CHAPTER 1

The Slugger

(or, Why Power Rules)

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In 1985 you couldn't hit in Dodger Stadium. Just couldn't be done. Singles? Sure. Doubles, triples, homers? Forget it. The foul territory was vast, which meant tepid pop-outs by the bushel. The hitting visuals—the shadows, the hue of the outfield walls in the Los Angeles sun—were brutal, and rumors had persisted since the days of Sandy Koufax that the groundskeepers at Chavez Ravine would illegally heighten the mound when an especially potent offense paid a visit. It just wasn't the place for a hitter. Unless you were Pedro Guerrero.

That season, Guerrero spent time at first base, third base, and the outfield corners, but despite being yanked about the diamond, he put together the best season of what was to be a 15-year career. Guerrero, although playing in one of the toughest environments for hitters in the league, paced the National League in on-base (OBP) and slugging percentage (SLG) and finished second to Willie McGee of the Cardinals for the batting title. At one point during the season, Guerrero reached base in fourteen consecutive plate appearances. He also tied a major league record (held by Babe Ruth, Roger Maris, and Bob Johnson) by hitting 15 homers in the month of June, and his tally of 33 home runs for the season tied the Los Angeles Dodger record set by Steve Garvey in 1977. Away from Dodger Stadium, Guerrero slugged .665, almost

300 points higher than the National League average that season. What Guerrero did was cobble together one of the great power seasons of all time.

The Indians originally signed Guerrero in 1973 out of the Dominican Republic as a 17-year-old, slightly built shortstop. However, following Guerrero's first season as a pro—one in which he managed to hit only two home runs the entire year for the farm club at Sarasota—the Indians, in a stunningly ill-considered deal, traded him to the Dodgers for pitcher Bruce Ellingsen, who would log a grand total of 42 major league innings in his career. Guerrero, meanwhile, began heaping a multitude of abuses upon opposing pitchers. He broke into the majors as a replacement at second base for the injured Davey Lopes, and Guerrero started hitting almost immediately. In '81 he slugged .762 in the World Series and rang up five RBI in the decisive sixth game. He and third baseman Ron Cey shared Series MVP honors.

The following season, Guerrero became the first player in Dodger history to hit 30 home runs and steal 20 bases in the same season. The next year, he turned the trick once again. If not for Guerrero's maddening penchant for injury, he'd have likely put together a Hall of Fame career. In '77 he missed most of the Triple-A season with a broken ankle. In '80 he injured his knee in one of his famously violent slides (he didn't so much slide as heave himself in the general direction of the bag) and missed the final two months of the season (it was after that injury that manager Tommy Lasorda retrenched Guerrero's base stealing). In '84 it was an ailing shoulder. In '85 it was a sprained wrist, and in '86 it was a ruptured tendon in his knee. Guerrero came back potently in 1987, slugging .539, walking 74 times, and posting the highest batting average by a Dodger since Tommy Davis in 1962. For his efforts the UPI bestowed upon him the Comeback Player of the Year Award. However, Guerrero once again landed on the DL in '88, this time with a pinched nerve, and the Dodgers sent him to St. Louis for lefty John Tudor. Guerrero, it turned out, had another season in him. In 1989, for an otherwise inconsequential Cardinals team, he batted .300, led the NL in doubles with 42, and posted the league's sixth-best OBP. Yet another shoulder injury limited him to 43 games in 1992, and he opted for retirement after the season. He left the game with a career batting line of .300 AVG/.370 OBP/.480 SLG, and 215 home runs.

In retirement, Guerrero met with trouble. On September 29, 1999, he and longtime friend Adan Cruz met with three men at a Miami

restaurant to arrange a $200,000 cocaine deal. Unbeknownst to Guerrero, the three men he and Cruz liased with were two informants and one undercover DEA agent. Prosecutors would later argue that Guerrero agreed to guarantee payment for the shipment. One of the informants, who was wearing a wire, told Guerrero that he would deliver "15 little animals" to Cruz and that Guerrero would ensure that Cruz delivered the money. "If he doesn't show up," Guerrero allegedly replied, "I'll take care of that."

The following day, the informant called Guerrero, told him the cocaine was ready, and said, "You're on the hook if he [Cruz] doesn't pay."

"Fine, fine, okay," said Guerrero. "No problem."

