

# Chicago's Biggest Bats

TOP TEN MOST  
POWERFUL HITTERS IN  
CHICAGO HISTORY

Photo: clare\_and\_ben

## THE ALL-TIME MOST POWERFUL BATTERS IN CHICAGO BASEBALL HISTORY

By: *Dominic Micheal*  
Editor, [stocknewsphotos.com](http://stocknewsphotos.com)

The history of baseball in Chicago is far older and much more complicated than just the Cubs-Sox binary that we all know and love today. In Fact, baseball has been played in the Windy City since before it was called the Windy City and even pre-dates the Civil War by nearly a decade. Two teams, one from Lockport and the other from Joliet, were first recorded playing a game of Baseball in August of 1851. A few years later, in 1854, the Union Baseball Club was organized. They played the Excelsiors in August of 1856, a game that was the first to make local newspapers. By 1887, the Chicago City League was formed and ball players began to receive compensation for playing the game of baseball. And with this, professional baseball in Chicago was born.

Fast forward nearly 150 years, and the cumulative history of baseball in Chicago has stacked multiple shelves full of books & almanacs at Harold Washington Library. From that very first game until now, we Chicago fans

have been blessed with countless irreplaceable baseball memories. Sure, it has not always been a bed of roses. Enough awful moments pop into mind to fill a lineup card like the notorious Black Sox scandal, the Bartman hatefest, the 76' Sox in shorts and the sporadic fan who, on occasion, jumps out of their seat to assault an umpire, to name a few. (Disco Demolition Night was intentionally left off this list because, well, more than a few people believe that kind of response to Disco was long overdue) And, let us not forget the long championship drought that plagued Chicagoans so deeply it had fans blaming everything from the long deceased Eight Men Out to the Curse of the Billy Goat. While we may not have had the seemingly endless stream of championship teams like New York has, or the merry-go-round of perennial All-Stars like Boston, Chicago has had an abundance of power hitters over the years. This article is about a select few of those power hitters, the ones who hit so hard they could smack all 108 stitches right off of a baseball.

We have rolled up our sleeves, shoved our hands deep into the stats, and sifted through the very guts of baseball lore to rank the most powerful hitters to ever wear a Chicago baseball uniform. For this compiled list, our staff has ignored the newest trendy, supposed 'tell-all' baseball stat, Isolated Power(ISO). This decision was made because, for our list, we are not concerned with how many extra base hits a player could leg out over a set number of plate appearances, but rather the sheer amount of force which a player could consistently smash the ball with. When evaluating our picks, keep that point in mind when you don't see your favorite second baseman, outfielder, or other ballplayer here. Many names one might expect to appear may be absent, including enough Cooperstown enshrines to displace Joe Mantegna, Dennis Franz, and the entire cast of Bleacher Bums out into left field. Our list is sure to delight some and infuriate others. Regardless, we hope this list will provoke deep debate among not only baseball fans in Chicago but fans across the world! So here we go...





