

## Affable slugger Thome heading to Cooperstown

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- When Jim Thome extended his right arm and pointed his bat toward the mound, settling into his iconic stance, it served as a warning. The pitcher knew what could come next, should the baseball that spun from his fingertips stray from its intended path.

For more than two decades, Thome made pitchers pay with his prolific displays of power and keen eye, becoming one of nine hitters in baseball's storied history to launch at least 600 home runs and the Indians' all-time leader with 337 shots. Now he can point his bat toward the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

On Wednesday, Thome was voted into the Class of 2018 by the Baseball Writers' Association of America, alongside Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman. That quartet of all-time greats will be joined by Jack Morris and Alan Trammell, who were voted in by the Modern Baseball Era Committee, for the induction ceremony on July 29 in Cooperstown.

"This is a day I don't think any player can ever imagine happening," Thome said. "It's a special day in all of our lives."

Thome surpassed the required 75 percent threshold by being named on 379 ballots, accounting for 89.8 percent of the total ballots. That Thome spent the latter third of his 22-year career mostly as a designated hitter did not prove to be much of an obstacle for the voting body, which instead recognized him as one of the game's premier home run hitters.

Thome is the first player voted into the Hall by the BBWAA to have the Indians as his primary team since 1976 (Bob Lemon), and he gives Cleveland 13 Hall of Famers overall.

Sandy Alomar Jr., who roomed with Thome during Spring Training early in their careers with the Indians, was thrilled for his former teammate.

"You know how there's a saying about good guys finish last?" Alomar said. "I'm so glad that a great, genuine person like Jim Thome is in the Hall of Fame. He was such a hard worker and a great teammate. He's the most genuine guy I've ever seen. It's good to see people like that reach their goals and the Hall of Fame. And also have a guy from those '90s Indians to be in it. We had such great teams in that era."

Beyond center field at Progressive Field in Cleveland, a statue of Thome -- erected in 2014 with his likeness frozen in time with his bat pointed forward -- rests near the landing spot of his 511-foot home run on July 3, 1999. As that ball bounced in the direction of Eagle Avenue, Tom Hamilton, the Indians' longtime radio voice, boomed: "That will take two tape measures!"

By that point, Thome had established himself as one of baseball's top power threats -- a skill he carried forward in stints with the Phillies, White Sox, Dodgers, Twins and Orioles through the 2012 season. Thome was a five-time All-Star (three times for the Indians, and once each for Philadelphia and Chicago), a one-time Silver Slugger recipient and he finished in the top 10 in MVP Award balloting four times. Thome ended with 612 home runs (eighth all-time), 1,747 walks (seventh) and a .956 OPS (18th). He ranks fifth in career at-bats per home run at 13.76, trailing only Mark McGwire (10.61), Babe Ruth (11.76), Barry Bonds (12.92) and Giancarlo Stanton (13.4). Thome, Bonds and Ruth are the only hitters in MLB history to have amassed at least 600 home runs and 1,500 walks in a career.

Thome hit an MLB-record 13 walk-off home runs, launched nine grand slams, had 17 postseason blasts, homered in 38 stadiums and took 403 pitchers deep during his career.

That Thome reached those heights is incredible, given the awkward, tense swing that he featured as a skinny 19-year-old third baseman in Cleveland's farm system. He was a quiet, polite kid from Peoria, Ill., and was taken by the Indians in the 13th round of the 1989 Draft out of Illinois Central College. Thome was a country boy with a strong work ethic, but a 600-homer icon? No one saw that coming.

The blueprint was there, though.

Alomar remembered his first impression of Thome during Spring Training before the 1990 season.

"Jimmy was taking BP with us and I was like, 'Man, this guy hits the ball hard.' And he hit the ball to all fields," Alomar said. "He looked like he had an idea at such a young age of how to hit."

How Thome's famous stance -- one imitated by kids in Cleveland and throughout the country in the 1990s -- came about is the stuff of legends.

As the story goes, Thome and his Triple-A teammates were watching "The Natural" one day, when Charlie Manuel -- then a manager in Cleveland's system -- walked in and told them to turn the TV off. The players insisted on watching a little longer and, when Manuel looked up and saw Roy Hobbs, the movie's fictional protagonist, point his bat toward the pitcher, the manager obliged.

Manuel had been searching for some kind of mechanism for Thome to use at the start of his swing to stay relaxed at the plate. He suggested that Thome try Hobbs' approach, and the stance was born. Thome never shattered any light standards, but he soon began morphing into the type of hitter that Manuel envisioned. It was around that same time that Manuel had Thome shift into a more open position with his feet.

"It was very important," Manuel said on MLB Network. "And let me tell you something, once we did that, he started hitting balls all over the yard. He started pulling balls strong and he also started hitting hard the other way, too."

When the Indians created Thome's statue, the slugger said one of Manuel should be built alongside it. There was a special bond that spanned several years through Thome's career.

"I would not be here if it wasn't for Charlie," Thome said. "I know he's very humble and he'll say, 'Hey, the players got to ultimately do it,' but I will tell you, there was many, many days that he pounded his fist, wanting to keep me at the big league level. There were days when I was in Triple-A that he told me I wasn't ready to go to the big leagues. So from that point, I knew and trusted him like a father."

During the 1990s, Thome was a part of the Indians' core that helped the franchise capture six division titles and reach two World Series (1995 and '97). After the 2002 season, though, Thome became the top free-agent hitter on the market and explored his options, eventually signing a six-year, \$85 million contract with Philadelphia. For the Phillies, Thome was the biggest free-agent acquisition since Pete Rose in '78. For Indians fans, it was incredibly tough news to swallow, especially after Manny Ramirez and Albert Belle had also left via free agency before him.

Thome led the National League in homers (47) in 2003, finished fourth in voting for the NL MVP Award and went on to belt 89 homers in a two-year span for his new club. Prior to the '06 season, the Phils dealt Thome to the White Sox, where he spent four years and now works as a special assistant to the general manager. Before retiring, Thome had a second stint with both Cleveland ('11) and Philadelphia ('12).

The Indians gave Thome a fitting send-off in his final home game in a Cleveland uniform. In the ninth inning against the Twins on Sept. 25, 2011, Lonnie Chisenhall moved to left from third base, and former Tribe manager Manny Acta sent Thome to the hot corner -- where his Indians career began -- for one pitch.

Being able to return to Cleveland, and be welcomed back by fans who were upset to see him walk away so many years earlier, meant a lot to Thome.

"Jimmy was so nervous about coming back," Alomar said. "When people came out and stood up and gave him an ovation, that was an incredible feeling for everybody, especially for people who were around for those times and knew what we went through in development, going from losing 100 games to winning 100. All of that, it was just a lot of hard work for growth as a unit, and he was one of the main pieces."

On Aug. 2, 2014, Thome signed an honorary one-day contract with the Indians, so he could officially retire as a member of the organization. That was the same day that his 12-foot, bronze statue was unveiled at Progressive Field, where Thome is part of the team's Hall of Fame.

Thome is no longer just an Indians great, though. He can now be called a Hall of Famer.

"Walking through the front door gives you chills," Thome said of going to Cooperstown. "I think the Hall of Fame is so magical."

### **Chipper, Vlad, Thome, Hoffman elected to Hall**

By Anthony Castrovince MLB.com @castrovince

For the second time in four years but just the fifth time in a voting process that dates back to 1936, the Baseball Writers' Association of America is welcoming four players into Cooperstown's hallowed Hall all at once.

Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero, Jim Thome and Trevor Hoffman compose the BBWAA's 2018 National Baseball Hall of Fame class, which was announced on Wednesday night on MLB Network and MLB.com. Jones and Thome were inducted in their first year of eligibility, marking the third time this decade that a BBWAA class includes multiple first-ballot Hall of Famers.

As always, players had to be included on 75 percent of the ballots submitted by voting members of the BBWAA, who had a maximum of 10 slots to fill. Jones and Thome became just the 53rd and 54th players in history to be voted in on their first ballot. For Guerrero and Hoffman, the 2018 result was a natural conclusion after both men finished tantalizingly close to entry in '17. Last year, Hoffman fell five votes shy of induction, while Guerrero fell 15 short.

Though this year's BBWAA class is equal in size to that of 2015 (Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez, John Smoltz and Craig Biggio), it marks just the second time since 1955 (Joe DiMaggio, Gabby Hartnett, Ted Lyons, Dazzy Vance) that the writers have chosen a group of four.

The other years with a class at least this large were 1947 (Lefty Grove, Carl Hubbell, Mickey Cochrane, Frankie Frisch) and the inaugural, immortal class of '36, which had five members (Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner, Babe Ruth, Christy Mathewson, Walter Johnson).

It was nearly larger. A recent surge in support for Edgar Martinez's candidacy led to the former Mariners designated hitter appearing on 70.4 percent of ballots -- just 20 votes shy of induction -- in his ninth and penultimate year of eligibility. Martinez will have one last chance at the BBWAA honor in 2019, when he'll be joined on the ballot by newcomer and veritable lock Mariano Rivera, among others.

In the wake of a 2013 vote that resulted in zero writer-elected Hall of Famers, the BBWAA has now welcomed 16 inductees over the past five years. That is the most in any five-year stretch in the history of the writer voting.

Now, Martinez finds himself in "next in line" territory, hoping the dramatic uptick from 2014, when he had a low watermark of 25.2 percent in his fifth year on the ballot, can continue in one final try. Right-hander Mike Mussina is also trending in the right direction, appearing on 63.5 percent of ballots in his fifth year of eligibility.

In their sixth year of eligibility, Roger Clemens (57.3), Barry Bonds (56.4) and Curt Schilling (51.2) all appeared on more than half of the 422 ballots submitted. For all three men, that was a slight increase over their 2017 totals.

As has been the case in every year of the BBWAA voting, there were no unanimous selections in 2018. But here's more on this year's fantastic foursome.

The Braves got it right with the No. 1 overall pick in the 1990 Draft. Jones becomes just the second No. 1 overall selection to reach the Hall of Fame, joining 2016 inductee Ken Griffey Jr.

Jones' entry follows a trend of the election of iconic members of Braves clubs that won a record 14 consecutive division titles from 1991-2005. Jones follows in the recent footsteps of first-ballot BBWAA inductees Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine and Smoltz, as well as manager Bobby Cox and team architect John Schuerholz, who were selected via small committee voting.

According to the research of longtime baseball scribe Jayson Stark, the Braves are the first team in history with four first-ballot teammates who spent 10 or more years with the same club.

"For us to have that little fraternity in a little piece of heaven up there in Cooperstown, New York, it's something that we can and should be very proud of," said Jones, "because we did an awful lot of winning during the '90s and early 2000s in Atlanta."

Having amassed a 19-year career in which he was a model of consistency and success, Jones was such a clear-cut Hall of Fame candidate that he wound up tied with Maddux for the 10th-highest percentage in BBWAA voting history.

"It blows my mind that 97 percent of [the writers] voted for me," Jones said.