The next day, agents delivered the faux coke to Cruz and arrested him at a grocery store near Guerrero's house. Later that same day, Guerrero and another accomplice were arrested. Guerrero soon posted his $100,000 bond.

While out on bail, he met with further controversy. In October, acquitted (wink, wink) murderer and former NFL star O. J. Simpson phoned police in South Florida and told them his girlfriend 26-year-old Christie Prody (who presumably had never performed even a cursory, fact-finding Google search on her new boyfriend) was in the midst of a two-day cocaine bender with Guerrero. "We have a problem here," Simpson told the 911 operator. "I'm trying to get a girl to go to rehab. . . . She's been doing drugs for two days with Pedro Guerrero, who just got arrested for cocaine, and I'm trying to get her to leave her house and go into rehab right now."

Police responded to Prody's house but found only Simpson, who told them Prody had left. Simpson also told police that he and Prody had suffered a "verbal dispute" before she departed. The cops, in what's surely one of the most hollow gestures in the history of recorded time, gave Simpson a brochure on domestic violence and then left. Simpson would later deny telling police that Prody had been on a coke binge with Guerrero. Instead, Simpson claimed he had been trying to get help for one of Prody's friends who went by the name "Pinky."

With the Simpson-Prody flap behind him, Guerrero was ready for his trial on drug conspiracy charges. Guerrero's attorney, Milton Hirsch, mustered a surprising defense by arguing that his client had been an unwitting dupe in the whole thing. The crux of Hirsch's case

was that Guerrero was, in essence, a man-child lacking the faculties to participate meaningfully in such an affair. "He never really understood that he was being asked to involve himself in a drug deal," Hirsch told the jury.

According to the defense, Guerrero's IQ was a mere 70. Some psychometric specialists say that those testing at an IQ level between 60 and 75 would have significant difficulty in being educated beyond a sixth-to-eighth-grade range. Hirsch said that Guerrero had little functional ability in the real world. To wit, he couldn't write a check or make his own bed, and he subsisted off a modest allowance given to him by his wife. True or not, after four hours of deliberation, the jury acquitted Guerrero.

Still, for all of Guerrero's foibles, missteps, and frailties, we as fans, in what's perhaps a frailty of our own, prefer to remember him only as Pedro Guerrero the hitter. And he *was* that.

From the beginning, that's what baseball has been about–the hitter. When the game was in its nascent stages, the pitcher served as little more than an obsequious valet to the batter. Indeed, during various points in the 19th century, pitchers were limited by rules that forced them to throw underhanded; keep both feet in contact with the ground; maintain straightened elbows throughout their delivery; keep their hands below their hips at the point of release; and, for a time, throw pitches according to the specific instructions of the batter (seriously). Of course, by now baseball is drastically different, but in its genesis, it was a game for hitters.

Without getting all Jungian on you, there's probably something about wielding a cudgel that taps into our atavistic, hunter-gatherer notions of lumbering through the forest primeval and overbludgeoning something hairy and dangerous so our hominid family can have dinner that night. Or maybe it's just cool to knock the insides out of stuff. Whatever the underlying reasons, I'd argue that the hitter and his accoutrements sit atop the baseball iconography. Then again . . .

One of baseball's bits of convention that's excruciatingly parroted by fans and media alike is that pitching and defense ultimately hold sway over offense. The observation is likely rooted in the faulty notion that good pitching and sound defense demand lofty levels of intelligence and execution, whereas teams reliant upon run scoring prowess are cut from the "see ball, hit ball" cloth. This is especially true, we're told, in times of critical mass. Pitching-and-defense teams

are more acclimated to the nip-and-tuck environs of the 3–2, 2–0, 1–0 games that seem to flourish when the bunting hangs in October.

Laying aside the extending generalizations, conventional wisdom is mostly correct in this instance. Given the cultural prominence of the hitter—both as an idea and as an individual—it might be surprising to learn that the 124 teams I've studied for this book tend to be more successful at run prevention than run scoring. The imbalance isn't overwhelming, but it's there. Great teams, at least within the confines of recent history, are more often more adept at keeping runs off the board than putting them up.