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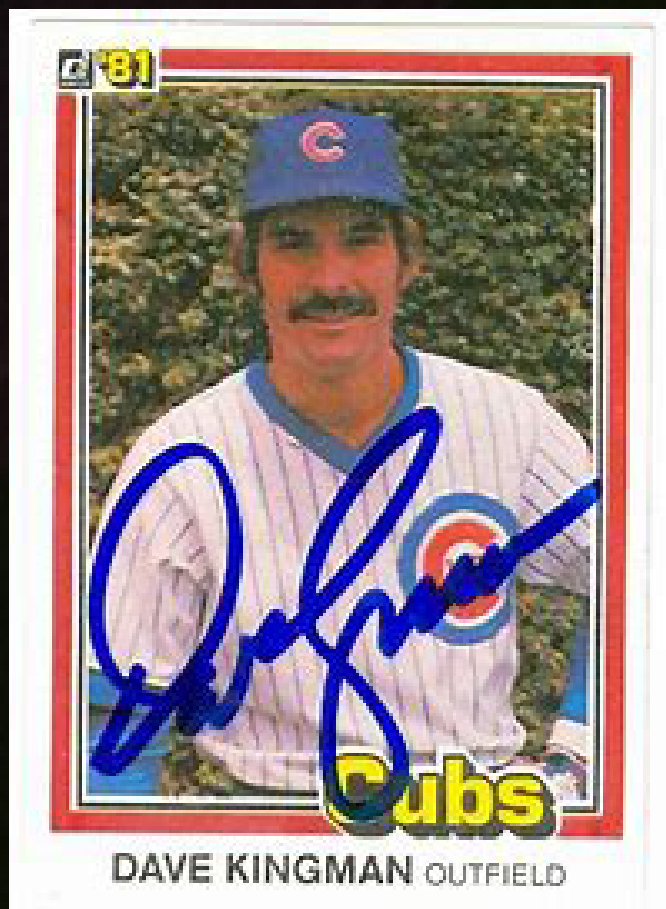
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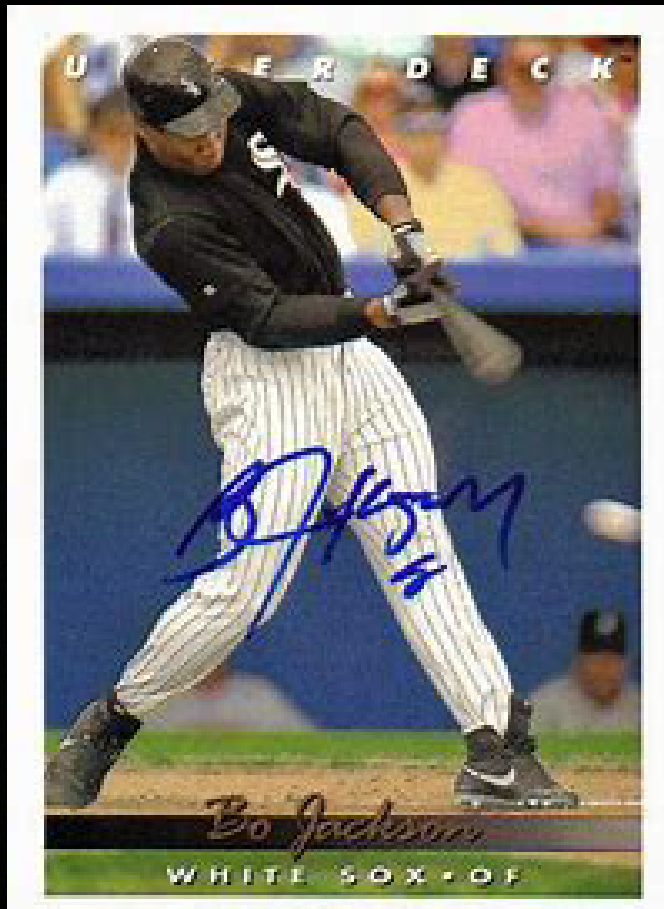


## *Dave Kingman*

Dave Kingman and his brawny bat are the stuff of legends here in the Second City, even if those legends are of the urban variety. Kingman may have only walloped 49 baseballs out of Wrigley Field during his stint with the Cubs, but they are some of the most mammoth shots ever hit in the long and storied history of the Friendly Confines. While most power hitters belt home runs onto Waverly Avenue, Kingman was capable of slamming the ball clear out to Kenmore Avenue. He accomplished this feat on May 7th, 1979 during a 22-23 slugfest loss to the Philadelphia Phillies. While officially measuring about 550 feet from home plate, hyper-inflated rumors of a 700-foot home run quickly began to spread. Hysteria aside, Kingman wielded a real mean bat. He led the league in both home runs and slugging percentage that year. Once he left Chicago his power followed him like a slime trail behind a slug. While with the Athletics, he once hit a ball into (literally into) the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome's roof, which never came down. Kingman also hit 35 home runs in his final season at age 37, a Major League record he held until 2016.



# #9



## Bo Jackson

Bo Jackson is quite possibly the finest all-around athlete the human genome has yet spawned. How do you find out if someone played baseball in their youth during the latter half of the 1980s? Easy. Ask them how many times they tried to break a bat over their knee as a child. Bo represented pure, uncut, unadulterated raw power, plain and simple. That power was on full display for a National audience during the 1989 All-Star game, when he slammed a bomb straight to center field as former President Reagan sat, being interviewed, in the booth. Another 'Bo-mo-moment' happened on July 29th, 1988, the game in which he hit his renowned 'Time-out Homerun'. Facing Jeff Ballard and the Baltimore Orioles at Memorial Stadium, Jackson failed to get properly set inside the batter's box before the pitch and attempted to request a time-out. Home plate umpire Mike Reilly refused to grant the time-out. With extraordinary reaction time, speed, and physical strength only Jackson could produce, he quickly recovered and hit the ball out of the park. Our personal favorite, however, has to be the time Bo tried to provide a baseball with enough escape velocity to clear orbit. He launched a three-run shot in September 1993 against a strong Mariners team that clinched the AL Central and sent the White Sox to the playoffs. His 400-foot blast hung in the air for an astonishing 7.7 seconds, seriously. Bo knows power.



