. Those personal accomplishments were very fulfilling. But there's also great satisfaction in team success. I felt both kinds of satisfaction when I hit the home run off Billy Muffett to clinch the 1957 pennant. The Braves in the middle and late 1950s were one of the best teams I was ever on. In 1956 the pennant was ours to win or lose. It was a three-team race all the way, between us, the Dodgers, and the Reds. We all wound up winning over ninety games. We stayed ahead during most of the summer then ultimately lost the flag on the next-to-last day of the season. I don't like to use the word "choke"--though some writers and many of our opponents did--but in 1956 we were a young club and did some things that were not championship caliber. It wasn't a pleasant experience, but it helped us learn what we had to do to win. We realized that nobody was going to give us the pennant. We had to go out and win it for ourselves. We were the favorites going into 1957, and we made those predictions look good with a 13-3 start. We cooled off and were in third place in late May, but the race was very close among five teams: ourselves, the Cardinals, the Dodgers, the Reds, and the Phillies. We started having injuries, and they didn't stop all season. Fortunately our bench and the players called up from the minors were able to step in and perform well. At the June 15 trading deadline in 1957, we had a chance to acquire Red Schoendienst, an all-star at second base, but it cost us three players, including two regulars. Because we had depth in the organization, we were able to trade two regulars for one and add another Hall of Famer to the lineup. We made a couple of runs at first place in June and July, then fell back. Early in August we reeled off ten straight wins to reach first place and open a little breathing space. We built the lead up to eight and a half games around Labor Day. It was our pennant to win again. Then we stopped playing well. Our lead was down to two and a half games by September 15. We recognized that we were not playing up to our capabilities and saw the similarities between our situation and the year before, but we didn't panic. We won six straight games and came back to Milwaukee needing just one more to clinch the pennant. We had a three game series with the Cardinals, the second place team, who was hanging on by its fingernails. We played the first game on a cold fall night, which added to the pennant race flavor. Even though we only needed one win, we weren't taking anything for granted. The series opener was one of those nip and tuck games. I led off the second inning with a single, the first of four hits in a row. I scored, and we still had the bases loaded with nobody out. That knocked out their starter, but we couldn't score any more runs. Lew Burdette made our run stand up until the sixth inning. The Cardinals loaded the bases, and Alvin Dark flipped a single just past Eddie Mathews at third for two runs. We tied the game 2-2 in the seventh; then we kept missing opportunities to win it. We got two runners on in the eighth but couldn't score. Burdette held St. Louis down through the tenth, and in the bottom of the inning, we loaded the bases with one out and sent up a pinch hitter for Lew. The hitter rapped into a home-to-first double play to end that inning and keep Lew from getting the win. We brought in Gene Conley, who played NBA basketball in the off-season, and he kept the Cardinals off the board in the eleventh. We had the top of our order coming up. Johnny Logan got a single, and I came up with two out. In that situation, as a hitter, you don't think about winning the pennant or the home run championship--I was one behind Ernie Banks, but at that time, I never imagined I'd win a home run championship; I thought of myself as more of a high average hitter than a home run hitter--in that situation all you think about is getting a good pitch to hit. Muffett's first pitch was a curveball, and I knew I hit it well, very high to straightaway center. On the way to first I saw Wally Moon go back to the wire fence and jump for it. I didn't know it was in there until I saw people scrambling for the ball on the other side of the fence. Because it was a

chilly night, you couldn't just hear the fans, you could see their cheers as their breath hit the cold air. I tipped my hat to crowd and I wanted to throw it up there, but for some reason I didn't. When I reached home plate, my teammates carried me to the dugout on their shoulders. Bobby Thomson had been one of my teammates in Milwaukee, and I thought about the home run he had hit against Brooklyn to win the pennant for the Giants in 1951. I had stayed out of school that day to listen to the game on the radio. And when I was running around the bases, it suddenly struck me that this must be the way Thomson had felt. A mighty good feeling it was, too. Related Links:

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