If the game of baseball is reducible to a single fundament, it's the run—both the run scored and the run allowed. It's this principle that informs many of our best analytical tools. In fact, by plugging runs scored and runs allowed into any of the various Pythagorean-inspired theorems (more on these later), we can predict a team's success in the following season better than we can using that team's won-lost record in the previous year. By extension, runs scored and runs allowed are the best ways to judge offense and defense (and by defense we mean pitching and fielding) on the team level.

It's runs analysis that leads to the conclusion that our pool of 124 playoff teams depended more on good pitching and fielding than hitting to win games. By comparing these teams' park-adjusted runs scored and runs allowed totals and comparing them to their respective league averages, we make some interesting findings:

- Playoff teams since 1980, on average, ranked 3.85 in their respective league in runs allowed and 4.18 in runs scored.
- These teams outperformed league average runs allowed marks by 8.2 percent and runs scored by 7.4 percent.
- Fifteen teams made the postseason despite below-league-average park-adjusted runs-allowed totals, and 17 teams passed playoff muster despite below-average adjusted-runs-scored totals.

It's certainly not a staggering margin, but it is apparent that the teams analyzed were better on the run-prevention side of the ledger than on the run-scoring side. As the data above show, on average these teams ranked higher in runs allowed than in runs scored, they bettered the league averages by a wider margin in runs allowed, and more teams made the playoffs despite suboptimal offensive attacks than with suboptimal pitching and fielding.

So is the hitter as important as we've always believed? In a word, yes. Run prevention may be slightly more crucial to great teams than run scoring is, but examining the "division of labor" of these two elements reveals the prevailing vitality of the hitter. Run prevention is the dual responsibility of the pitcher and the defense behind him. Precisely divvying up who's responsible for exactly how much is a bit of a fool's errand, but we can make some assumptions. Most of the onus is on the pitcher, but a substantial percentage of run prevention falls to the defense. As for run scoring, it's achieved at two places—at the plate and on the bases. While good base running is certainly helpful, it withers in comparison to the contributions of the batter. The upshot is that the hitter, in rough and broad terms, adds more to his team than does the pitcher, the fielder, or the base runner. Of course, value varies widely on an individual basis, but the general truth holds that the batter is the most important player on the diamond. This brings us to the matter of what the hitter does.

Many of those who approach baseball from a traditional mind-set place a great deal of value on clutch performances—those players who, time and again, seem to perform at a high level during critical junctures. Unlike many analysts of my stripe, I happen to believe in the existence of clutch hitters. However, I think it's quite difficult to wield "clutchness" in your favor. That's because by the time we have a meaningful enough data sample to adequately identify clutch hitters, those hitters are usually within hailing distance of retirement. There may be those who can divine clutch hitters in the callow stages, but I've never met them. And that's part of the problem with trying to build a team around this notion. Additionally, the way many fans, analysts, and executives have come to identify clutch performers in particular and hitters in general is profoundly flawed.

Time was when analysts and executives alike used only the hoariest and most familiar of offensive measures—for example, batting average (AVG) and RBI—to evaluate the performance of a hitter. Thanks to pioneers such as Allan Roth (Branch Rickey's trusted statistician) and Bill James, whose early writings served as a "tent revival" of sorts, not only do we know what traditional offensive statistics matter most, but also this knowledge has gained surprising traction over the years. Still, innovation often requires us to break some china, and the downright seditious notion that RBI and batting average were manifestly and greatly inferior to less familiar metrics such as on-base percentage

(OBP) and slugging percentage (SLG) was met with much resistance over the years. By now, however, if someone within the game is relying on the former two at the neglect of the latter two, he or she is either willfully ignorant or baselessly contrary.

That isn't to say that those traditional statistics are completely useless; they're just far less utile than other measures found on almost every stat line. To your rank-and-file fan, understanding some of your more advanced statistics is harder than unscrambling an egg, but we're not talking about those. We're talking about gleaning genuine wisdom about a hitter's performance by using commonplace measures such as OBP, SLG, and plate appearances. While those highfalutin stats (the ones whose acronyms sound like German obscenities) most assuredly have their place–I use them quite often in this very book–you can often approximate the conclusions they provide without needing product documentation to get there.