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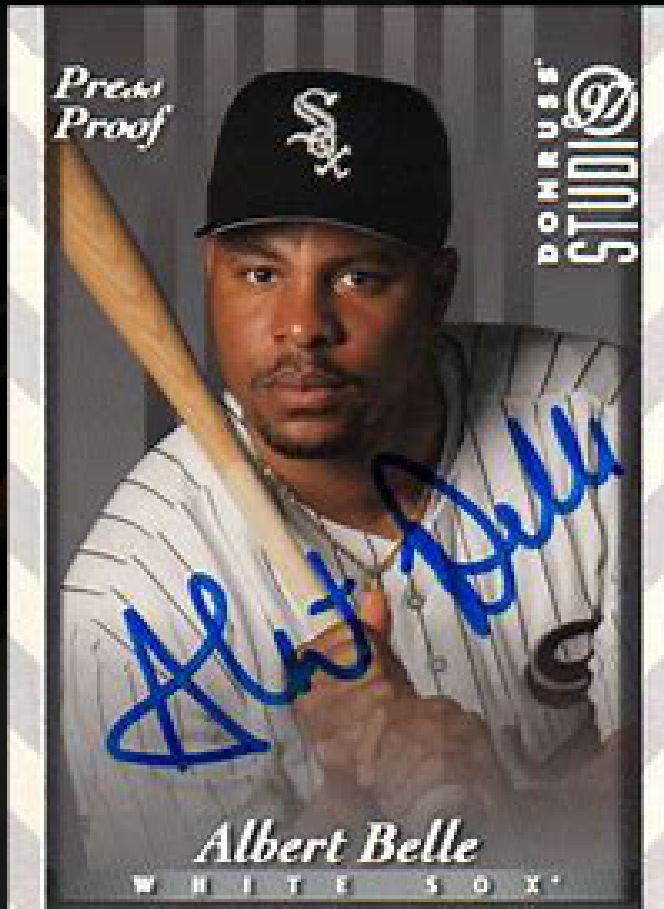
# #8



## *Dick Allen*

Dick Allen had a tumultuous tenure on the South Side, yet a very productive one. Allen won the 1972 MVP award and was well on his way towards repeating until a broken leg cut his '73 season short. In retrospect, most baseball historians recall his tremendous opposite-field strength, which was one of the most powerful to ever grace the game. Scorched into the mind's eye of Philly fans during the Pitcher's Era are his behemoth home runs at legendary Connie Mack Stadium. Allen destroyed baseballs there, including his mythic shots off of nearly every sign or billboard in the park, out past the grandstands and even over the stadium's 32-foot fence in straight away center field. On two occasions, Allen smashed the ball completely over the stadium's scoreboard, a superhuman feat by a right-handed hitter. During a game in 1974, Allen's massive 42-ounce bat connected with a pitch and sent it soaring onto the roof of Tiger Stadium in deep left field. He may have had a reputation for being a tough player to manage, but Allen's hefty bat certainly helped prevent the ailing Sox franchise from leaving Chicago for a different city altogether.

#7



# Albert Belle

Steroid rumors and corked bats aside, Albert Belle could swat a baseball a long, long way. He is the only player to ever hit 50 home runs and 50 doubles in a single season. It should be noted that he did this during the strike-shortened season of 1995. Belle was a fierce competitor that could intimidate the toughest ball players of his day. He had a habit of refusing to take his base when beamed by an opposing pitcher. Once, having already hit 3 dingers that day, Belle even refused to take first base after being hit by a pitch directly on his hand in extra innings. Instead, he wanted to stay at the plate, swinging the bat for a chance to win the game. Belle was also a model of consistency, hitting 30 home runs and 100 RBIs in eight consecutive seasons, being only one of six players to earn that distinction. Unfortunately, his violent behavior, the many allegations of cheating, and his clubhouse antics tend to make it difficult to root for Belle. Love him or hate him, Albert Belle could smack the rubbed mud out of a baseball.