Jones won a World Series as a rookie in 1995, won the National League MVP Award in 1999, was selected to eight NL All-Star squads, won a batting title (.364) at age 36, finished with 468 home runs and completed nine seasons of 100 RBIs or more.

Guerrero will either be the first player to wear an Angels cap on his plaque or, perhaps, the last to wear a Montreal Expos cap, depending on his preference. Guerrero said he will announce that decision on Thursday in New York at the Hall of Fame news conference, which will air live on MLB Network and MLB.com starting at 3 p.m. ET. His 16-year career included eight seasons in Montreal, where he emerged as an All-Star, and six in Anaheim, where he won the 2004 American League MVP Award.

One of the most purely entertaining players of his era, with a cannon for an arm and a bat that could reach just about any pitch, Guerrero hit .300 or better 13 times, drove in 100 or more runs 10 times and hit 30 or more homers eight times. He never struck out more than 95 times in a season, and only Musial, Williams, Gehrig and Mel Ott struck out less frequently while hitting as many career home runs as Guerrero did.

How did Guerrero become such a great "bad-ball hitter"?

"It really came down to a game we played back home called Plaquita," he said through interpreter Jose Mota. "You have four people; it's a little bit like cricket in a way, where you have a broomstick as a bat and you throw a ball -- rubber ball, soft ball, anything -- and you try to knock down the ... We actually played with folded license plates. Because of that, the ball had to be bounced as we tried to knock down the license plate that was standing right by you at home plate. That actually opened up my hitting zone."

Though Guerrero came close to induction last year, he saw a seismic surge in support on this ballot. His percentage climbed 21.7 points.

Becoming one of only nine members of the 600 home run club is impressive on its own. But Thome possessed the rare combination of power and patience. In addition to posting the fifth-best at-bats-per-home run mark in history (13.76), Thome also finished with a career on-base percentage (.402) one point higher than that of Hall of Fame leadoff man Rickey Henderson.

A country-strong slugger plucked out of Illinois Central College in the 13th round of the 1989 Draft, Thome opened his stance under the tutelage of Charlie Manuel, began pointing his bat at la Roy Hobbs in "The Natural" and joined Bonds, Ott, Ruth and Williams as the only players in history with at least 500 homers, 1,500 runs scored, 1,600 RBIs and 1,700 walks. Being roundly regarded as one of the nicest men in baseball certainly didn't hurt his cause, either.

Thome has already hand-delivered the baseballs from his 500th and 600th home runs to the Hall of Fame. Now his plaque will join those mementos.

"I think the Hall of Fame is just so magical if you're a baseball fan and you truly understand it and want to understand it," Thome said. "I think that was the driving force to take the 500th and 600th baseballs there -- because it's where it should have been, it's where it should be. You've got all these great artifacts. It's the greatest place there is."

With Jones and Thome aboard, both third basemen from the 1995 World Series are accounted for in this class. Thome represents the Cleveland Indians teams that won six division titles and two AL pennants in a seven-year stretch from 1995-2001.

Hoffman finished agonizingly close to induction a year ago. No surprise that one of the greatest closers of all-time finished the job. Hoffman becomes just the sixth reliever to enter the Hall, but his career began as a light-hitting shortstop in the Reds system. He was traded twice before settling in with San Diego, where he served as the Padres' closer from 1994-2009, with the sound of AC/DC's "Hells Bells" famously preceding his appearances.

Over the course of 1,089 1/3 career innings, Hoffman posted a 1.058 WHIP that ranks ninth all-time and fifth all-time among pitchers whose careers started after 1920. Hoffman also ranks first among relievers in hits allowed per nine innings (6.989). He saved 40 or more games nine times, tying Rivera for the most such seasons. Hoffman was a seven-time All-Star and -- especially impressive for a reliever -- a four-time top-10 finalist in NL Cy Young Award voting.

"It's hard to describe the emotions that flood you right away," Hoffman said. "I know it's a very standard line, but so many things go through you. You think of your early days in the game, you think of parts of your career that you understand what you put into on a daily basis. To be sitting there at this stage seven years after you retire, it just comes full circle. It's kind of the cherry on top of a sundae."

The Hall of Fame now has 323 elected members, including 226 players, 128 of whom have come through the BBWAA ballot.

#### Complete 2018 Hall of Fame election results

Below are the results of the Baseball Writers' Association of America vote to elect the Baseball Hall of Fame Class of 2018, with vote totals and percentages. A total of 422 ballots were cast, with 317 required for election.

Chipper Jones: 410 votes (97.2%)  
Vladimir Guerrero: 392 votes (92.9%)  
Jim Thome: 379 votes (89.8%)  
Trevor Hoffman: 337 votes (79.9%)  
Edgar Martinez: 297 votes (70.4%)  
Mike Mussina: 268 votes (63.5%)  
Roger Clemens: 242 votes (57.3%)  
Barry Bonds: 238 votes (56.4%)  
Curt Schilling: 216 votes (51.2%)  
Omar Vizquel: 156 votes (37.0%)  
Larry Walker: 144 votes (34.1%)  
Fred McGriff: 98 votes (23.2%)  
Manny Ramirez: 93 votes (22.0%)  
Jeff Kent: 61 votes (14.5%)  
Gary Sheffield: 47 votes (11.1%)  
Billy Wagner: 47 votes (11.1%)  
Scott Rolen: 43 votes (10.2%)  
Sammy Sosa: 33 votes (7.8%)  
Andruw Jones: 31 votes (7.3%)  
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Jamie Moyer: 10 votes (2.4%)  
Johan Santana: 10 votes (2.4%)  
Johnny Damon: 8 votes (1.9%)  
Hideki Matsui: 4 votes (0.9%)  
Chris Carpenter: 2 votes (0.5%)  
Kerry Wood: 2 votes (0.5%)  
Livan Hernandez: 1 vote (0.2%)  
Carlos Lee: 1 vote (0.2%)  
Orlando Hudson: 0 votes  
Aubrey Huff: 0 votes  
Jason Isringhausen: 0 votes  
Brad Lidge: 0 votes  
Kevin Millwood: 0 votes  
Carlos Zambrano: 0 votes

All candidates who received less than 5 percent of the vote on ballots cast will be removed from future BBWAA consideration.

Vizquel needs Hall of Fame support to swell

Defensive wizard gets 37 percent of vote in first year on ballot

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Omar Vizquel turned defense into a blend of art and acrobatics. He was a franchise icon for the Indians and one of the great shortstops not only of his era, but in baseball history.

That might one day lead to Vizquel becoming a Hall of Famer, but it may take time and more convincing among the voting body of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. On Wednesday, in his first year eligible for enshrinement, Vizquel fell well short of the 75 percent of the vote required for induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Jim Thome, one of Vizquel's teammates on the powerhouse Indians teams of the 1990s, was elected to the Class of 2018, along with Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman. They will be honored during an induction ceremony on July 29 in Cooperstown, N.Y., along with former Tigers greats Jack Morris and Alan Trammell, who were voted into the Hall by the Modern Baseball Era Committee.

Former Mariners DH Edgar Martinez, who fell just short of election on Wednesday, played with Vizquel from 1989-93 and believes the defensive wizard deserves his own plaque in Cooperstown some day.

"He got 2,800 hits and 11 Gold Gloves," Martinez said. "To me, it doesn't get better than that. He was a great player that played the game for a long time. He belongs. He doesn't have the big numbers like a lot of home runs or RBIs, but defense is important, too, and he was consistent on both sides of the field."

While it was an historic day for Thome, who was also on the ballot for the first time, the other players with Cleveland ties on the 2018 Hall of Fame ballot did not receive enough votes.

- [Affable slugger Thome heading to Cooperstown | Complete results](#)

Vizquel led that group with 156 votes (37 percent), followed by Manny Ramirez (93 votes, 22 percent) and Jeff Kent (61 votes, 14.5 percent). That trio will return to the ballot next year, but Johnny Damon (1.9 percent), Kerry Wood (0.5 percent) and Kevin Millwood (no votes) were not named on at least 5 percent of the ballots cast and are no longer eligible.

Ramirez (1993-2000 with the Indians) saw his percentage drop slightly from 23.8 percent last year, which was his first time on the ballot. Known as one of the greatest right-handed hitters in history, Ramirez belted 236 of his 555 career home runs with Cleveland, while owning the all-time club records for slugging percentage (.592) and OPS (.998). Ramirez was a 12-time All-Star and ended with a .312 average and .996 OPS in 19 seasons, but the end of his career was marred by multiple positive tests for performance-enhancing substances.

Vizquel spent the bulk of his 24-season Major League career with the Indians, suiting up for Cleveland from 1994-2004 and winning nine of his 11 Gold Glove Awards with the club. Overall, Vizquel amassed 2,877 hits between stints with the Mariners, Indians, Giants, White Sox, Rangers and Blue Jays, and he finished as baseball's all-time leader in double plays turned (1,734), games played (2,709), and fielding percentage (.985) among shortstops.

Vizquel became one of the faces of the '90s Indians teams that won six division crowns and a pair of American League pennants.

"His defense was remarkable," said Sandy Alomar Jr., Vizquel's teammate with the Indians from 1994-2000. "And a lot of times, the one thing that I liked about our guys is that they coached themselves on the field. They didn't need a lot of help from the coaching staff. Omar, he was kind of like the human GPS. He knew where to play. He knew the hitter. On the go, he'd make decisions out there. Now you position players because of all this data that we have. Omar already knew that.

"He was ahead of the game when it came to defense. A lot of plays, he made it easier, because he was positioning himself ahead of time."

While Vizquel is heralded for his defense, his overall offensive showing is what may hold him back from enshrinement in the Hall of Fame. While he compiled nearly 3,000 hits over his two-plus decades in the game, Vizquel had an 82 OPS+ for his career. That indicates that he was 18 percent below average as a hitter in his time in the Majors.

"You can't penalize him for power numbers. He wasn't that type of player," Alomar said. "He wasn't born with the strength to hit home runs. He was more of a spark plug. He became a hitter when he came over to us. He wasn't as good until he was sandwiched in there with [Carlos] Baerga and [Kenny] Lofton and became the player he became."

### **Bauer eager to unveil his offseason project**

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The video quickly spread across social media earlier this month. It showed Indians pitcher Trevor Bauer, wearing black workout shorts and a dark navy top, racing forward, then doing a few quick stutter steps before unleashing a baseball into a net with a few onlookers nearby.

On the wall, a yellow radar gun reading flashed: 116.9.

Yes, that is in miles per hour. Every offseason, Bauer heads to Driveline Baseball outside Seattle and works through a rigorous program, which includes this jaw-dropping pull-down drill. That throw, in particular, was a facility record for velocity with a 3-ounce training ball. The video was posted by @DrivelineBB and soon spread across the internet to news outlets and fans.

Bauer's Twitter account was soon flooded with messages.

"Mostly, just people telling me I'm going to injure myself," Bauer said with a smirk Friday, when he was in Cleveland for Tribe Fest. "[I heard from] all the guys online who know infinitely more about the subject than I do. That was fun. Always is."

