

Thurman Munson's Decade of Unmatched Excellence

The Case for His Induction into Baseball's Hall of Fame



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"He was the best there was at what he did."

Howard Cosell - August 6, 1979



Thurman Munson on August 7, 1969 - the day before his major league debut for the Yankees.

Preface

A New Look at History

The career of Thurman Munson is widely acknowledged to have been a great one. It is also commonly accepted that his life was cut too short by tragedy for him to have been realistically considered as a candidate for the Baseball Hall of Fame. But to fully honor the memory of the man and give his contributions to baseball the comprehensive review they deserve, it is critical that we take a closer look at exactly what he ***did*** accomplish in his career.

When considered with a fresh perspective, a review of some of his key ***generally unknown but truly significant*** feats suggests that Thurman Munson did enough to be a Hall of Famer. In fact, such a review reveals clearly that he did more than enough to be considered among the all-time great players of the game. It is even arguable that Thurman Munson's body of work in the 1970s, along with some of his forgotten but unique historical contributions, is among the most impressive decades of comprehensive play ever delivered by a Catcher in the history of baseball.

At the very least, a review of the data suggests that key contributions that Thurman Munson made to the game are not currently represented in Cooperstown by any Catcher. To put things succinctly, the difficulty and importance of the position of Catcher on the field requires that the Hall of Fame honor such a player who could "don the tools of ignorance," endure the brutality of the most ferocious moments of the game, suffer the ever increasing wear and tear of the position on his joints, and then ***not only*** sustain great regular season performance as the months turned colder, but ***consistently rise to the occasion dramatically and unambiguously*** into the deepest part of the postseason in his team's most critical games when league championships and world titles were on the line.

Thurman Munson is the only man whose contributions to the game at the Catcher position ***can so decisively*** fill that void both offensively and defensively. In advancing his Hall of Fame case we not only honor the memory of a truly great man, but we acknowledge tradition within the great game of baseball and the unique difficulties of perhaps its most important position more than 150 games into the season. Respect, both for the accomplishments of the man and the history of the game, demands nothing less. In short, as Howard Cosell said, "he was the best there was at what he did," and now is the time to articulate exactly why that is a very reasonable statement.

1st Inning: Foundational Points of Distinction

To begin our review, let's consider five cornerstone summary points on Thurman Munson's career:

- 1) Munson's 10 Year Wins Above Replacement (WAR) of 45.6, beginning with his official rookie season in 1970, **has been outdone only by 6 Catchers in history!** He is one of exactly 10 Catchers in baseball history to catch 1000+ games with 40+ WAR in a period of 10 consecutive years. Every man above him on the list of 10 players is in the Hall of Fame, and every other Catcher in history, in their own best 10 years, **was not as efficient at contributing WAR as Thurman Munson!**
- 2) Munson's .357 postseason average is **94 points above the HOF Catcher average** – with hits in 27 of 30 games!
- 3) Munson is **the only Catcher in history** to throw out at least 7 base runners Caught Stealing (CS) in 3 different postseasons, and the only Catcher to throw out at least 3 base runners CS in 6 different postseason series!
- 4) With 22 RBIs & 24 Defensive CS in 30 postseason games, Munson's **combination** of RBIs per game and defensive CS per game is more than 50% higher than any Hall of Fame Catcher – **no one else even comes close!**
- 5) It is important to note, in the context of the above 3 postseason individual milestones, that every time Thurman stepped onto the field in the postseason his team was facing a Manager who was eventually inducted into the Hall of Fame. We will show in great detail how unusual it is historically, even for Hall of Fame Catchers, to help lead their teams to victory against Hall of Fame Managers in the postseason. **Munson faced the best and won!**

These simple points indicate that Thurman Munson delivered not only a phenomenal and historically great regular season decade of excellence, but more importantly, he rose to the occasion in his team's most critical games against some of the best minds in baseball history. Munson was generally known as a great leader amongst his teammates and in the broader baseball world at the time of his death, and yet **some of his truly historical contributions to the game have very nearly been lost to history.** This research effort and summary is designed to put Munson's career into context and make a robust argument for why he deserves to be considered one of baseball's all-time greats and welcomed into the Hall of Fame.

2nd Inning: A Benchmark for Excellence Shared by Only Two Men

In the middle of Ivan Rodriguez' Hall of Fame career is a *seemingly* routine sequence of statistics that runs between 1996 and 1999. His hit totals in those years show at least 180 hits for each season, which, at first doesn't seem so impressive, but which, upon further inspection opens the door to one of the most interesting, and under-appreciated stories within the rich history of baseball. In fact, there are only two other Hall of Fame Catchers who have delivered seasons which included 180 hits, with Yogi Berra being the first to accomplish the feat in 1950 and Mike Piazza doing so 3 times in the late 1990s.

It may surprise fans of baseball to know that there are only 21 examples in baseball history of seasons in which a Catcher has delivered 180 hits while catching at least 120 games. And when Ivan Rodriguez accomplished the feat 4 consecutive years in a row his hit totals were overshadowed by his MVP award in 1999 and no one took notice of the unusual but impressive nature of his achievement. And no one even wondered if it had ever been done before.

In fact, the only other man to deliver 4 straight seasons with at least 180 hits while catching 120 games was from an entirely different generation; a time well before the hint of performance enhancing cocktails began casting aspersions on the new higher than ever offensive output of the 1990s. The man to do this first, and to date the only other Catcher in history to do so, was none other than Thurman Munson, who did it, just like Rodriguez, in his 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th full seasons.

Further still, if we look even deeper into the unique achievements of Rodriguez and Munson in these seasons and take into account their defensive Caught Stealing (CS) success, we find that there are exactly 12 examples in baseball history in which a Catcher delivered 180 hits and caught 120 games while being above their league average in CS percentage for the season.

Considering that there have been 1,780 examples since 1871 of players at **any** position delivering at least 180 hits in a season, these 12 examples by Catchers deserve further appreciation and examination. To add further dimension to the unusual nature of this feat, let's consider that in baseball history there have been exactly 15 examples of players of **any** position getting at least 240 hits in a season. The fact that there are only 12 examples of a Catcher playing 120 games at the position while delivering 180 hits and being above league average in Caught Stealing is perhaps the greatest possible way to demonstrate the unique physical demands on those men taking their place on the field directly behind the plate!

Think about it this way: to endure the additional challenges of the Catcher position for 120 games and hit for a high enough average to deliver at least 180 hits, while at the same time be able to excel on the defensive side of the ball is one of the most difficult trifectas in the game! To balance durability with endurance and hit with consistent excellence is a rare talent.

Seasons in Which A Catcher Has Caught 120 Games and Delivered 180 Hits While Being Above League Average in Caught Stealing %

	Year	Hits	League Rank in Hits	Games Caught	Caught Stealing %	VS. League CS %
Yogi Berra	1950	192	4th	148	58	9
Ted Simmons	1973	192	4th	153	44	8
Thurman Munson	1975	190	3rd	130	50	12
Thurman Munson	1976	186	4th	121	35	1
Thurman Munson	1977	183	11th	136	40	1
Thurman Munson	1978	183	4th	125	45	7
Ivan Rodriguez	1996	192	7th	146	51	21
Ivan Rodriguez	1997	187	5th	143	57	24
Ivan Rodriguez	1998	186	9th	139	56	25
Ivan Rodriguez	1999	199	5th	141	55	22
Jason Kendall	2004	183	10th	146	36	8
Joe Mauer	2006	181	11th	120	38	8

Analytical Note 1: Yogi Berra won a World Series Title in 1950 and Thurman Munson won in 1977 and 1978.

Analytical Note 2: Thurman Munson won the MVP Award in 1976 and Ivan Rodriguez won in 1999.

Analytical Note 3: Munson's 190 hits and 3rd place finish in 1975 is the closest a Catcher has come to leading his league in hits: 5 behind the leader (Brett / 195).

So together, Thurman Munson and Ivan Rodriguez share 8 of those 12 seasons in the history of baseball in which a Catcher has caught at least 120 games and delivered 180 hits while being above their league average in the defensive CS metric. And, when combining *both regular season and postseason productivity* Ivan Rodriguez put up a total of **772 hits** between 1996 and 1999, and throughout the history of the game, Thurman Munson is the only Catcher to surpass this 4 year total with the **788 total hits** that he delivered between 1975 and 1978. Delivering this level of astounding offensive output at the Catcher position while at the same time being above league average in CS% every year, is truly a special and noteworthy contribution to the game *joining **only these two men** in baseball history.*

The fact that Thurman shares these feats with a first ballot Hall of Famer renews the questions of how high Thurman would have been on the list of all-time great catchers had his career not come to a tragic end, but it is also gives us pause to take a *renewed look at what he did accomplish* in his 10 years in baseball.