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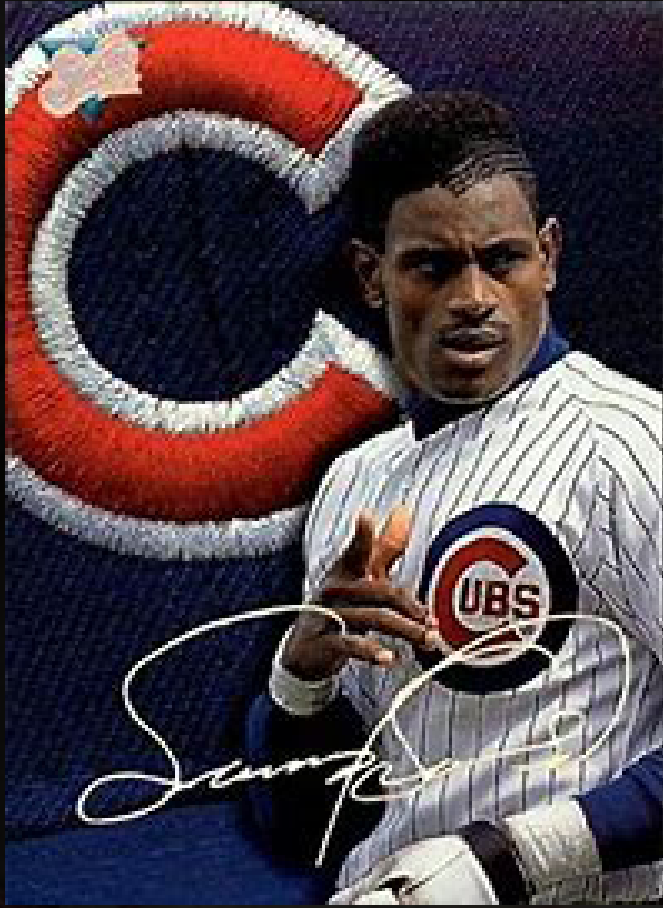
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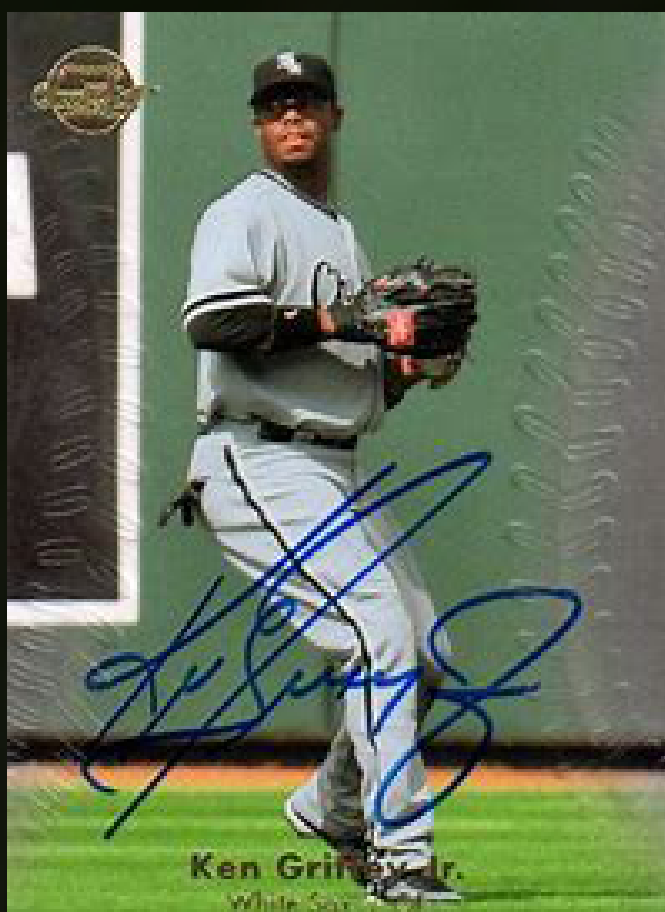


## *Sammy Sosa*

Sammy Sosa is essentially the Windy City's estranged child. Much like Albert Belle, Sosa's legacy is tainted with allegations of failed drug tests, performance-enhancing drug use, and corked bat issues. Plus, he struck out, lots. Still, he regularly climbs in percentage points on Hall of Fame ballot voting. His involvement in the infamous 1998 race to break Roger Maris' single-season home run record with fellow disgraced player Mark Macguire, though marred by controversy and theories, permanently cements his place in baseball history. Sosa began his tenure in Chicago by hitting 28 homers for the White Sox before lugging his talents to the north side and hitting 545 more in blue and white. However, his relationship with both Northside fans and team management can at best be described as strained. His very last appearance at Wrigley saw Sosa leave the stadium before the game was even over, a move many fans will never forget



# #5



## *Ken Griffey Jr*

Ken Griffey Jr. is one of the most talented baseball players ever. Even if he hit well below the Mendoza line, “The Kid” could have probably made a major league roster based on his defensive skills and fielding ability alone. Included with that spectacular play in Center Field, Griffey Jr. possessed one of the most graceful, fluid swings in baseball history. Efficient and smooth, his swing produced 630 career home runs and 5271 total bases. Baseball season in the 1990’s was always chock full of Ken Griffey Jr. For so many Millennials, summers came complete with endless highlight reels night after night of his gravity-defying putouts and wicked powerful home runs. Swingman is very appropriate retroactive branding, indeed.