Bauer is able to laugh off such criticism, because the right-hander knows there is a fine-tuned method behind what looks on the surface to be madness. That aggressive pull-down drill is actually a part of Bauer's warmup routine for live at-bat sessions. This winter, the pitcher estimates that he has already logged 30 innings of work to hitters with his primary objective being to hone a revamped slider.

During his winter workouts against batters, Bauer has limited his repertoire to his fastball and the new slurve. Once he begins pitching in a Spring Training setting -- Cleveland's pitchers and catchers report to Arizona on Feb. 14 -- he will begin mixing in his curveball, cutter and changeup. This winter, Bauer restructured his lifting routine, brought more tech devices to Driveline to better analyze his pitches and continued to focus on velocity training and mechanics.

"I'm always trying to find an incremental way to get better," Bauer said.

Last season, Bauer pieced together his best overall campaign in the Majors, going 17-9 with a 4.19 ERA and 196 strikeouts against 60 walks in 176 1/3 innings. The right-hander was particularly impressive down the stretch, posting a 10-1 record with a 2.60 ERA and 91 strikeouts vs. 23 walks in 83 innings across his final 14 appearances. That sample begins with his July 21 start against the Blue Jays, and there is a reason for drawing a line at that point in his game log.

It was during that outing against Toronto that Bauer ditched his splitter -- an offering he worked on last winter -- and began throwing a modified slider. Using his cutter grip, the pitcher repositioned his thumb higher on the ball "to counteract inertial forces." Translation: Bauer wanted a breaking ball that had more depth and run than the cutter, but was more reliable for targeting the lower-third of the strike zone. That was the original plan for the splitter, but it did not work how Bauer hoped.

Consider that adjustment a bit of in-season survival on Bauer's part. The slider grip was not comfortable, making it hard to command, but the pitch helped balance the movement off his fastballs, curve and changeup. The pitch mix was close to what Bauer had spent the previous few years trying to find, and the results down the stretch were impressive.

"I needed something besides fastball-curveball that I could throw down in the zone," Bauer said. "That's what [the slider] was: An on-the-fly adjustment to patch a hole, and use the offseason to high-grade what I actually want that pitch to be."

So, Bauer spent this winter trying to improve upon that success by finding a more comfortable version of the pitch.

"The modified slider has been nixed," Bauer said. "I've replaced it with what hopefully will have a similar movement profile to a Marcus Stroman curveball or a Corey Kluber slurve. All the info that I have on it so far says that it profiles very similar to those two. Obviously, we'll see once I get up against a hitter in a game."

Until then, Bauer will continue facing batters in simulated settings, and warming up with those high-octane pull-down pitches.

"It's one of the more fun parts of training," Bauer said

### **Tribe adds Wilk, Murphy on Minor League deals**

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The Indians added two more players to the preseason mix Monday, signing left-hander Adam Wilk and switch-hitting catcher Jack Murphy to Minor League contracts that include an invitation to attend Major League Spring Training.

Cleveland's pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to Goodyear, Ariz., on Feb. 14, with the first official workout for that group scheduled for Feb. 16. The remainder of the Tribe's position players are slated to report to Arizona on Feb. 18, leading up to the first full-squad workout on Feb. 20.

With Wilk and Murphy joining the fold, the Indians have 19 non-roster invitees, bringing the camp total to 59.

Wilk, 30, split the 2017 season between the Mets and Twins, appearing in four games (two starts), in which he allowed 14 earned runs in 14 innings. In 44 1/3 innings at Triple-A last year, the left-hander posted a 5.48 ERA with 35 strikeouts against eight walks. Wilk has a 7.36 ERA in 40 1/3 career innings in the Majors between stops with the Tigers, Angels, Mets and Twins, dating back to 2011.

The Indians already have a sound MLB catching duo in Roberto Perez and Yan Gomes -- not to mention MLB Pipeline's No. 1 catching prospect in Francisco Mejia knocking on the big league door -- but Murphy will give the team another catcher to serve as depth and help divvy up the Spring Training workload.

Murphy has spent the past nine seasons in the Blue Jays' and Dodgers' farm systems, hitting .222 (.649 OPS) with a career 29 percent caught-stealing rate. Last year, Murphy hit .141 in 187 plate appearances between Double-A Tulsa and Triple-A Oklahoma City.

Beyond Wild and Murphy, the Indians' list of non-roster invitees includes: Pitchers Jeff Beliveau, Lisalverto Bonilla, Louis Head, Cameron Hill, Evan Marshall, Josh Martin, Alexi Ogando, Neil Ramirez, Cole Sulser and Robert Zarate; infielders Bobby Bradley, Drew Maggi, Michael Martinez and Nellie Rodriguez; and outfielders Brandon Barnes, Richie Shaffer and Melvin Upton Jr.

Jordan Bastian has covered the Indians for M

### **'They don't make them like Jim Thome': Sean Casey grateful to have had a Hall of Famer as a mentor**

**By Zack Meisel 2 hours ago**

Sean Casey attended the Indians' first winter development program with Danny Graves, Bartolo Colon, Enrique Wilson, Bruce Aven and a few other rising prospects in January 1996.

The group listened to speakers, worked out with strength coach Fernando Montes and toured Jacobs Field. When they reached the batting cages, there stood a guy in his signature, sturdy stance, his bat pointed toward the sky (err, ceiling).

"I remember literally being in awe," Casey told The Athletic, "like, 'Oh, my God. It's Jim Thome. That's freaking awesome.' "

Casey approached him, the two talked hitting, and the seeds were planted for a long-term friendship.

Casey had reason to be awestruck; his mentor proceeded to author a Hall of Fame career. Jim Thome was elected to the sport's sanctuary in his first appearance on the ballot. He received 89.8 percent of the vote and will join Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman in Cooperstown, New York, in late July.

Casey earned a promotion to the big leagues in September 1997. As the players boarded a flight to Kansas City, Thome grabbed the 23-year-old and told him to sit next to him at the back of the plane.

"No idiot rookie goes to the back of the plane unless you're invited by Jim Thome," Casey said.

He looked around. Matt Williams — at that point a four-time All-Star and three-time Gold Glove Award winner — was sitting in front of him. David Justice, a three-time All-Star and former Rookie of the Year, sat to his right. Orel Hershiser and Charles Nagy were within earshot.

"And me, sitting back there, so uncomfortable, feeling so out of place," Casey said. "But I was so excited. Thome said to come sit with him. What am I going to say, 'No?' "

Jeff Manto, a veteran corner infielder, stood up.

"Hey, rookie, what are you doing sitting in the back?" he asked.

Thome intervened and told Manto that he wanted to chat with the rookie first baseman.

"That was really cool for me," Casey said, "like, this guy is taking me under his wing."

During spring training in 1998, Casey, Thome and Richie Sexson would hustle to a field at the Indians' complex in Winter Haven, Florida, by 8 a.m. each day. Fielding coordinator Brian Graham would work with the first basemen on picking the ball.

Casey adored Thome's glove, a black and tan Wilson piece, broken in perfectly. Thome would take a turn at first base. Sexson would go next. Then, Thome would hand his glove to Casey to use for his turn.

On the last day of spring training, the Indians traded Casey to the Reds for Dave Burba. Thome approached Casey at his locker and gifted him the glove.

Casey still has it, 20 years later. He used it with Cincinnati in 1998, his first full season in the majors.

"That's who he is," Casey said. "Jim is just a rare breed."

Casey and Thome now work together as MLB Network analysts, when Thome isn't fulfilling his duties with the White Sox front office. They'll occasionally grab dinner. They'll constantly chat about hitting. No conversation can conclude without a mention of Charlie Manuel, an instrumental coaching figure for Thome. Manuel helped Thome redesign his approach at the plate, with a more open stance that generated the power necessary to produce 612 home runs and a .956 OPS over 22 seasons.

"To talk hitting with a guy like Jimmy, I feel like I won the lottery or something," Casey said. "The ball came off his bat differently. He was special."

Casey has firsthand experience. When Thome relocated to the National League, their teams squared off every season. Three hitters struck fear into Casey when he was holding a runner on at first base before he shifted into his defensive stance: Cliff Floyd, Barry Bonds and Thome.

"He hit me some scud missiles down there at first," Casey said. "It was scary."

Thome ended his career with a .402 on-base percentage. He topped the 25-homer mark in 14 seasons. He totaled 17 postseason homers, all between 1995-2001 with the Indians.

The numbers are out of this world. The human being, though, is down-to-earth.

"They don't make them like Jim Thome," Casey said. "The guy is one of the greatest baseball players of all time, with the home runs that he's hit. If you hung out with him for four days, you would never know who he is. You go on a hunting trip with him and talk to him and you may never know who he is. He's such an unbelievable person."

Thome has his bronze statue in downtown Cleveland. In late July, he'll be immortal in Cooperstown, too.

"I'm glad that he'll get the recognition from baseball, which is unbelievable," Casey said, "but also hopefully when he's up there giving that speech in Cooperstown, everyone will get to see the humble, down-to-earth, great guy that Jim Thome is."

### **The Omar Vizquel Hall of Fame debate will rage on ... and that's not so bad**

By T.J. Zuppe 1 hour ago

Jim Thome clubbed 612 career home runs in his 22 seasons in the majors, 337 of those coming as a member of the Indians.

He carried an on-base percentage of just more than .400 through 10,313 plate appearances. He successfully served as one of the game's most feared sluggers for nearly two decades, all while avoiding the wide spotlight of baseball's PED witch hunt.

Oh, and few (if any) have an unpleasant word to speak of him.

Thome was essentially a Hall of Fame slam dunk.

There wasn't much fiery debate about his candidacy. There were no anti-Thome truthers leading a charge in opposition. Not one person was shocked by his first-ballot induction.

The former slugger earned 89.8 percent of the BBWAA vote, well more than the required 75 percent.

And let's be real, it's difficult to get 90 percent of anyone to agree on anything.

Yet, through these divisive, hostile times, most came to the conclusion that Jim Thome was a Hall of Fame talent, worthy of the game's biggest honor. But the same can't be said for Thome's former teammate, defensive star Omar Vizquel, who earned 37 percent of this year's vote.

And he certainly didn't fall short due to a lack of debate.

Those who watched the slick-fielding shortstop play on a nightly basis routinely begged voters to use their eyes. They spoke of the flashy barehanded grabs or the jaw-dropping double plays. Those who are married to the numbers have studied the stats and believe their eyes work just fine. But they're also hesitant to put him on the same pedestal.

Those who played with Vizquel have a different opinion.

"I reference Omar as The Human GPS," Sandy Alomar Jr. recently told The Athletic. "It won't get validated by the Hall of Fame or the stats, but only people who played with him can tell you about the sixth sense of the game, and Omar was one of the guys blessed with that.

"His defense is the best I've seen from a shortstop. He was remarkable."

While Thome's candidacy didn't create much room for public banter, the battle lines within voters regarding Vizquel's career accomplishments were drawn quite early, leading to all-out warfare between the old and new schools of thought on career evaluation.

Somewhere in my mind, this is how I envisioned every Vizquel debate:

Omar was just as good as Ozzie Smith!

The defensive metrics disagree.

