

## Baseball Sluggers

With the issuance of the Sluggers stamps, the U.S. Postal Service recognizes the accomplishments of four baseball greats: Mickey Mantle, Mel Ott, Roy Campanella, and Hank Greenberg. Remembered as powerful hitters who wowed fans with awesome and often record-breaking home runs, these four men were also versatile players who helped to lead their teams to victory and set impressive standards for subsequent generations.

### Roy Campanella

Nicknamed "Campy," Roy Campanella (1921-1993) was the first black catcher in the history of Major League Baseball. Known for his years with the Brooklyn Dodgers, the famous "Boys of Summer," Campanella is remembered as a talented all-around player. He hit 242 home runs during his ten-year Major League career, he was a catcher in five World Series, and he was named Most Valuable Player three times.

Born in Philadelphia, Campanella began his career by playing ball with a semiprofessional Negro League team, the Bacharach Giants, during his teens. He played for the Baltimore Elite Giants from 1937 to 1945 and was considered one of the best catchers in the Negro Leagues. He also played in briefly in the Mexican League.

Campanella began playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1948. During his 1953 MVP season, he hit 41 home runs, chalked up 142 RBIs, scored 103 runs, and batted .312, considered one of the best seasons ever recorded by a catcher. With Campanella, the "Boys of Summer" won five National League pennants between 1949 and 1956 and won the World Series in 1955.

In 1958, Campanella was paralyzed in a car accident, but for decades he worked behind the scenes and in community relations for the Dodgers in Los Angeles. In 1969 he was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1991, two years before he died, Campanella and his wife founded The Roy and Roxie Campanella Physical Therapy Scholarship Foundation, which provides support for those living with paraplegia and funds scholarships for students who pursue degrees in physical therapy.

### Hank Greenberg

As one of the all-time greatest right-handed batters, Hank Greenberg (1911-1986) is remembered and baseball's first Jewish superstar. Twice named Most Valuable Player, he had a career batting average of .313 and 1,276 RBIs and was selected to four consecutive All-Star teams from 1937 to 1940.

Nicknamed "Hammerin' Hank," Bronx native Henry Benjamin Greenberg turned down an offer from the New York Yankees and signed with the Detroit Tigers in 1930. After a short time in the minors, he began playing first base for the Tigers in 1933 and stayed with the team for most of his career. He led the American League in home runs and in RBIs four times each, and he was twice named Most Valuable Player. With 58 home runs in 1938, Greenberg tied Jimmie Foxx's home-run record for right-handed hitters, and his 11 multi-homer games set a one-season record that still stands.



Greenberg's baseball career was interrupted 19 games into the 1941 season when he was inducted into the U.S. Army. He was discharged on December 5, 1941, but after the United States entered World War II he enlisted as an officer in the Air Corps and served with distinction until 1945. When Greenberg returned to baseball later that year, he hit a home run in his first game back. His grand slam in the ninth inning on the last day of the season helped the Tigers win the pennant, and he hit two homers and batted in seven runs to help propel the Tigers to victory over the Chicago Cubs in the 1945 World Series.

After joining the Pittsburgh Pirates for the 1947 season, Greenberg retired as a player, later serving as general manager for the Cleveland Indians and part owner and vice president of the Chicago White Sox. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1956 and the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in 1979.

### Mickey Mantle

Known as "The Commerce Comet," Mickey Mantle (1931-1995) was a famous switch-hitter whose powerful home runs were matched by his impressive speed as a runner and as an outfielder. Synonymous with the New York Yankees for nearly two decades, Mantle was enormously popular with baseball fans, and he is still considered one of the greatest players ever to take the field.

Born in Spavinaw, Oklahoma, and raised in Commerce, Oklahoma, Mickey Charles Mantle was named for baseball catcher Gordon "Mickey" Cochrane. Mantle overcame a childhood bout with the bone disease osteomyelitis to excel as an athlete, playing with a semiprofessional baseball team by the time he was 16. He signed with the Yankees in 1949 and began playing for the team in 1951.

In 1956 Mantle enjoyed one of the greatest seasons in baseball history, hitting 52 homers with 130 RBIs and a .353 batting average to win the Triple Crown. That year he also won the first of three Most Valuable Player awards, winning again in 1957 and 1962. During his career with the Yankees, Mantle led the league in home runs during four seasons and in runs during three seasons. The team won 12 pennants and seven World Series titles and Mantle himself established World Series records for runs (42), home runs (18), and RBIs (40).

By the time he retired in 1968, he had a .298 batting average, he had hit 536 home runs, and he had been named to 20 American League All-Star teams.

In 1974, the first year of his eligibility, Mantle was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. He died of cancer in 1995.

### Mel Ott

Born in Gretna, Louisiana, Mel Ott (1909-1958) is remembered for his easygoing demeanor and his unusual but powerful high-leg-kick batting stance. Distinguishing himself with the New York Giants for 22 seasons, Ott was the first National League player to hit 500 home runs, and he led the league in home runs six times.

"Master Melvin" Ott began playing for the New York Giants in 1926 and stayed with the team for his entire career, serving as player-manager from 1942 to 1947 and as manager until midway through 1948. During the 1929 season, he racked up an impressive 42 home runs and 151 RBIs. A solid right fielder, he also took the league by storm with his unique left-handed batting technique, which involved holding his hands low and lifting his front foot. Ott set what was at the time a National League record for home runs with 511, hitting all but 187 of them in his home park, the Polo Grounds.

With Ott in their lineup, the Giants won three pennants. In 1933 he was a World Series hero when he hit two home runs, one of which won the fifth and final game in the tenth inning. Ott played in three World Series and eleven All Star games. He boasted a career batting average of .304, 511 home runs, and 1,860 RBIs.

Mel Ott was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1951. He died in a car accident in 1958.

The Sluggers stamps were designed by Lonnie Busch of Franklin, North Carolina. Busch based his designs on historic photographs, simplifying and adapting the portraits to resemble old-fashioned baseball trading cards.

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