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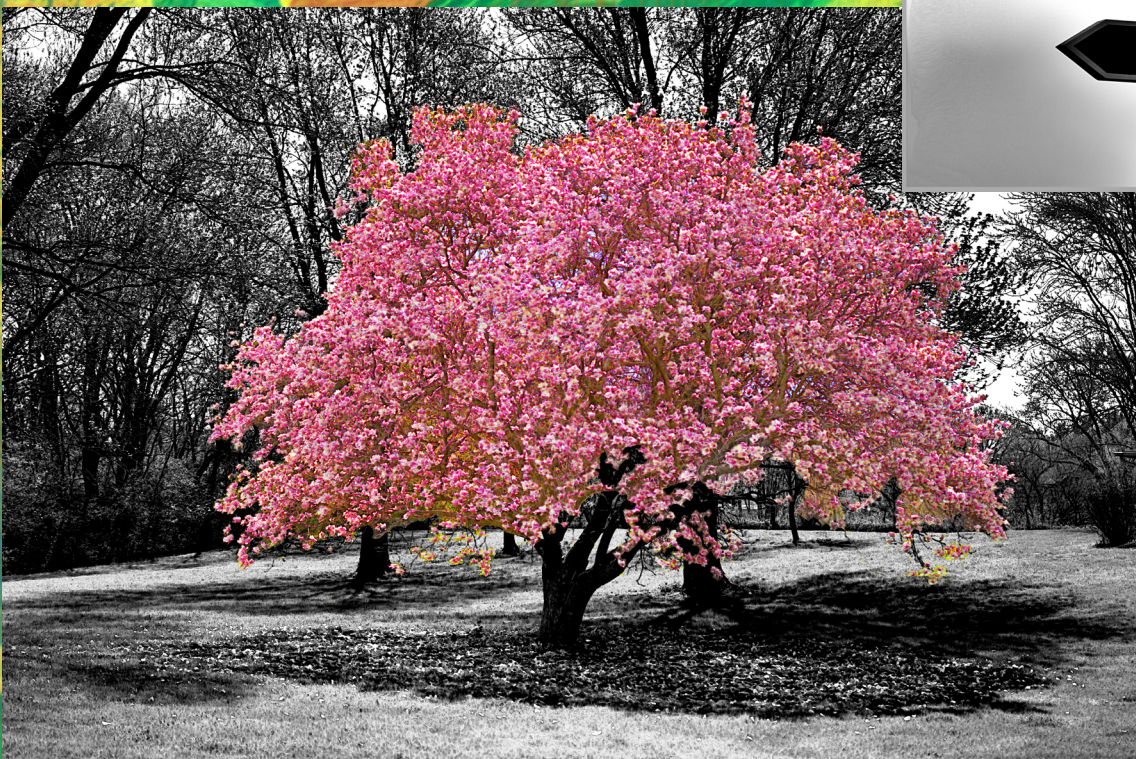
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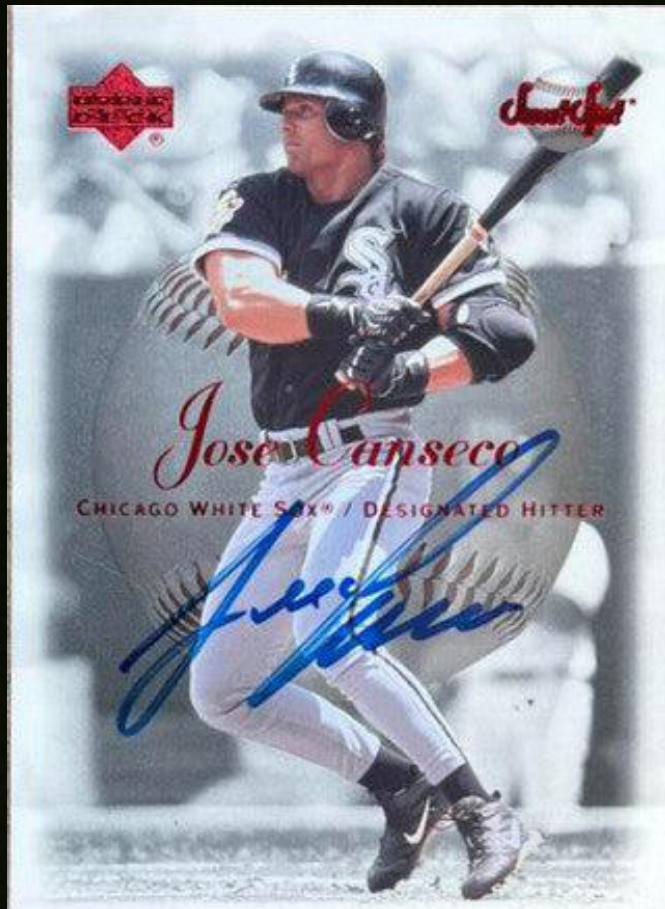