Oh, stop. Did you even watch him play defense?

Yeah, but what about his offense?

He had almost had 3,000 hits!



Yeah, over 24 seasons. Nice OPS+, LMAO!

Oh, and how do you find heart on a spreadsheet?  
Exactly!

Ahh, nothing like a civil war to bring back warm memories of the Miguel Cabrera-Mike Trout MVP debates of yesteryear. Those were much simpler times.

Today, Vizquel has a few things working against him.

First, it's incredibly difficult to build an entire Hall of Fame case on defense. In fact, it's almost impossible. Fairly or unfairly, he will always be compared to Smith, who finished with better offensive numbers compared to his era than Vizquel but, more important, was graded as a better defender through the limited number of metrics we have.

Believing Vizquel was one of the three or four best defensive shortstops of all-time is far from crazy, but even if we concede that past metrics are far from perfect, the switch-hitter didn't add enough offensive value to make it an easy decision.

Second, the current rules have made it difficult to clear a logjam of talented players. While the voting has led to an expanded class in recent years, imagine how much easier the process could be if players were each evaluated individually, not in direct competition with others on the ballot.

Under the current system, voters can only offer up to 10 check marks.

Even if Vizquel were deemed worthy — a completely acceptable conclusion — how many other players are more worthy? If voters were allowed to cast yes or no votes, perhaps it would be easier to defend a thumbs up. Instead, it's more difficult to justify Vizquel taking a vote away from Edgar Martinez, Mike Mussina, Billy Wagner, Gary Sheffield, Barry Bonds and many others.

However, at least Vizquel didn't suffer the same ridiculous fate as former teammate Kenny Lofton, who fell off the ballot in his first season of eligibility. And, believe it or not, a continuation of the Vizquel debate should be viewed as an overwhelming positive.

Many of the discussions about the Hall of Fame in recent years have been tied to the stigma of performance enhancing drugs, muddying the stellar resumes of some incredible talents. That dark cloud has kept players like Bonds and Roger Clemens from claiming their piece of immortality. Each year, the confusion over how to handle the steroid era serves as an undesirable reminder of an embarrassing time.

Vizquel's candidacy, however, continues to be polarizing in all the best ways. The evaluation methods have changed, but the overall gist of the conversation is still tied to his on-field worth.

His career sparks debate. It's the sort of candidacy that draws a line in the sand, ignites thoughtful discussion and doesn't focus on one of the game's biggest blemishes.

It's precisely the type of banter the Hall of Fame should strive for on a yearly basis, and thanks to earning enough votes, will continue into next year.

Yes, that means another year filled with UZR and range factor discussion. Prepare to be sold more and more on the all-important eye-test. Go find where Vizquel ranks in flashy plays and leadership on the FanGraphs leaderboard. But, through all that, at least we'll be debating baseball.

That's not so bad, is it?

### **There are reasons to believe in Tyler Olson, but he insists on proving himself all over again**

T.J. Zuppe Jan 23, 2018

Tyler Olson's earned-run average last season resembles the total number of baby diapers he's changed in his lifetime: 0.00.

But that will soon change.

In addition to earning some career stability and peace of mind with his dominant late-season performance, Olson learned he will become a father later this year, topping his list of winter blessings.

He's not-so-secretly hoping for a lefty, and, as you can guess, he's already planning to teach his son his trio of arm angles.

"Whatever it takes to get them out," Olson said with a giant smile.

The uncertainty of impending parenthood is terrifying in all the best ways. And if there's anything Olson has proved, it's his ability to adapt and overcome unstable and unpredictable situations.

You see, two years ago, Olson was involved in two offseason trades.

Within the span of a few weeks, his spring-training destination changed from Arizona to Florida. His role was far from known.

He eventually started three games at Triple-A for the Yankees before moving to full-time relief. He was claimed on waivers by the Royals in June 2016, then again by the Indians a month later.

After he made just one big league appearance that season, it took over a year to finally earn a callback to the majors. And shortly after getting handed the ball by Terry Francona, Olson plunked the first batter he faced.

Oops.

But 20 innings later, his season ERA still stood at zero. And his career? It was certainly starting to feel a lot more stable.

"It's definitely nice knowing where you're going," Olson told The Athletic. "But I don't take anything for granted. Coming in here, I'm still going to work hard and come in with the mindset that I have to make the team, go out there and prove myself. It's exciting."

The 28-year-old's presence as the second left-hander offered some assurance to the organization, allowing them to decline Boone Logan's pricey club option. His ascension from under-the-radar minors arm to trusted leverage weapon last year speaks to the volatility of bullpens, but under the surface, there are several things worth believing in — even when examining such a small sample size.

However, the biggest difference, at least in Olson's eyes, came from finally knowing and understanding his role.

"Definitely played a huge part that last year I was strictly a reliever," Olson said. "Not bouncing back between starting and relieving."

That doesn't just apply during the season. It impacts how he prepares. It changes his cardio program. It impacts how often he throws. He's altered his program to match the back-to-back scenarios he might face out of the bullpen. And because it worked so well last year, he replicated that plan this winter.

"Same trainer, same place we trained, same throwing program. Everything was the same," Olson said. "That's why I feel I'm in a good spot this year."

But approach wasn't everything. He also appreciated how Francona used him.

"Tito put me in situations and other guys in situations where they're going to be successful and get comfortable doing it," Olson said. "Once you establish your role, that's your role and he keeps using you. You get more and more comfortable every time."

For the most part, Olson was used in short bursts, largely facing left-handed hitters. In fact, he faced three batters or fewer in 22 of his 30 outings. He faced 42 lefties in those appearances, limiting them to a .158/.244/.216 slash line and .213 wOBA.

He used added deception by employing three release points.

He also relied heavily on his curveball, a pitch that became his most predominant offering in 2017. Opposing hitters slugged just .200 against it this past year, as it became more than just a complement to his 89 mph fastball. His breaking ball generated 17 total swinging-strikes and registered in the top 17 percent for average curve spin rate this past year.

But unlike other relievers, Olson kept throwing all four of his offerings, opting to use his change-up against right-handed hitters. That pitch variety was one Mickey Callaway insisted Olson keep throwing, knowing it was one that Logan and Andrew Miller didn't possess. Righties slugged just .150 against his change-up last year, and overall, he limited them to a .219/.286/.219 slash line in 35 plate appearances.

But those stats aren't necessarily predictive of future success. We know he was good in 2017. Understanding why he was good helps us decide how real that production was. That can be difficult when looking at a sample size of 20 innings. But even in that tiny glimpse of his relief profile, there are small encouraging nuggets.

His 23.4 percent strikeout rate was solid, but not overly impressive. His 7.8 percent walk rate wasn't alarming, but it certainly wasn't elite. But what Olson managed to do that separated him from others was keep the ball on the ground more than 50 percent of the time while collecting some of the best quality of contact on the staff.

In fact, when using expected weighted on-base average (a metric calculated by combining exit velocity and launch angle to help us understand what sort of outcomes should have happened based on the quality of contact), we find that Olson's small sample was as good as some of the game's best hurlers.

This is important because xwOBA helps strip luck and other factors from the equation, giving us a clearer indication of the pitcher's true production.

According to Baseball Savant, Olson carried a .251 xwOBA, not quite as dominant as his .228 actual wOBA, but still pretty darn encouraging. According to xStats.org, Olson's xwOBA was just more than 33 percent better than the league average.

To put that into language we can all understand, Olson produced an xwOBA that was similar to Corey Kluber (.251), Chris Sale (.248) and Clayton Kershaw (.253).

Of course, comparing a reliever — someone who faces a small handful of hitters each night — to a starter's workload is a little unfair. So if we just focus on relief arms, Olson was comparable to Brad Hand (.247), Ken Giles (.246), Chris Devenski (.258) and Aroldis Chapman (.247).

Perhaps that's a result of his increased curve usage. Maybe it's due to his frequent platoon advantage. Or, as Olson indicated, maybe his full-time shift to relief played a crucial role.

While his peripheral numbers suggest major reason for optimism, he'll need to bank more than his 2017 resume to reach an established, believable level. With Logan, Bryan Shaw and Joe Smith now elsewhere, chances will be abundant.

But with every out collected, he can prove himself a little more. And with every diaper change, he'll inch even closer to clearing life's most challenging hurdle.

After that, baseball should be easy.

"The way I look at it, every opportunity I get, it's time to go out there and do my job," Olson said. "Anything I can do to help this team be successful and to move to another postseason, it's all exciting stuff."

### **Former Indians slugger Jim Thome to be inducted into National Baseball Hall of Fame this summer by Ryan Lewis**

Former Indians slugger Jim Thome to be inducted into National Baseball Hall of Fame this summer

The greatest power hitter in Indians history, as well as one of the best the game of baseball has ever seen, will have his spot in Cooperstown this July.

It was announced Wednesday night on MLB Network that Jim Thome, known for his high socks, down-to-earth attitude and a lethal left-handed swing, had garnered enough votes to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. The induction ceremony will take place on July 29 at the Clark Sports Center in Cooperstown.

This was Thome's first year on the ballot, as voted upon by eligible members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Seventy-five percent of the vote is needed for induction. Thome easily topped that with 89.8 percent of the vote.

Thome will be one of four members in the 2018 class via the BBWAA vote, along with Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman. Jack Morris and Alan Trammell were also inducted this year by the Modern Baseball Era Committee.

Thome is the 13th player to be inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame who had the Indians as a primary team. He is also the first Indians player to be inducted since Larry Doby in 1998, which came via the Veterans Committee. Prior to Thome, the Indians hadn't had a primary player inducted via the BBWAA vote since Bob Lemon in 1976. Thome also joins Bob Feller (1962 inductee) as the only Indians players to be inducted on the first ballot.

Thome ranks eighth all-time with 612 home runs and is one of only nine hitters to reach the 600-home run plateau. Across a 22-year major-league career, Thome finished with a .276 average, .402 on-base percentage, .554 slugging percentage and a .956 OPS. He led the league in home runs once, with 47 in 2003, and finished in the top-5 eight times. He reached the 20-home run mark in 16 different seasons and hit at least 40 homers six times. Thome also holds the record with 13 walk-off home runs.

And as one of the premiere sluggers during a time in which baseball was full of them, Thome is one of the few prodigious hitters to never be connected to allegations of performance-enhancing drugs.

Across parts of 13 seasons with the Indians, Thome was one of the central pieces to the juggernaut offenses in the mid-to-late 1990s that made two trips to the World Series. He belted 337 home runs as a member of the Indians, a franchise record. He also holds the franchise record for home runs in a single season, when he hit 52 in 2002, his last year in Cleveland before returning in 2011. And no Indians fan will forget his 511-foot shot off Kansas City's Don Wengert on July 3, 1999, which left the stadium altogether and still stands as the longest home run in park history.

Omar Vizquel, also on his first year of the ballot, received 37 percent of the vote.