This leads us to why batting average and RBI–and runs scored, while we're at it–are so overrated and misapplied. There are, broadly speaking, two subsets of standard offensive statistics: counting stats and rate stats. Counting stats are–prepare for stunning lucidity–stats that count things. For example, five triples, 30 homers, 110 RBI, 90 runs scored. Rate stats are percentages: a .300 average, a .400 OBP, a slugging percentage of .500, etc. Both have their uses, and both have their weaknesses. Counting stats are highly dependent upon playing time and, in some cases, lineup slotting and the overall quality of the offense. In the right lineup and during an offensive era, it's perfectly possible to rack up 100 RBI, which is one of the more misleading benchmarks in sports, and still be a generally lousy hitter. If you tell me a hitter has exactly 100 RBI over a full season and revealed nothing else, I could safely surmise he wasn't the worst player in the annals of the game. But that's about it. Any offensive statistic is prone to the foibles of home park and era, but counting stats such as RBI are even more context-dependent and can be greatly influenced by a panoply of factors that have almost nothing to do with a hitter's true abilities.

For instance, Ruben Sierra earned cachet as a "good RBI man"–one of baseball's most revered mythical beasts and the kind of thing that beguiles more than a few mainstream observers–because in the late '80s and early '90s he'd back his ass into a 100-RBI season every other year or so. Still, despite his putting together an 18-year (and counting) major league career, there are only about three seasons in

which I'd have wanted him as a regular on my team. In fact, in 1993 Sierra put together what I believe is the worst 100-RBI season ever. That season he tallied 101 ribbies, but in the process he posted a putrid OBP of .288 and a patently inadequate slugging percentage of .390. Account for the fact that he was a corner outfielder and thus had a greater offensive onus (and account for the fact that he often played right field like a prop comic), and those numbers look even worse. What helped Sierra to ring up all those RBI was that for more than half the season he batted a couple of spots behind Rickey Henderson and his .469 OBP. I don't care how many runs you're driving in, if you're making outs in more than 72 percent of your plate appearances, you're a cipher. Cipher, thy name is '93 Ruben Sierra.

Come to think of it, if we carry conventional wisdom to its logical margins, it should be easier to hit a grand slam and rack up four RBI (because the pitcher supposedly has no latitude to nibble with the bases loaded and must give the batter the much-dreaded "something to hit") than it is to launch a solo shot. I'm not saying that's the case, but according to doctrinal thinking it *should be* the case.

All of this isn't to suggest that RBI are utterly useless; as with any deeply flawed metric, it's evocative at the margins, but only at the margins. For example, it's still rather hard to total, say, 140 RBI and somehow suck. On the other hand, it's entirely conceivable that a player with 115 RBI had a much better season than someone with 130 RBI.

The shortfalls of batting average are of a different rubric. The problem with rate stats in general is that they don't provide any indication of playing time. To cite an extreme example, you can see a hitter's average of .333 and not know whether he went 1 for 3 on the season or, for instance, 196 for 588, as Will Clark did in 1989. Unless you have some vague handle on the number of plate appearances involved, rate stats aren't useful. However, batting average has further weaknesses. Batting average tells you how often a hitter reached base via a hit. It doesn't tell what kind of hits those were, and it gives no indication of how often he reached base by other means. Those are vital pieces of information that can't be discerned from batting average alone. Batting average (in the presence of some indicator of playing time) is more useful than RBI, but it's still suboptimal.

The more informative rate stats—the ones that fill the voids left by batting average—are OBP and SLG. These tell you how often a hitter reached base and how much power he hit for. If you subtract batting

average from SLG, you're left with isolated SLG, or ISO. ISO is a good indicator of how much "raw" power a hitter has, and it communicates that by removing his singles from the calculus. Knowing the basic rate stats–AVG, OBP, and SLG–in the presence of plate appearances and making at least cursory adjustments for park, league, and era, you can soundly evaluate a player's offensive contributions. And from those numbers, you can determine ISO, which provides you with another perspective on a hitter's level of power. As rate stats go, it's become received wisdom in the analytical community that OBP is the most important, closely followed by SLG. However, this simply isn't the case.

Certainly, SLG has its flaws. Most notably, it operates under the assumption that a home run is as valuable as four singles, which it plainly isn't (roughly speaking, four singles are worth two runs, while a home run is worth a little less than 1.5 runs). However, among widely available and familiar rate statistics, it actually fares better than the recently lionized OBP.