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# #4

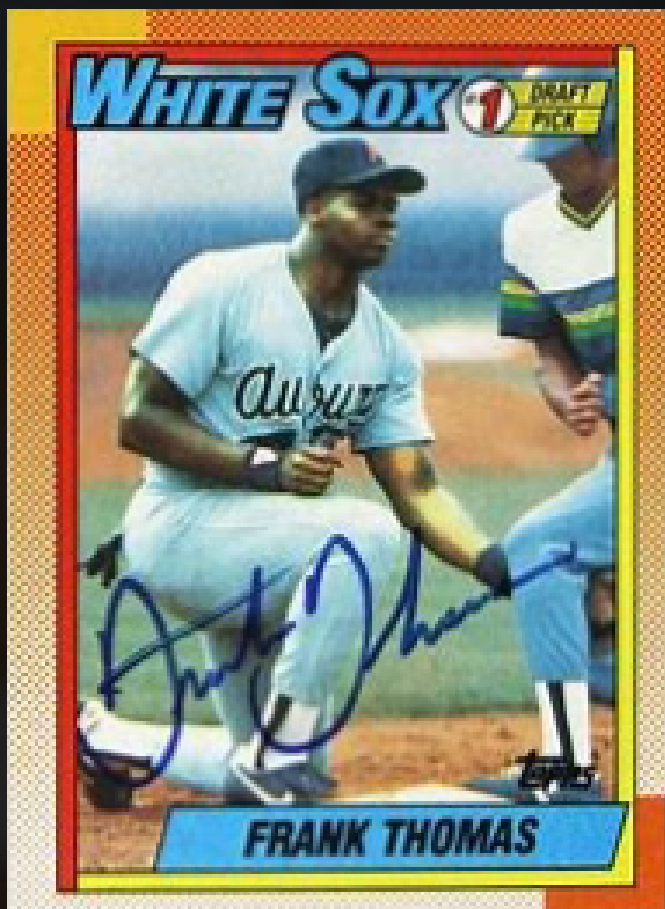


## Jose Canseco

Sadly, corked bats, steroid allegations, and enough strikeouts to fill old Comiskey seem to be a running theme with some of the players on this list. The latter two can certainly be said about Jose Canseco. Truly, one cannot tell the history of modern baseball without at least mentioning Canseco's impact on the sport, for good and bad. On the field, he played like a monster. Off the field, he lived like a rock star. After leaving Major League ball he kicked the hive with an explosive autobiographical book, participated in MMA fights, and even shot himself. Before that however, the 'Juiced' author posted the first 40/40 season in baseball history and amassed 462 home runs with 1407 RBIs over a 17-year big league career. In his prime, he hit some of the longest moonshots of the 80s. One particular slam from the brunette Bash Brother during the 1989 ALCS landed on the upper deck of the Toronto Skydome, traveling an estimated 443 feet. Canseco has also played 30 seasons of professional baseball in some capacity or another, a feat that is generally unknown by most fans.



#3



# Frank Thomas

Frank Thomas is the greatest baseball player to ever don a uniform in the city of Chicago. He combined remarkable power with immaculate contact and mixed both with unparalleled patience at the plate. Thomas drew 100 walks or more in a single season an incredible 10 times. In addition, he led the league in on-base percentage 4 times ending his illustrious career with a .419 OBP. But equally impressive was his immense power. When Thomas was able to get full extension of his long, oak tree-like arms and get the head of his bat around, he hit home runs approaching 500 feet in length. Frank Thomas lit up the Comiskey Park scoreboard like no one else has before or since.



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# #2



## *Adam Dunn*

The difference between first and second place on this list can be debated for a considerable amount of time. Both players have some of the most powerful bats in MLB history. Adam Dunn is one of them, a player who hit a baseball so hard that the person who made the ball on the assembly line would feel it. Dunn had one of the most interesting baseball careers ever, posting a multitude of statistical anomalies and holding several odd, off-the-beaten-path records. Like many on this list, opposing pitchers knew they had a strong chance of striking Dunn out. However, they also knew that if they hung a curveball or missed by just an inch with a fastball, when Dunn got ahold of their pitch the score of the game would change. Even though ‘The Big Donkey’, as he was affectionately called by Reds fans, struck out a mind-boggling 2,379 in 8328 plate appearances, Dunn has a significantly higher walk percentage than many of his contemporaries on this list. Only the players ranked at #3 & #1 have a higher career walk percentage. We will leave you with a small nugget of trivia to ponder. On August 10, 2004, Dunn became the first and only known MLB player to hit a baseball from one state into another, smashing a 535-foot bomb from Ohio across state lines into Kentucky.