### **Welcome aboard: Jim Thome's election gives Cleveland Indians 13 players in Cooperstown**

CLEVELAND, Ohio – Jim Thome, the power-hitting first baseman of the powerhouse Indians teams of the mid-to-late 1990s, reached a baseball player's highest honor on Wednesday night when he was elected to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

Thome, whose 612 homers are the eighth most in history, made it on his first try. He is the 13th player to represent the Indians in Cooperstown and the only the second to make it on the first ballot. Bob Feller, the winningest pitcher in team history, is the other.

Thirteen should have a nice ring to it for Thome and the Indians. They drafted him out of Illinois Central College in the 13th round in 1989. To say he was raw is to say he didn't make one of the Indians' minor league teams after his first spring training.

But starting his career in extended spring training didn't slow Thome down for long. At 21 he made his big league debut on Sept. 4, 1991. He hit his first home run on Oct. 4, a two-run game-winner off Steve Farr at Yankee Stadium, with Joel Skinner's borrowed bat.

Four years later Thome hit .317 with 25 homers and 73 RBI as the 1995 Indians ended a 41-year drought by reaching the World Series.

Here's a look at the 12 other players in Cooperstown who represent the Indians.

By Paul Hoynes and Joe Noga, cleveland.com

#### NAP LAJOIE

Position: Second baseman.

Induction date: 1937, BBWAA.

The skinny: Lajoie played 13 years with the Indians. He was a three-time batting champ and was their player-manager from 1905 until 1909. He finished his career as a .338 hitter. From 1903 through 1914, the Indians were called the Naps in his honor.

Joe Noga, cleveland.com

#### TRIS SPEAKER

Position: Center field

Induction date: 1937, BBWAA.

The skinny: Speaker, like Lajoie, was a player-manager for the Indians. He led them to a World Series title in 1920. The Grey Eagle spent 11 years with the Indians and hit .354. He was a .345 career hitter over a 22-year career. His 792 doubles are the most in history.

#### **Path to Cooperstown will not be easy for Cleveland Indians shortstop Omar Vizquel**

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Omar Vizquel played 1,478 games for the Indians over 11 seasons. I saw most of them and the more I watched the more I was convinced he was the best shortstop I've ever seen.

Vizquel won 11 Gold Gloves in his career, including eight in as many seasons with the Indians. As the Gold Gloves mounted, I felt his case for Cooperstown did as well. I didn't think it would be easy because he didn't hit the way the shortstops of his era - Cal Ripken, Alex Rodriguez, Derek Jeter, Nomar Garciaparra - did.

Still, when you see excellence every day over 11 seasons, it cannot be ignored. In some cases the eye test still means something in the age of sabermetrics and defensive metrics. Vizquel passed the eye test and he belongs in Cooperstown.

It's just not going to happen this year.

Vizquel made his first appearance on the Hall of Fame ballot in December. When the vote of the Baseball Writers Association of America is announced at 6 p.m. Wednesday, he will not be one of the players enshrined in Cooperstown.

It's not a surprise and it's not a bad thing. An optimist would call it a start.

Vizquel, based on Ryan Thibodaux's Hall of Fame ballot tracker, will receive well over the required five percent of the vote to stay on the ballot. He will not slip as quickly and quietly into the void as Kenny Lofton, Albert Belle and so many others have in the past. It will give voters more time to study his case and to understand just how good he was.

With 236 ballots revealed/~55.7% of the vote known:

Chipper - 98%

Vlad - 95%

Thome - 93%

Hoffman - 78.4%

Edgar 77.1%

-----

Mussina - 70%

BB/RC - 64%

Schilling - 59%

Walker - 39%

Vizquel - 33%

Manny - 23%

McGriff - 19%

Rolen - 13%

Andruw - 5.5%

Players can stay on the ballot for 10 years - reduced from 15 years in 2014 - as long as they maintain five percent of the vote. Ten years is a long time to politic, argue and study. Sometimes all that talking still ends in frustration. Jack Morris and Alan Trammell spent 15 years on the BBWAA ballot and failed to gain entry to the Hall of Fame.

In December, however, the veterans committee elected both. Trammell, a shortstop, never received more than 40.9 percent of the required 75 percent of the vote on the BBWAA ballot. But the fact that he stayed in the conversation for so long had to help his case with the veterans committee. Not to mention the fact that he was a fine player.

It would be a shame if Vizquel has to wait that long. But Trammell certainly didn't seem like a frustrated man when he talked to reporters after the announcement was made in December at the winter meetings in Orlando, Fla. The Hall of Fame is worth the wait.

CLE@FLA: Vizquel makes a great diving stop

Meanwhile, here are a few things to remember about Vizquel.

\* He finished his career with 2,877 hits. Only six other shortstops in history have more - Derek Jeter, Honus Wagner, Ripken, Robin Yount and Rodriguez. Wagner, Ripken and Yount are in the Hall of Fame. Jeter will be and Rodriguez should be if not for a history of steroid abuse. Not bad for a guy who started his career nicknamed Omar the Out Maker with Seattle.

\* It seems popular to discount Vizquel's hit total because he played until he was 45. Some call them "counting stats." Like hitting a 95 mph fastball is just like rolling out of bed every morning and getting ready for work. The last time I checked, big league teams didn't give away roster spots just to enhance a player's career stat line. They especially don't give them away to veterans unless they feel they can help the team win.

\* Vizquel played more games at shortstop, 2,709, than any other player in history. He has the best fielding percentage, .985, of any shortstop in history. He turned the most double plays, 1,734, of any shortstop in history.

\* From 1995-99, he hit at the top of a lineup that led the Indians to five straight AL Central titles and two trips to the World Series. In that stretch, Vizquel averaged 94 runs and 37 steals per season. He led the AL in sacrifice hits twice.

\* During his career, Vizquel was often compared to Ozzie Smith. The Wizard of Oz won 13 Gold Gloves in the National League for his play at shortstop and made it to Cooperstown as a first-ballot inductee in 2002. That will not be the case with Vizquel.

\* Smith went to 15 All-Star Games, Vizquel went to three. Vizquel, however, was a better offensive player and appeared in 11 postseason series, all with the Indians, compared to eight for Smith.

\* Vizquel played 24 years in the big leagues, while Smith played 19. Defensive metrics give Smith a big edge over Vizquel, but you'll have to pardon me if I'm skeptical. Vizquel won consecutive Gold Gloves at age 38 and 39 with the Giants. There are times when you have to believe what you see and not what's churned out by metrics.

The best thing about Vizquel was how much fun he had playing. He was always smiling. It looked like every ball that was hit to him he'd seen a thousand times before.

Make a bare-hand play for the last out in Chris Bosio's no-hitter for Seattle in 1993? Check. Make a diving stop to throw out Florida's Charles Johnson with two on and two out in the sixth inning of a must-win Game 6 of the 1997 World Series? Check. Turn his back on a high pop to short left field to avoid the sun so he could catch the ball over his shoulder? Check that box as well.

The game never went too fast for Vizquel. The path to the Hall of Fame - a path I believe he'll take one day - seems destined to follow the same pace.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 01.25.2018

### **Jim Thome seventh MLB Hall of Famer with 1,000+ games played for Cleveland Indians**

By Dennis Manoloff, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Jim Thome will become the sixth-longest-tenured Cleveland Indians player to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. Thome, who appeared in 1,399 games over 13 seasons for the Tribe, was elected by the Baseball Writers Association of America (BBWAA) in his first year on the ballot. Results were announced Wednesday, Jan. 24, on MLB Network.

Thome's career comprised 2,543 games over 22 seasons (1991-2012). He played 391 games with the Philadelphia Phillies, 529 with the Chicago White Sox, 179 with the Minnesota Twins, 17 with the Los Angeles Dodgers and 28 with the Baltimore Orioles.

On Hall of Fame Weekend in late July, infielder-designated hitter Thome and right-hander Jack Morris will join 31 others who played at least one game for the Indians to have been inducted. (Morris, alongside shortstop Alan Trammell, was elected by the Modern Era Committee in December).

According to Indians ace beat reporter Paul Hoynes, Thome will be the first Hall of Famer recognized as an Indian by vote of the BBWAA since Bob Lemon in 1976. Thome is the second Indian to be elected on the first ballot (Bob Feller, 1962).

Thome was a 13th-round pick of the Indians in the 1989 MLB Draft. Thome will join righty Dennis Eckersley (third round, 1972) as the only National Baseball Hall of Famer who were drafted by Cleveland and played for the Indians. The inaugural MLB Draft was held in 1965.

Here is the list of Hall of Famers, and Hall of Famers awaiting induction, who have appeared in at least one game for Cleveland's charter franchise in the American League (established in 1901):

Nap Lajoie - 1,614 games (13 seasons)

Lou Boudreau - 1,560 games (13 seasons)

Tris Speaker - 1,519 games (11 seasons)

Joe Sewell - 1,513 games (11 seasons)

Earl Averill - 1,510 games (11 seasons)

JIM THOME - 1,399 games (13 seasons)  
Larry Doby - 1,235 games (10 seasons)  
Elmer Flick - 935 games (9 seasons)  
Bob Lemon - 615 games (15 seasons)  
Bob Feller - 570 games (18 seasons)  
Joe Gordon - 566 games (4 seasons)  
Roberto Alomar - 471 games (3 seasons)  
Early Wynn - 368 games (10 seasons)  
Stan Coveleski - 361 games (9 seasons)  
Eddie Murray - 309 games (3 seasons)  
Addie Joss - 296 games (9 seasons)  
Gaylord Perry - 134 games (4 seasons)  
Ralph Kiner - 113 games (1 season)  
Bert Blyleven - 104 games (5 seasons)  
Dennis Eckersley - 104 games (3 seasons)  
Frank Robinson - 100 games (3 seasons)  
Sam Rice - 97 games (1 season)  
Dick Williams -- 67 games (1 season)  
Cy Young - 63 games (3 seasons) NOTE: Young played 425 games over nine seasons with the Cleveland Spiders, 1890-98.  
Billy Southworth -- 61 games (2 seasons)  
Al Lopez -- 61 games (1 season)  
Phil Niekro - 56 games (2 seasons)  
Satchel Paige -- 52 games (2 seasons)  
Dave Winfield - 46 games (1 season)  
Hoyt Wilhelm - 32 games (2 seasons)  
Hal Newhouser - 28 games (2 seasons)  
Jack Morris - 23 games (1 season)  
Steve Carlton - 23 games (1 season)  
Indians managers in Cooperstown, as player or manager:  
Nap Lajoie (1905-09) -- 377W-309L  
Tris Speaker (1919-26) -- 617-520  
Walter Johnson (1933-35) -- 179-168  
Lou Boudreau (1942-1950) -- 728-649  
Al Lopez (1951-56) -- 570-354  
Joe Gordon (1958-60) -- 184-151  
Frank Robinson (1975-77) -- 186-189

**Jim Thome's power and decency were both extraordinary: Bill Livingston**

By Bill Livingston, The Plain Dealer [blivingston@plained.com](mailto:blivingston@plained.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Jim Thome played in Peoria.

Really. The Cleveland Indians' newest Baseball Hall of Famer grew up playing baseball and basketball in the Illinois city that in vaudeville days was a symbol of mainstream America.

