

RESEARCH QUARTERLY

leagues until they were quite old. In the latter case it would be possible to make a simple, direct comparison of the average performance of each successive age group. But, because selective factors operate so constantly and so relentlessly, it is not possible to employ the foregoing procedure. For this same reason the correlation technique is likewise quite useless for the study of age differences. Indeed, careful analysis of the available data reveals that the average proficiency of the several age groups that participate in major league baseball does not differ appreciably. This is due to the fact that the professional ball player is not employed by the league management until he has exhibited a high level of proficiency. And, as soon as a particular player falls below a very high standard of excellence, he is released by the management and no longer permitted to exhibit his lesser skill in the same class of baseball competition.

Since players are not permitted to remain in the major leagues when they fail to display very great skill, the writer has studied age differences in baseball proficiency by simply tabulating the ages of individuals whose names appeared in the successive annual editions of *Who's Who in Baseball*³ from 1916 to 1938 inclusive.*

In the foreword of *Who's Who in Baseball*, the publishers make the following explanatory statement:

This book, as its name implies, is devoted to the better known or more talented players of the two major leagues. *Who's Who* does not claim to present the records of all the major league players nor even of all the regulars. Such an attempt would be impossible, if for no other reason, because of the continually changing personnel of the big clubs.

If the editors of *Who's Who in Baseball* have succeeded in listing the more talented players of the two major leagues, tabulation of the ages of the players whose names are included each year should reveal the chronological ages at which baseball players are maximally proficient.† What are the chronological ages at which players most frequently exhibit such a high degree of baseball skill as to warrant inclusion of their names in *Who's Who in Baseball*?

Figure 1 presents a composite picture of the ages of the most talented major league players (other than pitchers‡) for a period of 22 years. This figure sets forth data for 3,126 player-years. As here used the term "player-year" posits merely one full year's performance in a major league club, plus inclusion of the player's name in *Who's Who in Baseball* for the succeeding year.§ Since the names of some

*The issue of *Who's Who in Baseball* for the year 1922 (if there was one) was not available to the writer.

† It seems safe to assume that, in making their annual selections, the publishers of *Who's Who in Baseball* did not exhibit prejudice for or against any particular age groups.

‡ Data are presented separately for baseball pitchers.

§ Each edition of *Who's Who in Baseball* contains data for the previous year. It was therefore necessary to make allowance for the fact that the individual's playing