Batting practice before his first major league game on August 8, 1969 during which he caught a complete game 9 inning shutout victory by Al Downing and collected his first hit off Hall of Famer Catfish Hunter – his future friend and teammate.

3rd Inning: A Modern Statistical Look at Munson's Regular Season Career – Wins Above Replacement

From a purely statistical perspective, according to the most widely accepted regular season comprehensive modern baseball statistic, Munson produced exactly 45.6 Wins Above Replacement (WAR) in the ten seasons beginning with his Rookie campaign in 1970. It may be surprising, but even though Munson lost two months of his final season due to his death, there are still only 6 Catchers in the history of baseball to produce that number over even their **best** 10 consecutive regular season campaigns. Their names are Gary Carter, Johnny Bench, Mike Piazza, Ivan Rodriguez, Mickey Cochrane, and Yogi Berra. This period of 10 consecutive regular seasons that Munson delivered, in terms of overall WAR productivity, has been **outdone only by 6 of the best Hall of Fame Catchers in the history of baseball in their own best 10 year period!**

It is worth pointing out that Munson's WAR 7 statistic, measuring a player's best 7 years, also ranks 7th in the history of the game at his position. But, it is more critical to point out that even **with** the shortened duration of his career due to his death, he still manages to rank 14th all-time in Career WAR at the Catcher position and even ranks 12th in the widely accepted JAWS metric which balances both peak years and longevity at the position.

Best CONSECUTIVE 10 Years of WAR Productivity at the Catcher Position in Baseball History (Minimum 1,000 Games Caught)

	All Time WAR 10 Rank	Best Consecutive 10 Years WAR	10 Year Games Caught	Peak 10 Year Period	Career WAR	Career WAR Rank	Career WAR 7	Career WAR 7 Rank	Career JAWS	Career JAWS Rank
Gary Carter HOF	1	60.8	1,390	1977 - 86	69.9	2	48.2	1	59.1	2
Johnny Bench HOF	2	59.9	1,365	1968 - 77	75.0	1	47.1	2	61.0	1
Mike Piazza HOF	3	53.9	1,300	1993 - 02	59.4	6	43.1	3	51.2	5
Ivan Rodriguez HOF	4	50.7	1,251	1995 - 04	68.4	3	39.7	4	54.0	3
Yogi Berra HOF	5	47.1	1,316	1950 - 59	59.5	5	37.0	7	48.2	6
Mickey Cochrane HOF	6	47.0	1,249	1926 - 35	52.1	9	36.9	9	44.5	8
<u>Thurman Munson</u>	7	45.6	1,253	1970 - 79	45.9	14	37.0	7	41.5	12
Ted Simmons	8	44.7	1,354	1971 - 80	50.1	10	34.6	11	42.4	10
Bill Dickey HOF	9	42.4	1,179	1930 - 39	55.8	7	34.2	12	45.0	7
Carlton Fisk HOF	10	41.7	1,067	1972 - 81	68.3	4	37.5	6	52.9	4

Analytical Note 1: There are 6 Catchers in the history of baseball who produced as much WAR as Munson in their own best 10 year period.

Analytical Note 2: Munson died with two months to go in the 1979 season on August 2.

Analytical Note 3: Joe Mauer accumulated 44.3 WAR between 2004 - 2013, primarily as a Catcher, but only caught 925 games and hasn't caught a game since.

Analytical Note 4: Joe Torre accumulated 41.9 WAR between 1961 - 1970, primarily as a Catcher, but only caught 903 games and never caught a game again.

Appendix One on page 19 includes an extended ranking of WAR 10 productivity by Catchers.

4th Inning: Munson's Postseason Batting Performance Compared with Hall of Fame Catchers

Where Munson stands the tallest, and where his contribution to the game of baseball is most unique, is his postseason productivity in the 3 postseasons and 6 postseason series that he played in. A close look at his productivity in these 30 games provide conclusive data that Thurman Munson definitively and unambiguously holds the best postseason record of any Catcher in the history of the game. As a **starting point**, let's note that only **one** Hall of Fame Catcher has a postseason batting average above .300 (Roger Bresnahan in the 1905 World Series, his only postseason appearance). Let's also point out that **only three** Hall of Fame Catchers have a higher postseason average than their regular season average, those being Ray Schalk, Gary Carter, and, again Bresnahan. It is worth noting, however, that only Gary Carter, within this group, played as many postseason games as Munson with exactly the same number at 30.

Further still, while the average Hall of Fame Catcher delivered a .288 regular season batting average, their collective postseason average rests a full 25 points below at .263. With Thurman Munson's own .357 postseason average being a full 94 points above that of the average Hall of Fame Catcher, **this puts his performance in his team's most critical and pressure-packed games in a very favorable light. As a final point, not even one Hall of Fame Catcher has a postseason average within 40 points of Munson and only 3 are within 75 points!**

Thurman Munson's POSTSEASON Batting Average and Hits Per Game Compared with Hall of Fame Catchers

	Career <i>REGULAR</i> Season AVG	Career <i>POSTSEASON</i> AVG	Postseason AVG vs. Regular Season AVG	Postseason Games	Postseason Hits	Postseason Hits Per Game
<u>Thurman Munson</u>	.292	<u>.357</u>	<u>+ 65 points</u>	30	46	<u>1.53</u>
Roger Bresnahan	.279	.313	+ 34	5	5	1.00
Ray Schalk	.253	.286	+ 33	14	12	0.86
Gary Carter	.262	.280	+ 18	30	33	1.10
Johnny Bench	.267	.266	- 1	45	45	1.00
Carlton Fisk	.269	.259	- 10	14	14	1.00
Yogi Berra	.285	.274	- 11	<u>75</u>	<u>71</u>	0.95
Buck Ewing	.303	.290	- 13	19	18	0.95
Roy Campanella	.276	.237	- 39	32	27	0.84
Ivan Rodriguez	.296	.255	- 41	40	39	0.98
Gabby Hartnett	.297	.241	- 56	16	13	0.81
Bill Dickey	.313	.255	- 58	38	37	0.97
Mike Piazza	.308	.242	- 66	32	29	0.91
Ernie Lombardi	.306	.235	- 71	6	4	0.67
Mickey Cochrane	.320	.245	- 75	31	27	0.87
<u>Average HOF Catcher</u>	<u>.288</u>	<u>.263</u>	<u>- 25 points</u>			<u>0.92</u>

Analytical Point 1: Hall of Fame Catchers Josh Gibson, Biz Mackey, and Louis Santop played in the Negro Leagues.

Analytical Point 2: HOF Catcher Rick Ferrell did not play in the postseason, but his Regular Season AVG of .281 is included in the Hall of Famer AVG.

But importantly, it is not just his postseason batting average where he stands tall compared with the all-time greats at his position. He also delivered more hits per postseason game (1.53), and as we'll find out later in our review, his RBIs per postseason game (0.73) is higher than every Hall of Fame Catcher and his postseason OPS (.874) is higher than all but one!

But, the most surprising and impressive element of his offensive postseason performance is the fact that he hit safely in 27 of the 30 postseason games he played in: **something which no other player of ANY position has done!**

Munson Stands Even Taller - Beyond Just Catchers in the Postseason

To widen the consideration set even further, it is important to note that among the 500 players of any position in the history of baseball with the most postseason At Bats (65+) there are exactly 7 players with a higher postseason batting average than Thurman Munson. Their names are Hank Aaron, Carl Yastrzemski, Paul Molitor, Lou Gehrig, Lou Brock, John Montgomery Ward, and Frank Home Run Baker. All of these men, of course, are Hall of Famers and none of them were Catchers. Said the other way... of the 500 players in history with the most postseason At Bats, 492 of them have a lower batting average than Thurman Munson, and the 7 who are higher are, definitively, among the all-time greats of the game.