"How will it play in Peoria?" politicians wondered, commissioning polls to find out the way Everyman viewed a policy proposal.

Advertisers used it as a test market.

Peoria was considered the home of ordinary, salt of the earth Americans before small town life was Disney-fied on Main Street in the Happiest Place on Earth.

A happy man in a dark clubhouse

Actually, that place was anywhere in the vicinity of Thome's locker.

On the Indians teams of the 1990s, with Albert Belle the scowling face of the franchise, Thome was a bastion of calm in the stormy weather, a decent, humble man who said his Tribe hitting coach, friend and future manager Charlie Manuel, "saw something in me that I didn't."

Hours of work in the batting cage, taking cut after cut as Manuel knelt nearby, flipping the ball and counseling him on swing mechanics, eventually made the left-handed Thome a power hitter for all the world to see.

Kingman and Omar

His character is as admirable as his physical strength. As a boy, Thome slipped into the Chicago Cubs' clubhouse at Wrigley Field one afternoon, seeking the autograph of a big swinging slugger named Dave Kingman, No. 21 on the linked list of baseball jerks, a man who was like Thome but for his surliness, arrogance, and lack of friends. That was partially because he once sent a rat he named Sue to a female reporter with that name.

Thome never met Kingman, being escorted out of the dugout, but the futile quest for the autograph led to Thome's inability to refuse any autograph request after he made the big leagues.

In 1994, after the fifth game ever played at Progressive (then Jacobs) Field, a young impressionable Thome saw Omar Vizquel, who would become an 11-time Gold Glove winner at shortstop, answer every question from the reporters clustered around his locker. In the game, Vizquel had made an almost unthinkable three errors.

This is how a real pro treats people. This is how a real pro does his job, Thome thought.

As a result, no one was ever spurned, cursed, or insulted by Thome. That was true whether the interviews occurred after disappointing results or after one of his 612 home runs, eighth all time, with 337 home of them slammed with Cleveland.

Rocky, the statue, and Cooperstown

He hit them all with not a tendril of a cloud of realistic steroid suspicion casting a shadow over him.

Thome already has a statue at Progressive Field, depicting him in his trademark, one-handed take on Rocky Colavito, pointing the barrel of his bat straight at a pitcher.

Pressured by the players union to take every last dollar as a free agent from the Philadelphia Phillies, Thome, after vowing, "They will have to tear the (Indians) uniform off my back," left and became a baseball vagabond. He played with six teams, including two stints here.

None of that matters on his big day.

Fellow players knew him as a good teammate.

Baseball voters saluted him as an elite power hitter.

On a team marred by the rudeness of Belle, Thome lived his life according to an old precept that still plays in Peoria and everywhere else, one often idealized, but seldom realized. It is so valuable and untarnished that we call it the Golden Rule.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 01.25.2018

### **Baseball Hall of Fame 2018: Jim Thome's 12 most memorable moments with the Cleveland Indians**

Chuck Crow, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Baseball's Hall of Fame has called for Jim Thome, and the legendary Cleveland Indians slugger is now set to be immortalized alongside the greats of the game in late July.

Few players have connected with fans in the history of the Indians franchise the way Thome did during his career in Cleveland. His tape-measure home runs, steady demeanor and consistent play were the hallmark of the Tribe's incredible run of success in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

As Thome prepares to enter the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, here is a look back at some of his most memorable moments in an Indians uniform.

First home run: an upper-decker

Thome's first big league home run came in his 25th career game on Oct. 4, 1991 in Yankee Stadium. Thome drove an 0-1 pitch from Yankees reliever Steve Farr into the upper deck in right field, driving in Reggie Jefferson to give the Indians a 3-2 lead in the top of the ninth inning.

"The moment kind of stops, if that makes sense," Thome told cleveland.com during a 2016 interview. "The moment stops and you're like, 'OK. I want to do that again.' That's what keeps you coming back."

First career walk-off home run

It was June 15, 1994. With one out and the bases empty in the bottom of the 13th inning, Thome delivered his first career walk-off home run, tattooing a Scott Brow pitch over the fence to give the Indians a 4-3 win against Toronto. Thome would go on to hit 13 career walk-off homers, the most in the majors. Hall of Famers Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Jimmie Foxx, Stan Musial and Frank Robinson all had 12.

The game-changer

With the Indians trailing, 2-1, in the bottom of the sixth inning of Game 5 of the 1995 American League Championship Series, Thome crushed a two-run shot off Seattle's Chris Bosio down the right field line at Jacobs Field. The Indians claimed Game 5 and proceeded to win the series and advance to the Fall Classic.

The longest ever

Thome's prodigious blast off Kansas City's Don Wengert on July 3, 1999 traveled out of the park, 511 feet to dead center field. The baseball bounced onto Eagle Ave. It is still regarded as the longest drive in ballpark history.

## **Cooperstown comes calling for Cleveland Indians' Jim Thome**

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The small-town guy with the big swing is headed to another small town.

Jim Thome, who used to drive around the streets of Peoria, Ill., looking for a baseball game to play in, is headed to baseball's ultimate small town -- Cooperstown, N.Y.

Thome was one of four players elected to the Hall of Fame on Wednesday by the Baseball Writers Association of America. Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman were also elected.

The four new inductees join Alan Trammell and Jack Morris in July at Cooperstown. Trammell and Morris were elected by the the veterans committee in December.

Thome was named on 89.8 percent of the 422 ballots cast. A player had to receive 75 percent of the vote (317 votes) to be elected. Thome is just the second first-ballot Hall of Famer in Indians history.

Omar Vizquel, Thome's teammate in Cleveland, made a good showing with 37 percent of the vote. Vizquel, like Thome, was appearing on the ballot for the first time.

Jones, Atlanta's switch-hitting third baseman, received 97.2 percent of the vote, while Guerrero came in at 92.9 percent and Hoffman 89.8 percent. Seattle DH Edgar Martinez just missed at 70.4 percent of the vote.

Thome, on MLB Network, said it wasn't just power that put him in the Hall.

"It comes down to sweat-equity," said Thome. "All the time you're working in the cage."

He also credited former Tribe manager and hitting coach Charlie Manuel.

"I wouldn't be here without Charlie or my dad," said Thome.

The Indians drafted Thome in 1989 in the 13th round out of Illinois State College. It took him a while to get going, but when he did there was no stopping him. Thome enters Cooperstown with 612 homers, eighth in history. He hit over half of them (337) with the Indians.

One of the keys to Thome's success was a suggestion by Manuel that he open his stance. Thome, a left-handed hitter, had a closed stance because he liked to hit the ball to left and left center field.

When Thome opened his stance, he started driving the ball to all parts of the field.

"He started hitting the ball all over the park after that," said Manuel on MLB Network. "This is one of the best days of my life."

Thome loved the big moment. He hit 17 homers in the postseason and 13 walk-off homers in his career.

He hit 20 or more homers in 16 different seasons. Six times he hit 40 or more in a season. He owns the longest homer in Progressive Field history, a 511-foot drive that left the ballpark on July 3, 1999 against Kansas City.

Thome came up as a third baseman, but moved to first in 1997 when the Indians acquired Matt Williams. The Indians went to the World Series, losing to the Marlins in seven games that year.

Over 22 seasons, Thome hit .276 with 1,699 RBI. He drew the seventh most walks (1,747) and second most strikeouts (2,548) in history.

Jones was the NL MVP in 1999 and hit .301 in his career. When he retired, he had 2,726 hits, including 498 homers, in 19 seasons with the Braves. He was appearing on the ballot for the first time.

Guerrero gained entry in his second year on the ballot. He was the AL MVP with the Angels in 2004 in a career than spanned 16 seasons. Guerrero, who had a great throwing arm from right field, won eight Silver Slugger awards.

Hoffman saved 601 games, second most in history. Marioano Rivera leads with 652. He pitched 18 seasons.

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## **Ex-Twin Jim Thome blasts his way into Cooperstown**

By MIKE BERARDINO | PUBLISHED: January 24, 2018

Jim Thome played just 7 percent of his 2,543 career games in a Twins uniform, but the chance to befriend the late Harmon Killebrew as a member of the organization in 2010-11 still ranks as a career highlight.

"I don't think you'd meet a finer man than Harmon," Thome said Wednesday after being elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame on his first try. "I never had a chance to really meet Stan Musial, but you hear stories that two of the finest men that ever put a uniform on were Harmon and Stan."

Thome, who ranks eighth all-time with 612 career home runs, used to hear stories about Killebrew from his mentor Charlie Manuel as he came up through the Cleveland Indians system. Manuel, who played with Killebrew near the end of the Hall of Fame slugger's career, boosted a young Thome's confidence by comparing the majestic arc of his shots to those of the Twins legend.

"Charlie used to tell me all the time that the greatest thing about Harmon was he'd hit these high pop-ups and they'd just keep going and going and going," Thome said. "And I'd hit a ball like that, and he'd go, 'Aw, man, you remind me of Harmon.'"



One of four players elected this year by the Baseball Writers' Association of America, the 47-year-old Thome becomes the ninth former Twins player to reach Cooperstown. In addition to 1991 World Series hero Jack Morris, voted in last month by the Modern Baseball Era Committee, Thome joins Killebrew as well as Twins manager Paul Molitor, Dave Winfield, Rod Carew, Bert Blyleven, Steve Carlton and the late Kirby Puckett.

Yet, it's Killebrew, who finished with 573 homers and died on May 17, 2011 at age 74, who made the biggest impression on Thome.

"I feel so lucky that I got to cross paths and be, I guess, a friend, and have him just be him," Thome said. "He would come to spring training, and it was almost this surreal, iconic figure that was just there. I caught myself many times honestly just, like, staring at him."

Besides their prodigious blasts, Thome and Killebrew shared another link in their legendary kindness. A Bunyanesque figure with a boyish grin and a blue-collar personality, Thome made an easy connection with media and fans alike, even in a demanding city like Philadelphia.

A five-time all-star who never finished higher than fourth in league MVP voting, Thome still made an indelible impact at each of his six stops. Helping the Twins open Target Field and win the American League Central title in 2010 and then reaching 600 homers with them the following year made an impression upon him as well.

"The Minnesota time was so special," he said. "I loved the state of Minnesota. Being an outdoorsman, it fit me so well at that time of my career. And the driving force for me after the first year was to make sure I went back there to be able to hit that milestone of 600."

After signing at age 39 for \$1.5 million on Jan. 26, 2010, Thome returned to the Twins on a \$3 million deal the following winter.

"I loved the people there," he said. "They're some of the greatest people. My family absolutely just loved coming there and being there in the summer and watching baseball. When Target Field opened up it electrified that city. I just loved it."

A 13th-round draft pick in 1989 from humble roots in Peoria, Ill., Thome clubbed 37 homers for the Twins and still owns the longest home run at Target Field. That 490-foot blast, according to the Twins' estimate, came on July 17, 2011, against Kansas City Royals right-hander Felipe Paulino.