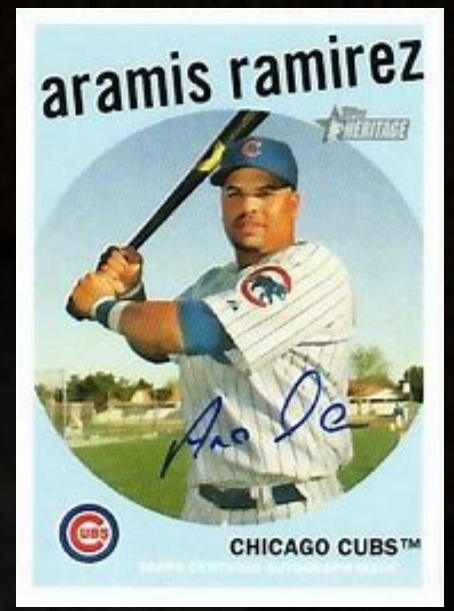




*Derrek Lee*

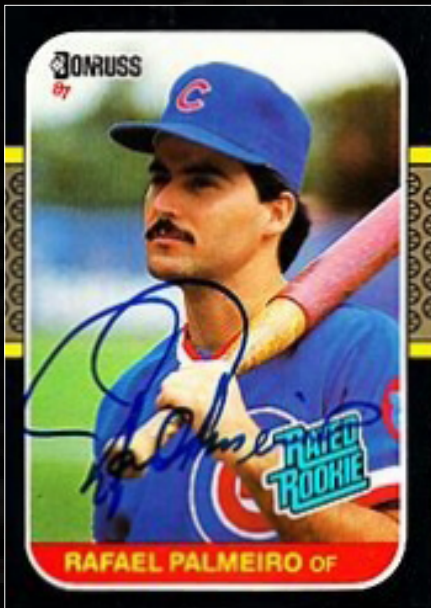


*Hack Wilson*

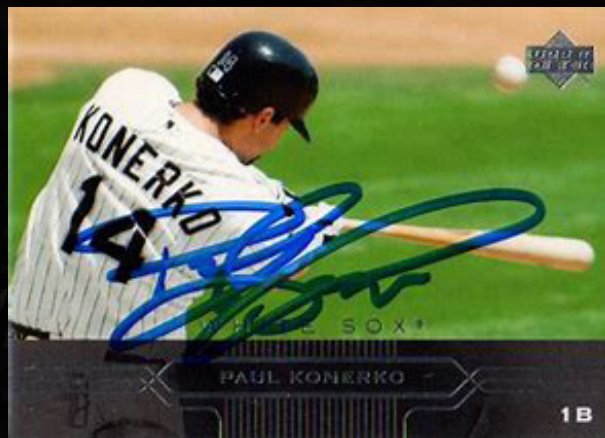


*Aramis Ramirez*

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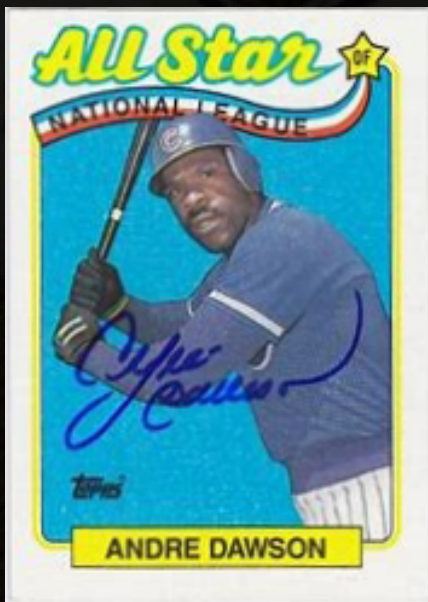
*Rafael Palmeiro*