And further still... if you limit the list of 500 players to only the 162 with at least as many postseason At Bats as Thurman (with 129), **not even one player amongst them has a higher batting average! That is borderline astonishing!**

Highest Postseason Batting Average Among the 500 Players in Baseball History with the Most Postseason At Bats

	Postseason Average	Postseason At Bats	Games	Hits	Hits Per Game	RBI	RBIs Per Game
John Montgomery Ward HOF	.400	65	17	26	1.53	13	0.77
Lou Brock HOF	.391	87	21	34	1.62	13	0.62
Carl Yastrzemski HOF	.369	65	17	24	1.41	11	0.65
Paul Molitor HOF	.368	117	29	43	1.48	22	0.76
Frank Home Run Baker HOF	.363	91	25	33	1.32	18	0.72
Hank Aaron HOF	.362	69	17	25	1.47	16	0.94
Lou Gehrig HOF	.361	119	34	43	1.27	35	1.03
<u>Thurman Munson</u>	.357	<u>129</u>	30	<u>46</u>	1.53	22	0.73

Analytical Note 1: No player in postseason history with at least 129 At Bats has a higher average than Thurman Munson.

Analytical Note 2: Among the 500 players with the most postseason at bats only 7 have a higher average than Thurman Munson.

Analytical Note 3: Every player on this list except Thurman Munson is in the Hall of Fame and Thurman is the only Catcher on the list.

Measuring raw “hits productivity,” to find a player of any position with a higher hits per postseason game average than Thurman at 1.53, you have to go all the way down to Lou Brock who had 34 hits in 21 postseason games and 87 At Bats (1.62 Hits Per Game). Another player somewhat close to Thurman’s performance in this metric is Paul Molitor who delivered 1.48 hits per postseason game with 43 hits in 29 games and 117 At Bats.

Think about it this way... among the top 300 players in baseball history with the most postseason At Bats, not even one of those players has a higher hits per postseason game than Thurman Munson. Lou Brock, at #305 on the At Bats list, is the first player with a higher hits per postseason game average. Thurman certainly kept the bases moving!

For Thurman Munson, as a Catcher, to be this high on the list of postseason batting average and hits per game is, at least, **VERY historically unique and unduplicated!**

5th Inning: Munson's Defensive Performance in the Postseason – A Few Records That Went Unnoticed

On the defensive side of the ball he may be even more impressive in the postseason. He is the only Catcher in the history of baseball to throw out at least 7 base runners CS in 3 different postseasons and the only Catcher to throw out at least 3 base runners CS in 6 different postseason series. And, in fact, he is second on the all-time list of postseason defensive CS with 24 in the 30 games he played in.

Thurman Munson's Postseason Defensive Caught Stealing Performance

Year	Playoff Round	Opponent	Games	Defensive CS	Attempted	
					Stolen	CS %
1976	AL Championship Series	Royals	5	5	10	50.0%
1976	World Series	Reds	4	4	11	36.4%
1977	AL Championship Series	Royals	5	4	9	44.4%
1977	World Series	Dodgers	6	4	6	66.7%
1978	AL Championship Series	Royals	4	3	9	33.3%
1978	World Series	Dodgers	6	4	9	44.4%
				<u>24</u>	54	44.4%

Analytical Point 1: Thurman Munson is the only Catcher in history to throw out at least 3 base runners CS in 6 different postseason series.

Analytical Point 2: Thurman Munson is the only Catcher to throw out at least 7 base runners CS in 3 different postseasons.

Analytical Point 3: With 24 Postseason CS Munson broke a 55 year old record held by Wally Schang, and then held the record himself for 26 years!

It is interesting, and probably not surprising, to note that the all-time leader in defensive CS amongst Catchers is Jorge Posada who played in a truly enormous 124 postseason games. In short, the all-time leader Posada (with 33) had only 9 more CS than second place Munson and he played in 94 more games! Munson established his new record of 24 career CS in the postseason in 1978 and held the record himself for 26 years all the way until 2004 when Jorge Posada, in his 82nd postseason game, tied Thurman at 24 in the Yankees famous ALCS meltdown against the Red Sox. For additional historical perspective on this accomplishment, the previous record holder by a Catcher was Wally Schang whose record of 21 postseason CS was established in 1923 and stood for a full 55 years until Thurman broke the record! In fact, on a CS per postseason game basis Thurman Munson's 0.80 is higher than every Hall of Fame Catcher except Ray Schalk who had 12 defensive CS in the 14 postseason games he played in the 1917 and 1919 World Series (0.86 per game).

Most Postseason Base Runners Caught Stealing by Catchers All-Time

	Postseason Games	Attempted Steals	Caught Stealing	CS %	CS Per Game	Attempted Steals Per Game
Jorge Posada	124	92	33	35.9%	0.27	0.74
<u>Thurman Munson</u>	30	54	<u>24</u>	44.4%	0.80	1.80
Wally Schang	32	42	21	50.0%	0.66	1.31
Johnny Kling	19	39	19	48.7%	1.00	2.05
Javy Lopez	60	46	15	32.6%	0.25	0.77
Yogi Berra HOF	73	37	14	37.8%	0.19	0.51
Chief Meyers	18	25	14	56.0%	0.78	1.39
Boss Schmidt	13	49	14	28.6%	1.08	3.77
Johnny Bench HOF	45	19	13	68.4%	0.29	0.42
Ray Schalk HOF	14	23	12	52.2%	0.86	1.64

Analytical Point 1: Jorge Posada established a new record for postseason CS in 2004, breaking Munson's 26yr old record.

Analytical Point 2: Thurman Munson broke Wally Schang's 55yr old record in the 1978 World Series when he reached 24.

Analytical Point 3: There are 4 other Catchers tied with 12 postseason CS including Mike Scioscia, and Darrell Porter.

Further still, if you consider the 40 teams that made the playoffs in the 1970s, it is clear that Munson faced teams which leveraged base-stealing as a core component of their strategy. In fact, of the 40 teams that made the playoffs during the 1970s, Munson faced the top 3, and 4 of the top 6, in base-stealing productivity, including the famous 1976 Royals who had an unsurpassed 7 players with at least 20 steals during the season. These 76, 77, and 78 Royals teams were the early iterations of “Whitey-ball” and Thurman was ready... beating them each year just to make it to the World Series!

The Teams That Thurman Munson Faced in the Playoffs:

Rank for Regular Season (RS) Stolen Bases (SB) Among the 40 Playoff Teams of the 1970s

RS SB Rank Among The 40 Playoff Teams in the 1970s	Year	Opponent	Playoff Round	RS Attempted Steals	RS Stolen Bases	Attempted Steals Per RS Game
# 1	1976	Royals	AL Championship Series	324	218	2.00
# 2	1978	Royals	AL Championship Series	300	216	1.85
# 3	1976	Reds	World Series	267	210	1.65
# 6	1977	Royals	AL Championship Series	257	170	1.59
# 16	1978	Dodgers	World Series	189	137	1.17
# 21	1977	Dodgers	World Series	176	114	1.09
AVG Among Teams Munson Faced				252	178	1.56
AVG Among 40 Playoff Teams in 1970s				171	117	1.06

Analytical Point 1: Among the 40 playoff teams in the 1970s, Thurman Munson faced the top 3 teams using Stolen Bases as a key part of their strategy.

Analytical Point 2: This is to illustrate that Munson needed to elevate his game to face a new level of attempted steals to WIN in the playoffs!

It is also worth noting that Munson's postseason Caught Stealing percentage of 44.4% (24 of 54) matches exactly his regular season CS% (427 of 960) even though teams in the postseason attempted to steal against him at more than twice the rate that they attempted steals against him in the regular season (1.8 attempts per postseason game vs. 0.75 attempts per regular season game). As much as Whitey Herzog, Sparky Anderson, and Tommy Lasorda tried to get the Yankees pitchers off balance by stealing with great frequency, **Munson rose to the occasion and delivered!**

The fact that he was able to do this while simultaneously delivering his .357 postseason batting average is an important element to fully appreciate the contribution that Munson made at the position in these critical games. It is worth noting that every opposing manager that he faced in the postseason had already won or would eventually win at least one World Series title, with a combined 6 titles amongst them. There is no player on the field who is more directly and immediately impacted by the decisions of the opposing managers as the Catcher, and **Thurman faced some of the best baseball minds of all time - Hall of Fame managers all - in each and every postseason game he played!**

As a side note, but interesting historical point, in the 1975 season with his 190 hits Thurman Munson came within 5 of George Brett's 195 total for the year when he led the league in hits. Then, one year later, in the very first game of the 1976 American League Championship Series, George Brett became Thurman's first ever CS victim in the postseason when, immediately after getting his postseason hit, Thurman threw him out attempting to steal 2nd base in the bottom of the 4th inning. When Munson came within 5 hits of Brett in 1975 it still stands as the closest a Catcher has ever come to leading his league in hits. Next on the list for catchers coming closest to leading the league in hits during a season is when Ted Simmons got 180 hits in 1972 and was 18 hits short of Pete Rose. Even when Mike Piazza got 201 hits in 1997, the all-time record for hits by a Catcher, he was a full 19 hits behind league leader Tony Gwynn.