Sold to the Indians five weeks later, Thome would hit just 16 more homers in the majors before retiring after the 2012 season. He played his final game in a Baltimore Orioles uniform in the American League division series and now works as a special assistant for the Chicago White Sox, for whom he played four seasons (2006-09).

He added Target Field blasts of 454 feet in April 2011 and 459 feet in June 2012 after returning to the Phillies.

Ten of Thome's 22 teams reached the postseason, where he hit another 17 home runs in 71 games. He played in the World Series with the Indians in 1995 and 1997 but lost each time.

His 13 walk-off homers are the most in big-league history and his 1,747 walks rank seventh. His 2,548 strikeouts trail only Reggie Jackson, but he reached base at a .402 clip.

Two-time Cy Young Award winner Johan Santana, voted into the Twins' Hall of Fame last week, failed to receive the 5 percent voting support required to remain on the ballot. Santana was named on just 10 of 422 ballots cast.

Pioneer Press LOADED: 01.25.2018

## **Chipper Jones and Jim Thome Lead Large Class Into Baseball Hall of Fame**

By TYLER KEPNER/JAN. 24, 2018

The Baseball Hall of Fame has rarely had a class like this. On Wednesday it welcomed four new members — Chipper Jones, Jim Thome, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman — in voting by the baseball writers. A smaller committee elected two other players, Jack Morris and Alan Trammell, in December.

The six living inductees match the most ever, and will be honored for their playing careers at a ceremony in Cooperstown, N.Y., in July. The only other class of newcomers with six living player-inductees was in 1955, when Home Run Baker, Joe DiMaggio, Gabby Hartnett, Ted Lyons, Ray Schalk and Dazzy Vance made it.

This year's class was nearly even bigger — Edgar Martinez missed induction by 20 votes, collecting 70.4 percent of ballots from the 422 voting members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Others who gained more than half the votes, but fell short of the 75 percent threshold for induction, were Mike Mussina (63.5 percent), Roger Clemens (57.3), Barry Bonds (56.4) and Curt Schilling (51.2).

Bonds is the career home run leader and Clemens is the only pitcher in history with 350 wins and 4,000 strikeouts. But both have ties to performance-enhancing drug use, and failed to gain election on their sixth try. Candidates can remain on the ballot for 10 years, as long as they receive at least 5 percent of the vote. Manny Ramirez, a slugger who served two drug suspensions, received only 22 percent in his second year as a candidate.

Jones and Thome appeared on the ballot for the first time, and both gained entry easily, Jones with 97.2 percent and Thome with 89.8. Guerrero (92.9 percent) and Hoffman (79.9) made it on their second try.

Jones played 19 seasons for the Atlanta Braves, hitting .303 with a .401 on-base percentage and a .529 slugging percentage. Only two other switch-hitters, Mickey Mantle and Eddie Murray, hit more homers than Jones's 468.

Jones won the National League Most Valuable Player Award in 1999 and led the Braves past the Mets in the N.L. Championship Series that October. He had torched the Mets for a .400 average in that regular season, and famously named his son Shea in honor of the Mets' old ballpark.

Thome slammed 612 home runs across 22 seasons, including 13 years with the Cleveland Indians. He ranks eighth in home runs — and second in strikeouts, to Reggie Jackson — and his .956 on-base plus slugging percentage trails only 15 retired hitters on the career list.

While Thome appeared in the postseason for five franchises — the Indians, the Chicago White Sox, the Minnesota Twins, the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Baltimore Orioles — he did not get there with the Philadelphia Phillies, who signed him away from Cleveland with a lucrative

free agent offer in Dec. 2002. Even so, the Phillies honored Thome with a plaque in their Wall of Fame, and the Indians built a statue of him at their ballpark.

Guerrero was the last superstar for the Montreal Expos, electrifying the franchise for most of its final seasons. He moved to the Angels in 2004 (the Expos left for Washington a year later), and won the American League's M.V.P. award in his first season in Anaheim. After six years there, Guerrero made an All-Star team for the Texas Rangers and helped lead them to their first A.L. championship, in 2010.

A fast runner in his early years, with an overpowering right field arm, Guerrero could hit nearly any pitch in any location; he was a classic "bad-ball" hitter, like the old Yankees catcher Yogi Berra. Only five players can match Guerrero's career figures in both batting average (.318) and home runs (449): Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ted Williams, Jimmie Foxx and Stan Musial.

Hoffman retired in 2010 as the career saves leader, with 601; only Mariano Rivera has passed him since. Hoffman, who was drafted as an infielder by the Cincinnati Reds, reached the majors with the expansion Florida Marlins in 1993 and was traded that summer to the San Diego Padres. He earned 552 saves for the Padres, and his changeup — one of the best in history — helped him average 9.4 strikeouts per nine innings.

Hoffman joins Hoyt Wilhelm, Rollie Fingers, Bruce Sutter, Goose Gossage and Dennis Eckersley as the only pitchers in the Hall of Fame who primarily worked in relief. Rivera, who retired in 2013, comes up for election in December, with Roy Halladay, Andy Pettitte, Todd Helton and Lance Berkman among the other first-time candidates.

#### **New York Times LOADED: 01.25.2018**

#### **White Sox slugger Jim Thome gets Baseball Hall of Fame call**

Scot Gregor

Jim Thome is going to Cooperstown.

The left-handed slugger, who ranks No. 8 all-time with 612 home runs, was voted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame by the Baseball Writers' Association of America on Wednesday, his first year on the ballot.

Needing a minimum of 75 percent of the vote for enshrinement, Thome was elected with 89.8 percent of the vote.

Also joining Thome in the Hall of Fame are infielder Chipper Jones (97.2 percent), outfielder Vladimir Guerrero (92.9), and relief pitcher Trevor Hoffman (79.9 percent).

Edgar Martinez fell 19 votes short, with 317 votes needed for induction.

Now working as a special assistant to Chicago White Sox general manager Rick Hahn, Thome played 22 major-league seasons for the Cleveland Indians (1991-2002), Philadelphia Phillies (2003-05), White Sox (2006-09), Dodgers ('09), Minnesota Twins (2010-11), Indians ('11), Phillies (2012) and Baltimore Orioles ('12).

The Peoria native ranks No. 7 all-time in career walks (1,747), No. 18 in OPS (.956), No. 26 in RBI (1,699), No. 41 in total bases (4,667) and No. 51 in runs scored (1,583).

While Thome will enter the Hall of Fame in July representing the Indians, he made a big impact on the Sox after being acquired in a Nov. 25, 2005 trade from the Phillies for Aaron Rowand and Gio Gonzalez.

In 529 games with the White Sox, Thome posted a hitting line of .265/.391/.542 with 134 home runs and 369 RBI. In the 2008 division tiebreaker game against the Twins, Thome's homer was the difference in a 1-0 win that sent the Sox to the playoffs.

On Sept. 16, 2007, Thome hit his 500th career home run off the Angels' Dustin Moseley at U.S. Cellular Field.

• Check back later for Scot Gregor's full report with Thome's reaction to being inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 01.25.2018

#### **Jim Thome credits Peoria roots for path to Hall of Fame**

Paul Sullivan

After knocking out three home runs in a game against the White Sox in the summer of 1994, Indians third baseman Jim Thome was thinking about his family and friends back home in Peoria.

"They're probably dancing in the streets," he said afterward.

Twenty-four years later, the dancing began anew as the former Tribune All-Stater from Bartonville-Limestone High was voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Thome and Braves third baseman Chipper Jones cruised into the Hall on their first year of eligibility, joining slugger Vladimir Guerrero and closer Trevor Hoffman, who got in on their second and third years on the ballot, respectively.

Thome, who currently serves the White Sox as a special assistant to general manager Rick Hahn, played for six teams in his 22-year-career, including the Sox, but never forgot the people who helped make it happen.

"Everything starts at your roots," Thome said Wednesday after learning the news. "I'm proud that I grew up where I did. Peoria is a special place... It's where it all started. Every Midwest kid can dream of a day like this, and I'm living it today."

Thome and the other three inductees will join Jack Morris and Alan Trammell, who the Baseball Writers' Association of America rejected during their years on the ballot before the Modern Era committee selected them last December.

The numbers of the newest members of the Hall speak for themselves. Thome is eighth on the all-time home run list with 612, while Jones was the best switch hitter of his era, averaging 32 home runs and 107 RBIs with a .961 OPS during an eight-year span from 1996-2003.

Hoffman's 601 career saves are second to Mariano Rivera, a surefire first-ballot Hall of Famer next year, and Guerrero finished with a career average of .318 while slugging 449 home runs and using his cannon arm to gun down baserunners from right field.

Thanks to the online Hall of Fame tracker, we already knew Thome, Jones, Guerrero and Hoffman were good bets to get in. Jones wound up with 97.2 percent, leading the pack, while Thome finished third with 89.8 percent. There were 422 ballots cast, including one blank one, down from 442 in 2017.

The only real question was whether Mariners designated hitter Edgar Martinez would join them. Though he came close with 70.4 percent, Martinez just missed the necessary 75 percent cutoff. He figures to get in next year in his final year of eligibility, along with Rivera and perhaps starting pitcher Mike Mussina.

As for Hall of Famer Joe Morgan's controversial "steroid" letter to BBWAA voters last fall, it didn't seem to have much of an effect on the electorate, which always had been divided on whether PED-tainted superstars Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens belonged.

Morgan's letter said: "We hope the day never comes when known steroid users are voted into the Hall of Fame. They cheated. Steroid users don't belong here."

After six years on the ballot, Bonds and Clemens remain a ways off, with Clemens picking up three votes (from 239 to 242) and Bonds remaining the same at 238. In 2013, their first year of eligibility, Bonds was at 36.2 percent, while Clemens was at 37.6 percent. Now they're at 56.4 percent and 57.3 percent, respectively, with four more shots at a spot in Cooperstown.

Former Cubs slugger Sammy Sosa wound up with 33 votes (7.8 percent), down from 38 last year. The meager total keeps Sosa on the ballot at least one more year, prolonging the inevitable.

Last week I asked Cubs great Billy Williams if Morgan spoke for him and the rest of the Hall of Famers with the "steroid" letter.

"All the players, this is what we think," Williams replied. "We talk about it at the Hall of Fame, and he just sent a letter to us that this is what we're going to send to the writers."

Isn't it likely some alleged cheaters already are in the Hall?

"They're in already," Williams admitted. "But it's a letter you (writers) are having a problem with. They don't know about (whether to vote in) the steroid guys. We're just giving you guys an outlet, to ease your conscience knowing this is how we feel. We don't vote."

I told Williams Morgan should have had all of the Hall of Famers sign the letter if he wanted it to have more impact. Nevertheless, the voters seemingly are entrenched in their views on Bonds and Clemens, with little movement this year.

Two players picking up momentum in '18 were Mussina and Curt Schilling. Mussina went from 51.8 percent to 63.5 percent in his fifth year, and Schilling from 45 percent to 51.2 percent in his sixth. Schilling was at 52.3 percent in 2016 but dropped down last year after sharing on Twitter a photo that suggested journalists should be lynched.

Omar Vizquel, the perennial Gold Glove-winning shortstop, garnered 37 percent in his first year, which bodes well for his chances down the road.