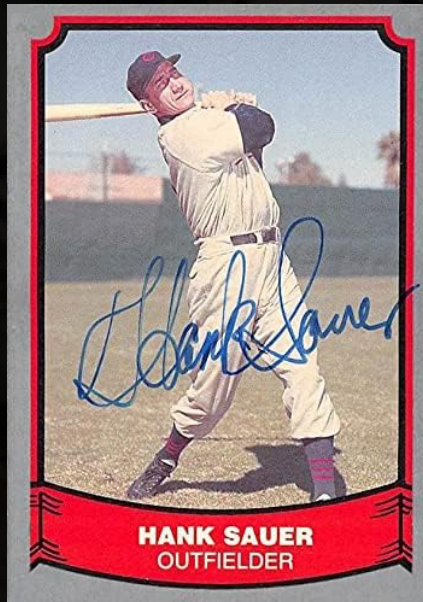
*Paul Konerko*



*Billy Williams*



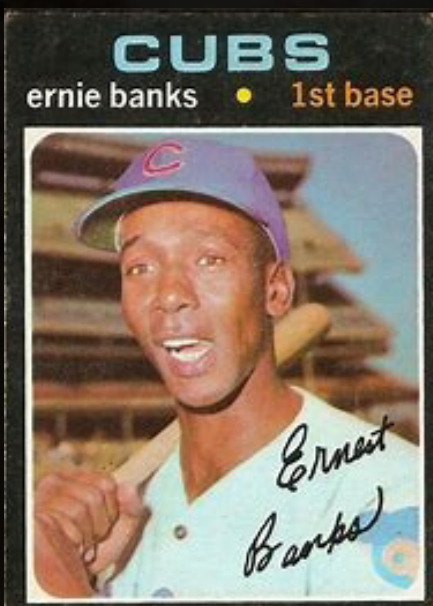
*Andre Dawson*



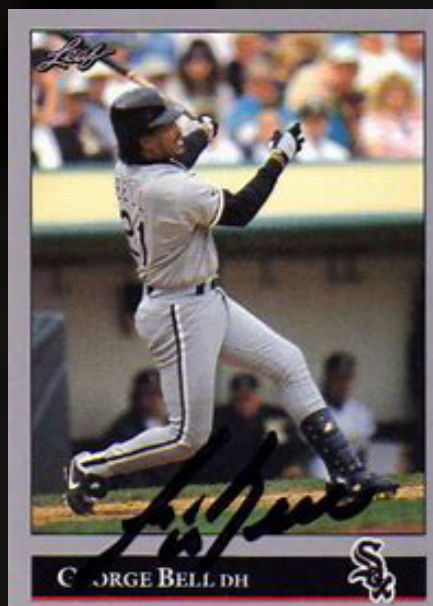
*Hank Sauer*



*Jermaine Dye*



*Ernie Banks*



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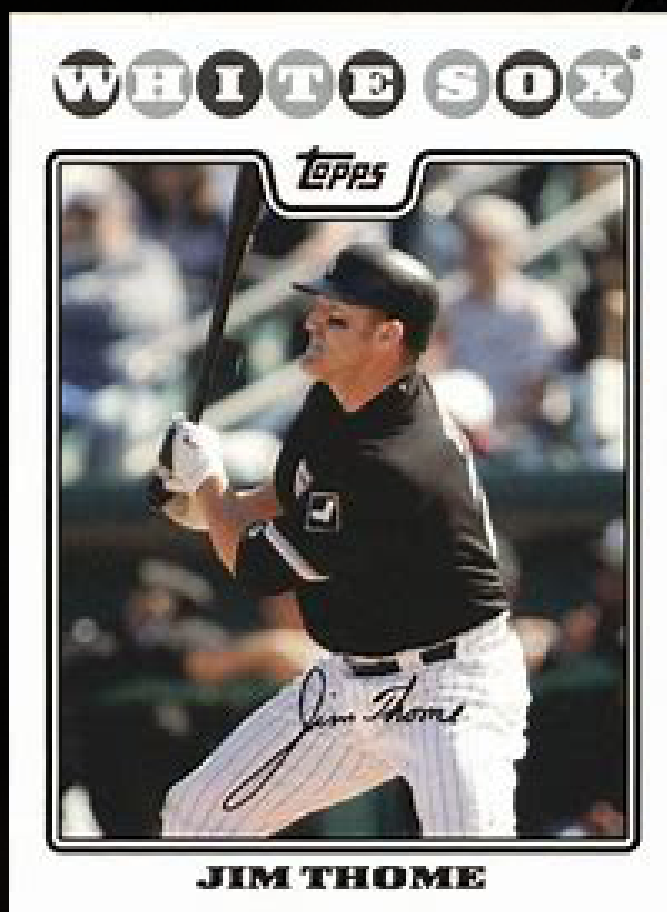


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# #1



## *Jim Thome*

Jim Thome had so much power to spare, that when he brought his services to the Windy City he likely needed a shipping container to carry it all with him. Thome's name is included with esteemed peers such as Josh Gibson, Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Reggie Jackson, and Mark McGwire for the title of most powerful hitter of all time. His best Superman impression is perhaps Thome's gargantuan performance of July 3rd, 1999. That afternoon, he launched a ball out of Jacobs Field that burned like smoldering white phosphorus, landing a stout 511 feet from home plate. His Herculean efforts followed him to the south side, where he smashed some of the longest home runs ever hit at Sox Park, or whatever the stadium is named this week. Thome has a plaque dedicated in his honor at Sox Park commemorating the spot where his monster shot on June 4th, 2008 hit the fan deck, measuring an astonishing 464 feet. During another fine moment in Thome's career, he did it once again, only this time he did it when it truly counted. On September 30th, 2008 he crushed a rocket shot onto the fan deck that won the 2008 American League Central tie-breaker game 1-0. Sox fans adore him for this near physics-defying feat, among many other great memories of Jim Thome in a White Sox jersey.



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