Certainly, for Thurman to come within 5 hits of the league leader represents a truly unique feat for a Catcher. In any event... **he has held the record since 1975!**

6th Inning: Comparing the Postseason Productivity of Catchers on Offense AND Defense – “Quality Points”

And this brings us back to Rodriguez. As great as he was during the regular season for 20 years on the offensive side of the ball with his .296 average, his postseason resume (.255) bears out the same pattern as great catchers before Thurman and after. Even last year's inductee at the Catcher position, Mike Piazza, demonstrates a strikingly similar result... batting .308 in his regular season career but only .242 in the postseason. As referenced earlier, every Hall of Fame Catcher except Gary Carter, Ray Schalk, and Roger Bresnahan had a lower postseason average than their regular season average. Even other more recent great Catchers with significant postseason experience such as Buster Posey, Jorge Posada, Yadier Molina, and Javy Lopez demonstrate the same pattern. It is interesting to note that compared with the average Hall of Fame Catcher's .263 postseason batting average, Thurman Munson never batted below .278 in any of the 6 postseason series in which he played and batted at least .320 in 4 of his 6 postseason series. To attempt to put this into perspective, Jorge Posada played in more postseason series than any other Catcher in history (28) and he batted above .278 exactly 6 times as well!

As a simple summary for both offensive and defensive Catching productivity in the postseason, if you combine both RBIs per postseason game and defensive Caught Stealing per postseason game by Catchers into one statistic, Thurman Munson delivered **1.53 “Quality Points”** per postseason game in which he played over his career (22 RBIs + 24 CS in 30 games). This is FAR higher than ANY career figure posted by either current OR prospective Hall of Fame Catchers in the postseason.

The closest Hall of Fame Catchers in this metric are Gary Carter and Ray Schalk at 1.0 / game each, with Bill Dickey (0.92) and Ivan Rodriguez (0.85) next on the list for overall comprehensive productivity per postseason game. Other interesting benchmarks within the Hall of Fame Catcher group are Piazza (0.75), Bench (0.73), Campanella (0.72), and Berra (0.71). Quite simply, Thurman Munson produced in the postseason on both sides of the ball at a level that has not been duplicated by any Hall of Fame Catcher. Other interesting borderline Hall of Fame Catchers are worth noting in the area of comprehensive postseason productivity as well with Ted Simmons at 0.88, Bill Freehan at 1.1, and Wally Schang at 0.94. In short, Munson stands tall vs. both Hall of Famers and other all-time greats.

Thurman Munson's Career POSTSEASON Productivity Compared with Hall of Fame Catchers

	AVG	OPS	Games	RBI	CS	Quality Points (RBI + CS)	RBIs Per Game	CS Per Game	Quality Points Per Game
<u>Thurman Munson</u>	<u>.357</u>	.874	30	22	<u>24</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>0.73</u>	0.80	<u>1.53</u>
Gary Carter	.280	.786	30	21	9	30	0.70	0.30	1.00
Ray Schalk	.286	.673	14	2	12	14	0.14	<u>0.86</u>	1.00
Bill Dickey	.255	.709	38	24	11	35	0.63	0.29	0.92
Ivan Rodriguez	.255	.706	40	25	9	34	0.63	0.23	0.85
Mike Piazza	.242	.759	32	15	9	24	0.47	0.28	0.75
Johnny Bench	.266	.862	45	20	13	33	0.44	0.29	0.73
Roy Campanella	.237	.696	32	12	11	23	0.38	0.34	0.72
Yogi Berra	.274	.811	<u>75</u>	<u>39</u>	14	53	0.52	0.19	0.71
Roger Bresnahan	.313	<u>.938</u>	5	1	2	3	0.20	0.40	0.60
Carlton Fisk	.259	.762	14	6	2	8	0.43	0.14	0.57
Mickey Cochrane	.245	.722	31	7	10	17	0.23	0.32	0.55
Gabby Hartnett	.241	.680	16	3	5	8	0.19	0.31	0.50
Ernie Lombardi	.235	.610	6	2	0	2	0.33	0.00	0.33

Analytical Point 1: Hall of Fame Catchers Josh Gibson, Biz Mackey, and Louis Santop played in the Negro Leagues.

Analytical Point 2: Hall of Fame Catcher Buck Ewing (1888 WS & 1889WS) played in the postseason when the games were considered "exhibitional" in nature.

Analytical Point 3: Hall of Fame Catcher Rick Ferrell did not qualify for postseason play.

Appendix Two on page 20 includes a broader look at Postseason Quality Points productivity by other noteworthy Catchers.

7th Inning: Munson Played EVERY POSTSEASON SERIES Against a Hall of Fame Manager

As referenced earlier, every time Thurman Munson played a postseason game he was doing so against a manager who was later judged to be amongst the best minds in baseball history, with all of them eventually being inducted into the Hall of Fame (Lasorda 1997, Anderson 2000, Herzog 2010). At this point, it is important to point out just how unusual it is, historically, *for even Hall of Fame Catchers* to have helped in leading their teams to victory against Hall of Fame Managers in **POSTSEASON SERIES** throughout the history of baseball. Collectively, Hall of Fame Catchers have a record of 44-34 (.564) in postseason series, but against Hall of Fame Managers their record is, collectively, a head-scratching 12-24! It is certainly hard to believe but exactly 12 times in history – **in 36 chances (.333)** – has a Hall of Fame Catcher been victorious with their team against a Hall of Fame Manager in a postseason series. Amongst Hall of Fame Catchers, Bill Dickey is the leader in this category with 3 such victories, having helped the New York Yankees win the World Series in 1939, 1941, and 1943 against Hall of Fame Managers Bill McKechnie (Reds), Leo Durocher (Dodgers), and Billy Southworth (Cardinals).

This makes it especially noteworthy that Thurman Munson had 5 such POSTSEASON SERIES victories while facing Hall of Fame Managers and LEADING the Yankees as their Captain!

Thurman Munson's POSTSEASON SERIES Record In Total AND Against Hall of Fame Managers Compared with Hall of Fame Catchers

	Postseason Games	Postseason Series	Postseason Series Won Against HOF Managers	Total Postseason Series Record	Postseason Series Winning Percentage	Postseason Series Record Against HOF Managers	Winning Percentage Against HOF Managers
<u>Thurman Munson</u>	30	6	<u>5</u>	<u>5 - 1</u>	<u>.833</u>	<u>5 - 1</u>	<u>.833</u>
Yogi Berra	75	14	2	10-4	.714	2-2	.500
Johnny Bench	45	10	0	6-4	.600	0-2	.000
Ivan Rodriguez	40	9	2	5-4	.556	2-4	.333
Bill Dickey	38	8	3	7-1	.875	3-1	.750
Mike Piazza	32	8	1	3-5	.375	1-4	.200
Roy Campanella	32	5	1	1-4	.200	1-4	.200
Mickey Cochrane	31	5	1	3-2	.600	1-0	1.000
Gary Carter	30	5	0	3-2	.600	0-2	.000
Gabby Hartnett	16	4	0	0-4	.000	0-3	.000
Carlton Fisk	14	3	0	1-2	.333	0-1	.000
Ray Schalk	14	2	1	1-1	.500	1-0	1.000
Buck Ewing	19	2	0	2-0	1.000	0-0	.000
Ernie Lombardi	6	2	0	1-1	.500	0-1	.000
Roger Bresnahan	5	1	1	1-0	1.000	1-0	1.000
<u>HOF Catcher Total</u>			<u>12</u>	<u>44 - 34</u>	<u>.564</u>	<u>12 - 24</u>	<u>.333</u>

At the very least, it seems worthy of note to point out that the 5 MLB Hall of Fame Catchers who played during or after Thurman Munson's career (Bench, Fisk, Carter, Piazza, Rodriguez) were a combined 3-13 (.188) against Hall of Fame Managers in postseason series during their comparatively very long careers. It is even more interesting to note that none of the Hall of Fame Catchers who came out of **Munson's own decade** in the 1970s (Bench, Fisk, Carter) participated even in one postseason series victory against a Hall of Fame Manager, going collectively 0-5 in such cases, while Munson himself as the first Captain of the Yankees since Lou Gehrig was 5-1.

This seems to be something of a tragic historical oversight.

Thurman definitely made the most of the chances his teams had! And he beat the BEST!