As for the other Chicago candidates, Jamie Moyer, Kerry Wood and Carlos Zambrano were all one-and-done on the ballot, failing to get the necessary 5 percent in their first years of eligibility to be listed again in 2019.

Moyer had 10 votes, Wood received two votes, while Zambrano was shut out.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 01.25.2018

### **New Hall of Famer Jim Thome's memorable moments with White Sox**

Chris Kuc

Jim Thome played all but 529 of his 2,543 career games wearing different uniforms, yet the burly Peoria native provided plenty of memorable moments as a member of the White Sox.

Thome's tenure with the Sox lasted four seasons from 2006-09, and while they were not the most productive of his career, they helped him earn induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame on Wednesday.

In his first year of eligibility, Thome garnered 379 votes, or 89.8 percent of the 422 ballots with 75 percent needed for election. He joins a four-man class including Chipper Jones (410 votes), Vladimir Guerrero (392) and Trevor Hoffman (337) that will be inducted into the Hall in Cooperstown, N.Y., on July 29.

At 35 and in his first season on the South Side after being acquired in a trade with the Phillies, Thome earned his fifth and final All-Star Game appearance and finished the year with a .288 average, 42 home runs and 109 RBIs.

The next season, Thome launched the 500th of his 612 career home runs — a walk-off blast on Sept. 16 that gave the Sox a dramatic 9-7 victory over Angels before a jubilant crowd of 29,010 at U.S. Cellular Field. To top it off, it was Jim Thome Bobblehead Day at the ballpark.

"It's amazing, it really is — like a movie script," Thome said. "I would never have imagined doing it in that situation."

Maintaining a flair for the dramatic, Thome blasted one of the most memorable homers in franchise history when he plated the Sox's lone run during the "Blackout Game," the Sept. 30, 2008 American League Central Division tiebreaker against the Twins. Thome led off the seventh inning of a scoreless game before a crowd of 40,354 at U.S. Cellular Field — most of them dressed in black as a show of support for the home team — with a titanic home run off Nick Blackburn to straightaway center field that traveled an estimated 461 feet. Along with a combined two-hitter from left-hander John Danks and closer Bobby Jenks, the homer was enough to lead the Sox to a 1-0 victory and their second postseason appearance in four seasons.

"There's no better feeling," Thome said afterward. "This is what you live for."

Before Thome's Sox career ended with an Aug. 31, 2009 trade to the Dodgers, he had amassed 134 homers and 369 RBIs with a .265 average during his stint in Chicago.

Thome rejoined the Sox in 2013 as a special assistant to general manager Rick Hahn and shortly after Wednesday's Hall announcement spoke of his fondness for the organization and its top executives.

"I love Jerry Reinsdorf, I love Rick Hahn (and) Kenny Williams," Thome said via a conference call. "They have taught me so much in the areas of the game that I basically didn't know as a player. Now being on the other side, I see both sides of it and I love the fans. I love the White Sox. I love the White Sox organization. They always have treated me with the utmost respect."

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### **Rosenthal: Why teams aren't biting on Yelich; Yankees' choices; explaining Indians' inactivity; more notes**

By Ken Rosenthal Jan 24, 2018

Pick a top prospect, any top prospect. Now ask yourself this question: Would you trade him straight-up for Miami Marlins outfielder Christian Yelich?

The answer logically would be yes, considering a prospect is under control for six years while Yelich is already established at 26 and under control at club-friendly salaries for five. But in today's value-crazed baseball environment, nothing is as simple as it seems.

Here's the problem with making Atlanta Braves outfielder Ronald Acuna, Toronto Blue Jays third baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. or any other top prospect the centerpiece of a Yelich trade: While a team would be acquiring certainty over uncertainty, the depressed state of the free agent market enables clubs to sign players at below-market rates and still keep their best youngsters.

Most of the remaining free agents are not as good as Yelich, who batted .282 with 18 home runs and an .807 OPS last season while also contributing above-average defense and baserunning. But for a team such as the Blue Jays, Yelich might only mean the difference between say, 84 and 87 wins. Guerrero, who is not yet 19 but already shows freakish power and plate discipline, might be the Jays' next big star, even if his Miguel Sano-type frame eventually necessitates a move to first base.

Acuna draws comparisons to Mike Trout for his power, plate discipline and ability to play center field — the Braves are not giving him up. Brinson is lower on the prospect lists due to inconsistency and injuries, but the Brewers would not part with him for Sonny Gray or Jose Quintana last summer.

Maybe the Brewers' thinking is changing due to their surplus of young outfielders, and a report from Sirius XM's Craig Mish on Tuesday night said they are indeed showing strong interest in Yelich. The team's Fan Fest is this weekend, and owner Mark Attanasio seems eager to make a splash, perhaps with Yelich, perhaps with a free agent such as outfielder Lorenzo Cain or right-hander Yu Darvish, perhaps with a combination of moves. But the Brewers, like other interested clubs, might talk themselves out of Yelich, too.

Two rival executives on Tuesday night mentioned Yelich's groundball rate as problematic — he has ranked in the top six in the majors in that department in each of the past four seasons, making it unlikely he suddenly will transform into a 30-homer man. One of the execs also noted Yelich's .704 career OPS was not nearly as good as his .855 mark against righties.

Nitpicking? To some degree, yes. But the Marlins reportedly want superstar value for a player who might not be a superstar. Yelich's age, contract and skill make him attractive to contenders and non-contenders, high- and low-revenue clubs. But when a team trades a top prospect, it also trades the chance to sign that player to a long-term extension similar to the one the Marlins awarded Yelich.

Some execs question whether the Marlins are truly motivated to move Yelich, even though his agent, Joe Longo, recently told ESPN that the relationship between player and club is "irretrievably broken." The bigger question, though, might be whether the Marlins can get the monster return they desire for their top remaining asset. It won't be easy as it seems.

#### Choices abound for Yankees

While it's unlikely the New York Yankees will go with less established players at both second and third base, it's not out of the question, either. The team's recent contact with free agents has been minimal, according to major league sources, though general manager Brian Cashman might simply be waiting for prices to fall.

As it stands, the Yankees could go with a combination of Ronald Torreyes and Gleyber Torres at second, start Miguel Andujar at third and use Tyler Wade in both the infield and outfield. Yankees officials remain high on Wade — they have resisted trade interest in him this winter, believing he did not get enough of a shot in the majors last season, sources say.

Free agent third baseman Todd Frazier would still appear an excellent fit, offering two things Andujar would not, veteran presence and defensive stability. The Yankees, though, view Andujar as a hitter who might make an immediate impact. They just do not know if his defense would be adequate enough right away.

#### Giants not necessarily done

The San Francisco Giants' signing of free agent outfielder Austin Jackson to a two-year, \$6 million contract seemingly was made with the intention of creating an opening for top prospect Steven Duggar, who would form the left-handed part of a platoon with Jackson in center field.

The only problem: Duggar might not be ready for such a role.

The Giants expected Duggar, their sixth-round pick out of Clemson in 2015, to contribute at the major-league level last season. But Duggar missed the first 2 1/2 months with forearm and hamstring injuries, and wound up appearing in only 44 minor-league games.

While Duggar reached Triple A and performed well in the Arizona Fall League, he enters the season with only 330 minor-league plate appearances above Class A. The Giants, not wanting to rush him unnecessarily even as they seek to remain under the \$197 million luxury-tax threshold, still intend to monitor affordable left-handed hitting candidates for center.

"We're in not in a position to shut down all of our discussions, all of our options," general manager Bobby Evans said. "(The Jackson signing) makes it less likely, but I wouldn't say it eliminates our desire to still add if there's a good fit for us. We're trying to be prepared either way on Duggar, whether he's ready or not ready. That's our mindset."

Where are the Indians?

Jackson marked the latest departure from a Cleveland team that previously had lost five other free agents — first baseman Carlos Santana, outfielder Jay Bruce and relievers Bryan Shaw, Joe Smith and Boone Logan. First baseman Yonder Alonso, the replacement for Santana, is the only significant addition, but most of the Indians planning for 2018 was done long ago.

The Indians' multi-year approach to roster building included the trade for left-handed reliever Andrew Miller, signing of free agent designated hitter Edwin Encarnacion and extensions for right-handers Corey Kluber and Carlos Carrasco, among others. The Opening Day payroll, currently projecting to \$130 million-plus, is expected to be the highest in club history.

As for the Indians' free agent departures, perception is not quite reality. Only Santana, Shaw and Jackson were with the club all of last season, and Jackson had arrived on a minor league deal. The Indians traded for Bruce and Smith; Michael Brantley, if healthy, will replace Bruce, and the Indians' bullpen will be quite deep even without Smith and Logan.

Which isn't to say the Indians are opposed to adding another reliever, knowing Miller and closer Cody Allen are eligible for free agency after this season. The team also would like to add a right-handed hitting outfielder, but barring a trade of second baseman Jason Kipnis or right-hander Danny Salazar, its financial flexibility will remain minimal.

Donaldson's edge over Harper

Toronto Blue Jays third baseman Josh Donaldson and Washington Nationals right fielder Bryce Harper share similarities beyond their respective 2015 MVP awards. Both are in the same service class and were eligible for four years of arbitration instead of the standard three.

So, how is it that Donaldson will enter free agency at the end of the season having earned a combined \$55.95 million during his arbitration years while Harper lagged behind at \$42.75 million?

Donaldson's agent, Dan Lozano of the MVP Sports Group, obviously deserves some credit — Donaldson's \$23 million salary this season will be a record for an arbitration-eligible player. Harper's offensive performance, though, probably should have put him ahead of Donaldson financially — he had a .937 OPS to Donaldson's .906 from 2014 to '17.

The discrepancy in earnings stems in large part from a dispute the Nationals had with Harper's agent, Scott Boras, over whether the Nats included language in Harper's initial draft deal enabling him to opt out of his negotiated 2015 salary and into arbitration.

Rather than go to a grievance they might have lost, Boras and Harper accepted a two-year, \$7.5 million deal, with two more years of arbitration to follow. Thus, Harper started from behind and never caught up — a player's salary in arbitration ascends like a staircase, with each number built upon the other.

Don't cry for Harper, though — he earned \$8.9 million in his draft deal and will enter the free-agent market at 26. Donaldson also will be part of the great class of 2018-19, entering the market at 33.

And finally . . .

Think this year's free agent market is troubling from the players' perspective? Next year's might prove even worse for the middle class.

A number of the remaining 130-plus free agents will end up with one-year deals, putting them back on the market next offseason. Thus, the supply-demand equation figures to be even more tilted in the clubs' favor, enabling them to apply an even tighter squeeze.

The New York Yankees, Los Angeles Dodgers and other clubs trying to reset their luxury-tax penalty rate will be in play for top-end talent — Harper, Donaldson, Manny Machado, Clayton Kershaw if he opts out, Charlie Blackmon, Craig Kimbrel, Andrew Miller.

But the lesser free agents — the ones who figure to suffer most this offseason — are not likely to get relief anytime soon.