The 12 Times a Hall of Fame Catcher Won a POSTSEASON SERIES Against a Hall of Fame Manager

Postseason Series	HOF Catcher	Winning Team	Opposing HOF Manager	Opposing Team
1905 World Series	Roger Bresnahan	New York Giants	Connie Mack	Philadelphia Athletics
1917 World Series	Ray Schalk	Chicago White Sox	John McGraw	New York Giants
1929 World Series	Mickey Cochrane	Philadelphia Athletics	Joe McCarthy	Chicago Cubs
1939 World Series	Bill Dickey	New York Yankees	Bill McKechnie	Cincinnati Reds
1941 World Series	Bill Dickey	New York Yankees	Leo Durocher	Brooklyn Dodgers
1943 World Series	Bill Dickey	New York Yankees	Billy Southworth	St. Louis Cardinals
1951 World Series	Yogi Berra	New York Yankees	Leo Durocher	New York Giants
1955 World Series	Roy Campanella	Brooklyn Dodgers	Casey Stengel	New York Yankees
1956 World Series	Yogi Berra	New York Yankees	Walter Alston	Brooklyn Dodgers
2000 NL Championship Series	Mike Piazza	New York Mets	Tony LaRussa	St. Louis Cardinals
2003 World Series	Ivan Rodriguez	Florida Marlins	Joe Torre	New York Yankees
2006 AL Division Series	Ivan Rodriguez	Detroit Tigers	Joe Torre	New York Yankees

Analytical Point 1: There was a 44 year gap between examples of a HOF Catcher beating a HOF Manager in a postseason series between 1956 and 2000.

Analytical Point 2: There was a 47 year gap between examples of a HOF Catcher beating a HOF Manager in a World Series between 1956 and 2003.

Analytical Point 3: HOF Catchers have won exactly 3 postseason series against HOF Managers since 1956. (3 Series in 60 Years!)

Reviewing the 12 times in history in which a Hall of Fame Catcher has helped his team be on the winning side of a postseason series against a Hall of Fame Manager brings a few interesting points to light. First, as hard as it is to believe, in the 60 seasons since the New York Yankees and Yogi Berra won the 1956 World Series there have been exactly 3 examples of a Hall of Fame Catcher being on the winning side of a postseason series against a Hall of Fame Manager. Second, there was a full **44 year gap** between such examples from 1956 to 2000 when Mike Piazza helped the New York Mets beat Tony LaRussa's St. Louis Cardinals in the 2000 National League Championship Series. And third, there was a full **47 year gap** between examples of a Hall of Fame Catcher winning a World Series title with his team against a Hall of Fame Manager when Ivan Rodriguez brought this "historical oddity" to an end when he helped the Florida Marlins win the 2003 World Series title against Joe Torre's New York Yankees! For this to be the only such example, **in 60 years now**, is astonishing! At the very least, with Munson's own 5 postseason series victories coming right in the middle of that gap, perhaps it is fair to say Munson's feat as leader of the Yankees was somewhat underappreciated at the time. And with the subsequent induction into the Hall of Fame of every manager he faced in the postseason, we now have the opportunity to appreciate those 5 series victories for what they represented: **something which no Hall of Fame Catcher has ever done!**

The 5 Times Thurman Munson's New York Yankees Won a POSTSEASON SERIES Against a Hall of Fame Manager

Postseason Series	Catcher for Winning Team	Winning Team	Opposing HOF Manager	Opposing Team
1976 AL Championship Series	Thurman Munson	New York Yankees	Whitey Herzog	Kansas City Royals
1977 AL Championship Series	Thurman Munson	New York Yankees	Whitey Herzog	Kansas City Royals
1977 World Series	Thurman Munson	New York Yankees	Tommy Lasorda	Los Angeles Dodgers
1978 AL Championship Series	Thurman Munson	New York Yankees	Whitey Herzog	Kansas City Royals
1978 World Series	Thurman Munson	New York Yankees	Tommy Lasorda	Los Angeles Dodgers

Analytical Point 1: Thurman Munson was the Catcher for and Captain of the New York Yankees in 5 Postseason Series Wins Against HOF Managers.

Analytical Point 2: No Hall of Fame Catcher has more than 3 Postseason Series Wins against Hall of Fame Managers (Bill Dickey).

Analytical Point 3: The 5 MLB HOF Catchers who played during or after Munson's career collectively won 3 Postseason Series against HOF Managers.

Analytical Point 4: The 3 HOF Catchers that were "Munson Contemporaries" were a collective 0-5 against HOF Managers in the postseason (Bench / Fisk / Carter)

Analytical Point 5: HOF Catchers have won exactly 3 postseason series against HOF Managers since 1956. (3 Series in 60 Years!)

8th Inning: Sparky Anderson - Master Motivator

To close out the discussion of Thurman Munson's postseason experience against Hall of Fame Managers, it is interesting to think for a few moments about what the 1976 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds represented for him personally. It is also worth referencing a noteworthy event – involving Sparky Anderson – which took place immediately after the 4th and final game of the series. This specific moment within Munson's career history is worth considering since this series was the one and only time that Thurman was on the losing side of a postseason series. It is also worth a review in light of what would take place over the next two years.

Munson was an Ohio native, having been born and raised through high school in the Akron-Canton area and then going on to play his college ball at nearby Kent State where he was named the Catcher on the 1968 College Baseball All-American Team. The season of 1976 was important on two fronts in that it was the season that he became, formally, the Captain of the Yankees and also because it was his MVP campaign. As such, the World Series that year represented an opportunity for Munson to get broader recognition within his home state for having brought the Yankees back to the championship for the first time in a dozen years.

During the series Munson put up the best-ever batting average in history for a player on a losing World Series team with his .529 average on 9 hits in 17 At Bats. This was also the **second best** performance ever for a Catcher in a postseason series. But, the issue was that on the other side of the field in that same series was Mr. Johnny Bench himself who delivered the **best-ever** performance by a Catcher in a postseason series with his .533 average on 8 hits in 15 At Bats. Suffice it to say that the “informal” competition between the men in the 1970s regarding who was the best Catcher in baseball seemed to be settled definitively in Bench's favor not just with Bench's batting performance but with the fact that the Reds won the World Series in a 4 game sweep! Then after game 4 when a reporter asked Sparky Anderson to compare the two men, he made his famous statement “Munson is an outstanding ballplayer and he would hit .300 in the National League, but don't embarrass nobody by comparing them to Johnny Bench.”

It was a somewhat difficult moment for Munson since he was in the room to hear the comment and he was still balancing the mixed emotions of having brought the Yankees back to the edge of greatness as their leader only to fall short against his home-state Reds and against a man who Munson himself admired in Johnny Bench. In short, it was a moment in which he was competitively outdone and overshadowed by another great Catcher in the game. Absorbing the “shock” of Anderson's statement must have been unusually difficult and no one should be surprised if, perhaps, he took the comment personally.

Additionally, no one should be surprised, or fault him, if Munson used this as “motivation” and helped to resolve his “grit” to an even deeper level of inner “will” and competitive determination. And, as we now retroactively review what took place in 1977 and 1978 it definitely can seem that he did indeed draw a special reserve of “encouragement” from those comments which were delivered on October 21, 1976 by a, then, two-time World Series Champion Manager.

So let's take a moment to think about what did happen immediately thereafter. First, in 1977 Munson became the first Catcher since Bill Dickey in the 1930s to deliver a 3rd consecutive season with a .300 average and 100 RBIs. To this day, no other American League Catcher has duplicated that achievement, leaving Dickey and Munson alone as the last two Catchers **in the past century** to accomplish the feat in the American League! Second, as we'll see in the next section, Munson delivered mastery with his pitching staff to achieve a very specific “never before and never since” milestone pairing Pitching and Catching excellence related to winning multiple Cy Young Awards. Third, as Captain of the New York Yankees, he led his team to 4 consecutive postseason series victories, including two World Series Championships, against Hall of Fame Managers: something which, as we outlined in great detail, no Hall of Fame Catcher has ever done. And finally, he delivered the second and third acts in a resume of postseason productivity, both offensively and defensively, which we now know was not exceeded before and has not been matched since by any Catcher in baseball history.

Clearly, it is very possible that Sparky Anderson may have played a key role as “master motivator” at that critical moment in Thurman Munson's life just before he embarked on a period of true and unduplicated historical greatness at the Catcher position. And, considering Anderson's specific comment, it may be fair for us to say, now, in the light of subsequent history:

“Don't embarrass any Hall of Fame Catcher by comparing their career postseason productivity, both offensively and defensively, to that of Thurman Munson.”

9th Inning: A Unique Membership of Nine Players

There is another impressive group that Thurman Munson is a member of that is worth pointing out when considering the full scope of his career. He is one of exactly 9 men in baseball history - including 3 catchers - who have ever won a Rookie of the Year award and MVP while also collecting a Gold Glove award and a World Series Championship in their career. The other names prior to or concurrent with Munson were Frank Robinson, Willie Mays, Johnny Bench, and Pete Rose. After Munson, the only players to achieve the feat were Cal Ripken Jr., Albert Pujols, Dustin Pedroia, and Buster Posey. Certainly an impressive collection of all-time great players!

The Nine Players Who Have Won a Rookie of the Year Award, an MVP Award, a World Series Title, and a Gold Glove During Their Career

	Rookie of the Year	MVP	World Series	Gold Glove
Willie Mays	1951	1954 & 1965	1954	12 (1957-1968)
Frank Robinson	1956	1961 & 1966	1966 & 1970	1958
Pete Rose	1963	1973	1975, 1976 & 1980	1969 & 1970
Johnny Bench	1968	1970 & 1972	1975 & 1976	10 (1968-1977)
Thurman Munson	1970	1976	1977 & 1978	1973, 1974 & 1975
Cal Ripken Jr.	1982	1983 & 1991	1983	1991 & 1992
Albert Pujols	2001	2005, 2008 & 2009	2006 & 2011	2006 & 2010
Dustin Pedroia	2007	2008	2007 & 2013	2008, 2011, 2013 & 2014
Buster Posey	2010	2012	2010, 2012 & 2014	2016

It is worth noting that Munson is the **only catcher** among the 3 on this list to have ever caught a Cy Young Award winner, doing so **both** with Sparky Lyle in 1977 and Ron Guidry in 1978. In fact, Munson is one of only 3 Catchers in baseball history to have ever caught **both** a Cy Young Award-winning Closer **and** Starter (Ted Simmons in 81 & 82 and Terry Steinbach in 90 & 92 are the others), and he is the only one to do so in years in which his team won the World Series in both years!

Further still, during the 1978 season when Munson caught Guidry's 18 strikeout performance on June 17th, they went on to become the only Pitcher/Catcher pair in baseball history to share **both** an 18 strikeout performance **and** win a World Series game in the same season together. The closest that any other Pitcher/Catcher combination has come to duplicating this feat was in 1959 when Sandy Koufax and John Roseboro paired up for an 18 strikeout performance during the regular season on August 31, but lost game 5 of the World Series on October 6th after giving up only 1 run in 7 innings, though the Dodgers did go on to win the championship two days later in Game 6.

As a final note, when you consider that the 1978 Guidry / Munson partnership also produced **both** a win in the famous season-end one game division-clinching playoff against Boston on October 2nd **and** the pennant-clinching ALCS win 5 days later on October 7th, it is reasonable to conclude that this was one of the most effective pairings in baseball history which produced a season of critical wins which, in total, is not likely to ever be duplicated. Perhaps let's officially call it the "Pitcher/Catcher Joint One Season Quint-fecta": strike out 18 in a game, win a Cy Young Award, win a one game Division-deciding Playoff, win a League Championship Series Game, and win a World Series Game. Add in the 25 victories that Guidry and Munson paired up on that season, and it is very likely to have been a "never again" historical feat by two men joined in a partnership of true excellence at the "art" of Pitching and Catching.

Extra Innings: Thurman Munson's Most Enduring and Unique Contribution to Baseball

As we consider the full scope of Thurman Munson's career, it seems that his strongest and most unique contribution to the game is that of a Catcher who significantly elevated his performance in the postseason over a comparatively large number of games. Clearly there are unique demands on those who play Catcher from a physical endurance perspective, especially as the season moves into September and ultimately into October. It should not be surprising that the offensive productivity even of Hall of Fame Catchers has historically fallen off as they moved into these critical games.

And beyond just the physical demands of the position, certainly there is significant additional detail work and study with their coaches in preparing to call pitches against batters they haven't seen as frequently. Much of their focus would also correctly need to be on learning the base-running tendencies of their opponents and developing general base-protecting strategies against teams they haven't seen as frequently. So when we have an example of a Catcher who has met these challenges and delivered his most astounding batting and defensive performance in these most critical games of the season, and over multiple postseasons, ***it is worth special consideration.***

While Munson's postseason excellence may not have seemed so unusual at the time of his death, history has revealed that he indeed did something on both sides of the ball in the postseason that was not duplicated before and has not been exceeded since. With Munson's career being cut short by tragedy, it seems entirely appropriate to consider these extra games in the most crucial situations to be part of his Hall of Fame resume.

It is true that Howard Cosell's statement "he was the best there was at what he did" on the night of Thurman's funeral can seem like an announcer being caught up in the tragedy and emotion of the moment. But in light of subsequent history, it is still true to say that Thurman Munson, when giving comprehensive consideration to the full scope of his accomplishments, did in fact do something which no other Catcher has ever done.



One of Munson's most enduring images... this photo was taken on July 16th, 1970.

It is the first live-action in-game photo ever featured on a baseball card – the famous 1971 Topps #5.

*The player sliding into home, Chuck Dobson, was the A's winning pitcher in the game and was SAFE at the plate!
Next up was Reggie Jackson who hit a 2 run single. It was one of the very few times Munson gave up 5 runs in an inning!*

The photo was taken by Yankees team photographer Michael Grossbardt.

Thurman Munson – Hall of Fame Catcher!

Even in the glorious history of the Yankees franchise, Thurman Munson is still the only Yankee ever to win both a Rookie of the Year Award and then go on to win a Most Valuable Player trophy during his career. In the spring of 1976, when George Steinbrenner made him the first Yankees Captain since Lou Gehrig, Thurman grudgingly agreed but then went on to win his MVP that same year and then take his team to the World Series for the first time since the early 1960s, ultimately winning the championship in the following two seasons.

Thurman's story is ***the very definition of excellence***, of rising to the occasion as the leader of his team, then helping his team to endure the often tumultuous "Bronx Zoo" years, while still grasping for and attaining the ring! It is a memory, and a story, which deserves to be more fully considered and honored within the rich history of the game.

Thurman Munson's 10 years of consistent regular season mastery (1970 – 1979), from a WAR perspective, has been ***matched only by 6 men in history – every one of them a Hall of Fame Catcher***. His postseason dominance, both offensively (RBIs) and defensively (CS), over a comparatively large number of October games at the Catcher position is unsurpassed. His leadership in anchoring the return of the Yankees to greatness, in the midst of great turmoil, is legendary.

Yet despite Munson's great accomplishments in the 1970s it is also very fair to say that he was always hidden in the shadows of other great men. In their one face to face competitive battle on the same field, Johnny Bench decisively emerged victorious and standing tall as the iconic Catcher of the decade. Then in the moment of Munson's most glorious achievement as Captain of the New York Yankees in winning their first World Championship in 15 years in 1977, he was overshadowed by the all-time historically significant sequence of home runs that Reggie Jackson delivered in Game 6 when he forever earned the title Mr. October, a name which Munson himself had bestowed upon Jackson, in jest, 4 days earlier! And, in the history of baseball's most decorated franchise Munson didn't seem quite as "heroic" or "larger than life" compared to the likes of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, or Joe DiMaggio. And baseball writers certainly weren't enthusiastic about adding yet another Yankees Catcher to the Hall of Fame in addition to the two that were already within the membership.

But, it is now very nearly 50 years since Munson was drafted 4th by the Yankees in the Spring of 1968. It is time for baseball to honor both the demonstrated greatness of the man and the difficulty of *sustaining and then elevating phenomenal performance at the Catcher position into the latest games of the season*. The Hall of Fame is incomplete without including such ***a bold and consistent example of excellence in postseason play*** within its membership at the Catcher position.

Think about it this way: there have been ***five*** MLB Catchers inducted into the Hall of Fame whose careers came during or after Thurman Munson and they, collectively, played 97 years and won exactly ***three*** postseason series against Hall of Fame Managers in that ***near-century*** of time.

Yet Thurman Munson, as the Captain of the Yankees in leading his team back to greatness managed to win ***five*** such postseason series in a ***decade***, while delivering his own "Mr. October" record at the Catcher position which has definitively gone unsurpassed in history. His is a record of ***astounding concentrated greatness*** which deserves to be remembered and celebrated – not forgotten.

Thurman Munson's career of unique achievements has been there all along – hiding in plain sight – as perhaps the most impressive comprehensive decade of work ever delivered by a major league Catcher in the history of baseball.

Let's finally take his record, and our memory of the man, out of the shadows and recognize him for what he delivered.

A decade of unmatched excellence.

The time has come. He did enough.

APPENDIX ONE

Best 10 Consecutive Years of WAR Productivity by Catchers All-Time

(Minimum 1000 Games Caught with 30+ WAR)

	Catcher	Peak WAR 10	10 YR GC	Peak Years	Career WAR	WAR 7	JAWS
1	<u>Gary Carter HOF</u>	60.8	1,390	1977 - 1986	69.9	48.2	59.1
2	<u>Johnny Bench HOF</u>	59.9	1,365	1968 - 1977	75.0	47.1	61.0
3	<u>Mike Piazza HOF</u>	53.9	1,300	1993 - 2002	59.4	43.1	51.2
4	<u>Ivan Rodriguez HOF</u>	50.7	1,251	1995 - 2004	68.4	39.7	54.0
5	<u>Yogi Berra HOF</u>	47.1	1,316	1950 - 1959	59.5	37.0	48.2
6	<u>Mickey Cochrane HOF</u>	47.0	1,249	1926 - 1935	52.1	36.9	44.5
7	Thurman Munson	45.6 (7)	1,253	1970 - 1979	45.9 (14)	37.0 (7)	41.5 (12)
8	Ted Simmons	44.7	1,354	1971 - 1980	50.1	34.6	42.4
9	<u>Bill Dickey HOF</u>	42.4	1,179	1930 - 1939	55.8	34.2	45.0
10	<u>Carlton Fisk HOF</u>	41.7	1,067	1972 - 1981	68.3	37.5	52.9
11	Jorge Posada	39.6	1,295	1998 - 2007	42.7	32.7	37.7
12	Bill Freehan	36.8	1,268	1964 - 1973	44.7	33.7	39.2
13	<u>Gabby Hartnett HOF</u>	35.8	1,123	1930 - 1939	53.4	30.3	41.8
14	Jason Kendall	35.0	1,364	1997 - 2006	41.5	30.3	35.9
15	<u>Roy Campanella HOF</u>	34.2	1,183	1948 - 1957	34.2	32.9	33.5
16	Jim Sundberg	33.5	1,386	1974 - 1983	40.5	28.6	34.5
17	Russell Martin	33.3	1,238	2006 - 2015	35.0	27.6	31.3
18	<u>Ernie Lombardi HOF</u>	32.7	1,006	1934 - 1943	45.9	27.8	36.8
19	Darrell Porter	32.1	1,140	1974 - 1983	40.7	29.0	34.9
20	Yadier Molina	31.5	1,290	2007 - 2016	33.3	26.9	30.1

Analytical Point 1: WAR 10 is defined as a Catchers BEST 10 Consecutive Years of WAR Productivity.

Analytical Point 2: There are exactly 20 Catchers in history who have Caught 1000 Games in a decade with a WAR above 30.

Analytical Point 3: Many HOF Catchers or those of note who didn't meet the 1000+ Games threshold appear on the two lists below.

Analytical Point 4: Thurman Munson died with 2 months to go in the 1979 season on August 2, yet still turned in the 7th best decade of WAR by a Catcher!

Other Noteworthy WAR 10 Comparisons

	Name	Peak WAR 10	10 YR GC	Peak Years	Career WAR	WAR7	JAWS
1	Lance Parrish	29.9	1,192	1979 - 1988	39.3	28.2	33.8
2	Javy Lopez	28.1	1,129	1996 - 2005	29.6	24.9	27.2
3	Manny Sanguillen	28.0	1,078	1969 - 1978	27.5	26.4	26.9
4	Sherm Lollar	25.7	1,116	1950 - 1959	30.4	21.9	26.2
5	<u>Ray Schalk HOF</u>	25.7	1,301	1913 - 1922	28.5	22.1	25.3
6	<u>Rick Ferrell HOF</u>	20.3	1,160	1931 - 1940	29.8	19.9	24.9

Noteworthy WAR 10 BUT Didn't Catch 1000 Games in a 10 Year Period

	Name	Peak WAR 10	10 YR GC	Peak Years	Career WAR	WAR7	JAWS
1	Joe Mauer	44.3	925	2004 - 2013	50.0	38.5	44.3
2	Gene Tenace	42.4	745	1973 - 1982	46.8	34.9	40.8
3	Joe Torre	41.9	903	1961 - 1970	57.6	37.2	47.4
4	<u>Buck Ewing HOF</u>	36.8	556	1883 - 1992	47.7	30.5	39.1
5	Charlie Bennett	35.1	703	1881 - 1890	39.1	30.0	34.5
6	<u>Roger Bresnahan HOF</u>	34.6	665	1903 - 1912	41.0	28.8	34.9
7	Buster Posey	33.5 (8yrs)	TBD	2009 -	33.5	33.6	33.5
8	Wally Schang	32.0	798	1913 - 1922	45.0	25.2	35.1
9	Elston Howard	27.3	946	1957 - 1966	27.0	26.4	26.7

APPENDIX TWO

A Broader Look at Postseason “Quality Points”

The Performance of Other Noteworthy Catchers in the Postseason vs. Thurman Munson and vs. The AVG HOF Catcher

Player	Regular Season AVG	Postseason AVG	Postseason AVG vs. Regular Season AVG	Postseason Games	Postseason Hits Per Game	Postseason RBI	Postseason RBIs Per Game	Postseason CS	Postseason CS Per Game	Postseason Quality Points (RBI + CS)	Postseason Quality Points Per Game (RBI + CS / G)
<u>Thurman Munson</u>	.292	<u>0.357</u>	<u>+ 65 pts</u>	30	<u>1.53</u>	22	<u>0.73</u>	24	<u>0.80</u>	46	<u>1.53</u>
<i>AVG HOF Catcher</i>	.288	.263	- 25	29.1	0.92	13.6	0.47	8.2	0.28	21.8	0.75
Jorge Posada	.273	.248	- 25	125	0.82	42	0.34	33	0.26	75	0.60
Yadier Molina	.283	.286	+ 3	89	1.01	31	0.35	11	0.12	42	0.47
Javy Lopez	.287	.278	- 9	60	0.95	28	0.47	15	0.25	43	0.72
Elston Howard	.274	.246	- 28	54	0.78	19	0.35	3	0.06	22	0.41
Buster Posey	.307	.248	- 59	53	0.96	23	0.43	7	0.13	30	0.57
Gene Tenace	.241	.158	- 83	42	0.43	14	0.33	3	0.07	17	0.40
Wally Schang	.284	.287	+ 3	32	0.84	9	0.28	21	0.66	30	0.94
Manny Sanguillen	.296	.282	- 14	29	1.00	4	0.14	1	0.03	5	0.17
Tim McCarver	.271	.273	+ 2	28	0.86	12	0.43	4	0.14	16	0.57
Ted Simmons	.285	.186	- 99	17	0.65	8	0.47	7	0.41	15	0.88
Jim Sundberg	.248	.208	- 40	14	0.71	7	0.50	5	0.36	12	0.86
Jason Kendall	.288	.224	- 64	12	0.92	3	0.25	2	0.17	5	0.42
Bill Freehan	.262	.139	- 123	10	0.50	5	0.50	6	0.60	11	1.10
Lance Parrish	.252	.267	+ 15	8	1.00	5	0.63	6	0.75	11	1.38

Analytical Point 1: This further illustrates the highly unusual nature of Thurman Munson's elevated performance in the postseason vs. a wider audience of Catchers.

Analytical Point 2: Thurman Munson not only has a much better RBI per postseason game PLUS CS per postseason game performance than the AVG HOF Catcher, but also against other Catchers of note.

Analytical Point 3: This illustrates the difficulty that Catchers have in significantly elevating batting performance in the postseason vs. their regular season batting performance.

“Postseason Quality Points” Formula = Runs Batted In Per Postseason Game + Defensive Caught Stealing Per Postseason Game

The Catchers on this list were selected for a variety of reasons: 1) significant postseason sample size, 2) respected Catchers in history, 3) notable performance.

APPENDIX THREE

The 21 Seasons in Baseball History in Which A Catcher Has Caught 120 Games and Delivered 180 Hits

	Year	Hits	Games Caught	Caught Stealing %	VS. League CS %
Yogi Berra	1950	192	148	58	+ 9
Ted Simmons	1972	180	135	32	- 5
Ted Simmons	1973	192	153	44	+ 8
Ted Simmons	1975	193	154	26	- 6
Thurman Munson	1975	190	130	50	+ 12
Thurman Munson	1976	186	121	35	+ 1
Thurman Munson	1977	183	136	40	+ 1
Thurman Munson	1978	183	125	45	+ 7
Ivan Rodriguez	1996	192	146	51	+ 21
Mike Piazza	1996	184	146	18	- 10
Mike Piazza	1997	201	139	28	- 4
Ivan Rodriguez	1997	187	143	57	+ 24
Ivan Rodriguez	1998	186	139	56	+ 25
Mike Piazza	1998	184	140	26	- 6
Ivan Rodriguez	1999	199	141	55	+ 22
Jason Kendall	2000	185	147	30	- 2
Jason Kendall	2003	191	146	27	- 4
Jason Kendall	2004	183	146	36	+ 8
Javy Lopez	2004	183	132	28	- 4
Joe Mauer	2006	181	120	38	+ 8
Victor Martinez	2006	181	133	18	- 12

Analytical Note 1: Yogi Berra won a World Series Title in 1950 and Thurman Munson won in 1977 and 1978.

Analytical Note 2: Thurman Munson won the MVP Award in 1976 and Ivan Rodriguez won in 1999.

Analytical Point 3: If you further refine for CS% above League AVG, 9 seasons fall off this list.

Research Note

This research effort began by taking notice of the unusual statistical comparison between Thurman Munson and Ivan Rodriguez in that they are still the only Catchers in the history of baseball to have 4 straight seasons of at least 180 hits. The above chart demonstrates how unusual it is for Catchers to be able to both play the position for a large number of games and hit for a high enough average to grind out 180 hits. It may be a fair criticism to say that some of the hits within the seasonal hit totals above by individual players may not have come in only games in which they were catching, but it is our point of view that the demands of the position don't begin and end on the day in which a game is caught. It is a position of constant preparation and recovery. So even if a certain number of the hits were delivered, for example, while playing first base it still doesn't diminish the unique accomplishment of catching at least 120 games **and** delivering 180 hits. It is worth noting that in the history of baseball the top 20 hit total seasons all-time for players of **any** position show totals between 237 and 262. The fact that the top 20 hit totals seasons for Catchers run between 180 and 201 is further validation of the point: it is really hard to endure the physical demands of the position and still hit for a high average with great consistency. By further refining this list of players to only those who were above their league average in Caught Stealing Percentage seemed like an interesting way to further refine the impressive nature of the accomplishment by isolating exactly those 12 seasons in which a Catcher could play a lot of games, gather a lot of hits, and be effective in those critical defensive moments when the base paths were under pressure. The fact that Thurman Munson was the first man to achieve this accomplishment 4 years in a row was perhaps the single best statistical validation of the type of player he was. The fact that the only other player in history to duplicate Thurman's feat was, definitively, one of the all-time greats at the position, and is now a first ballot Hall of Famer is validation that Thurman Munson's overall record is worth a renewed closer examination. This was our objective in this project.

Notes on Research Methodology and Data Sources

This page is offered to provide details on the sources of data that were used in the course of this research and it is intended to provide some level of clarity on why certain “analytical choices” were made. Every research effort requires choices to be made and here we intend to be transparent on our decisions.

WAR 10: 1000 Games Caught in 10 Consecutive Years

This is one of the key drivers of our conclusions. There are a few reasons why we chose to use 10 consecutive years and 1000 games caught as important benchmarks. First, it coincides exactly with the duration of Munson’s career between his Rookie Season in 1970 and his death in 1979. Second, in the history of baseball it became very clear that the overwhelming majority of strong productivity by even the best Catchers in the game is concentrated fairly tightly to a period of 10 years. For example, if you take the **Top 10 WAR 10 Catchers (40+ WAR)** they played a total of 77 seasons **outside** of their peak decade and only 12 of those 77 additional seasons showed WAR productivity above 3. If you take the **next 10 WAR 10 Catchers (30+ WAR)**, they played an additional 51 seasons **outside** of their peak decade with only 5 of those seasons showing WAR above 3. In short, this means that of the 128 seasons played by the **Top 20 WAR 10 Catchers outside of their peak decades**, only 17 of those seasons showed relatively strong WAR performance. And third, we thought it was important when measuring the relative productivity of Catchers over time that we focus exactly on those players who met a certain minimum threshold of playing the position over a full decade in which most of the games they played was as a Catcher. Choosing the number 1,000 was admittedly somewhat arbitrary but it did require the players highlighted within the analysis to play an average of 100 games at the Catcher position for 10 years straight. When performing this refinement a few interesting names fall out of the analysis which serves to highlight how difficult it is for even some of the great Catchers in the game to sustain the ongoing physical demands of the position over many years. But in short, we thought it was important that to effectively compare the productivity of Catchers we needed to isolate those players who produced most of their WAR while actually playing the position of Catcher.

Postseason Quality Points (RBIs Per Postseason Game Plus Defensive Caught Stealing Per Postseason Game)

Admittedly this statistic is a new creation, and it seeks to establish a blended measure of both offensive and defensive production by Catchers in the postseason. RBIs are chosen as the offensive metric because it requires the player to be effective in the most critical moments in the game when runs are available on the bases to be driven in. The comparison of Munson’s productivity in this area to that of Hall of Fame Catchers, and every other noteworthy Catcher in the history of the game, produced an interesting result worth sharing. Likewise, on the defensive side of the equation we believe that defensive Caught Stealing productivity is as clean a way as possible to measure the effectiveness of the Catcher in protecting his pitchers by slowing down the base paths. This analysis also produced results worth sharing and made some comparisons throughout history very interesting. By combining both metrics into one per game number it seemed to nicely measure how effective in combination a Catcher was in helping his team win in the postseason relative to the performance of other great catchers over time. It’s not perfect but it is offered for consideration as a useful statistic.

Postseason Batting and Postseason Defense

Sean Lahman’s Postseason Batting and Postseason Fielding Archives were the primary data sources used in delivering all analysis and conclusions in these areas.

Teams Stealing Productivity

Sean Lahman’s Teams Archive was the primary data source in delivering all analysis and conclusions in this area.

Regular Season WAR, Hit Totals, and RBIs

Baseball-Reference.com and Sean Lahman’s Batting Archive were the key sources of information for all player-specific regular season productivity metrics.

Summary Points on the Unique Accomplishments in the Career of Thurman Munson

Munson is one of exactly 10 Catchers in history to catch 1000+ games and produce 40+ WAR in 10 consecutive seasons

Produced 45.6 WAR from 1970-1979: only 6 Catchers – *all Hall of Famers* – ever delivered more in any 10 year period

His .357 postseason batting average is 94 points higher than the Hall of Fame Catcher average

Only Catcher in history to throw out at least 7 base runners Caught Stealing in 3 different postseasons

Only Catcher in history to throw out at least 3 base runners Caught Stealing in 6 different postseason series

His combination of RBIs per postseason game and CS per postseason game is the best in history amongst Catchers

His hits per postseason game is higher than every Hall of Fame Catcher

His RBIs per postseason game is higher than every Hall of Fame Catcher

More postseason defensive CS than every Hall of Fame Catcher

Higher postseason OPS (.874) than every Hall of Fame Catcher except one

First Catcher in history with 4 consecutive 180+ hit seasons

Thurman is the last American League Catcher with 3 consecutive seasons with a .300+ average and 100+ RBIs

One of two American League Catchers in the last 100 years with 3 straight .300+ average / 100+ RBI seasons

492 of the 500 players in history with the most postseason At Bats have a lower batting average than Thurman Munson

The 7 players among those 500 with a higher average than Munson are all Hall of Famers and none were Catchers

Munson's 190 Hits in 1975 was the closest ever a Catcher came to the league leader in hits (Brett / 195)

Munson hit safely in 27 of 30 postseason games – no other player has ever done that!

Incidentally, Joe DiMaggio hit safely in 24 of his first 30 postseason games!

Only Catcher in history to catch back to back Cy Young Award winners and win the World Series both years

Munson and Ron Guidry are the only Pitcher/Catcher pair with an 18+K game and a World Series win in the same year

Every game he played in the postseason as Captain of the Yankees his team was facing a Hall of Fame Manager

Munson led his team to more postseason series wins against Hall of Fame Managers (5) than any Hall of Fame Catcher

The HOF Catchers who played during or after Munson have a combined 3 postseason series wins vs. HOF Managers

The 3 HOF Catchers who played during the 1970s have exactly zero postseason series wins against HOF Managers

One of only 9 players in history with a Rookie of the Year Award, MVP, Gold Glove, and a World Series Championship

Thurman Munson was, definitively, one of the greatest Catchers in the history of the game!

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