Here's how the four rate stats–AVG, OBP, SLG, and ISO–correlate with run scoring over the years, with the numbers closest to 1.0 indicating superior correlation:

Years	AVG	OBP	SLG	ISO
1871–1900	.888	.892	.901	.764
1901–1925	.846	.878	.861	.717
1926–1950	.834	.898	.914	.817
1951–1975	.774	.841	.897	.784
1976–2000	.752	.811	.868	.728
1871–2003	.828	.866	.890	.762

Some musings on these data:

- For our purposes, the 1976–2000 period is the most germane one. Over that span, SLG is more closely associated with scoring runs, and it's not a particularly close call.
- Observe the steep downward trend undergone by AVG. The 1871–2003 numbers don't do justice to just how less important AVG is when compared to OBP and SLG.
- There don't seem to be any discernible trends in how ISO relates to run scoring.

- Through much of the deadball era, OBP was more important than SLG; however, as run-scoring levels increased, SLG became the more vital measure. That's especially the case in the contemporary period.
- SLG is the only rate stat ever to have a correlation with run scoring of .900 or higher.
- All four rate stats have declined in terms of correlation from the 1951–1975 period to the current one.
- Despite the "OBP is life" movement spurred along, in part, by *Moneyball* and the success of the Oakland A's in recent seasons, hitting for power is more important than getting on base. However, both SLG and OBP are substantially more important than AVG.

Knowing this, let's take these commonplace yet useful tools and apply them to the teams we're studying, with an eye toward figuring out what makes these offenses go. When we think in terms of "power hitters" what comes to mind is that middle-of-the-lineup force of nature who hits for, novelty of novelties, power. As discussed above, two familiar and roughly efficient ways to evaluate power production are SLG and ISO. However, if we're to wring any meaningful conclusions from the numbers, we need to park-adjust them. This will be the first of many times you'll see numbers adjusted for playing environment. The concept of "park effects," or how a home ballpark exerts its influence over the events of a ball game, has gained belated credence among mainstream fans and media in recent years. Part of this is owing to the fact Coors Field, which had provided us with an offensive environment unmatched in the history of the sport, came online within the past decade and called attention to just how drastically parks and environments can alter the game on the field. (For instance, in 1995, the first year of Coors Field, the Rockies and their opponents hit 241 homers in Denver and only 119 in other parks.) Parks do this in a variety of ways. In some it's fence distance, fence height, or amount of foul territory; in some it's weather and altitude; in others it's less conspicuous traits, such as mound quality and hitting visuals; and in most it's some combination of all of these things. Whatever the reasons for these phenomena, discussions of park effects too often are wrongly limited to how a park disturbs the scoring of runs. For instance, Dodger Stadium and Shea Stadium both, generally speaking,

suppress the scoring of runs. However, they do it in different ways. Dodger is actually an average park for home runs, but it drastically reduces the number of doubles and triples. Shea, in contrast, is especially unaccommodating toward home run hitters.

As such, we need to analyze park effects on the component level (unless, of course, we're specifically concerned with runs scored). That means analyzing how parks alter the means to runs (i.e., SLG, AVG, OBP, left-handed batters, right-handed batters, strikeouts, etc.) and not just the runs themselves. So in this chapter, when I say that sets of numbers are park-adjusted, it means they're adjusted for that individual statistic and not just runs scored. Thanks to gracious and cherished resources such as David Smith and Retrosheet.org, this kind of necessary anal retention is a breeze.

As we ponder the slugger, it's worth asking which of these four measures–AVG, OBP, SLG, and ISO–is most closely associated with winning teams in the contemporary era. To do this, let's first look at how our 124 teams fare in terms of the park-adjusted percentage of the league average for each of these metrics:

Statistic	Adjusted Percentage of League Average
Batting average	100.6
On-base percentage	101.1
Slugging percentage	101.8
Isolated slugging percentage	104.6

These numbers reflect how much our sample of teams exceeded the park-adjusted league averages for AVG, OBP, SLG, and ISO. As you can see, these teams excel at ISO, SLG, OBP, and AVG, in that order. Now let's look at what percentage of our teams finished above the park-adjusted league average:

Statistic	Percentage of Teams Better Than League Average
Batting average	54.0
On-base percentage	58.9
Slugging percentage	61.3
Isolated slugging percentage	65.3

The order of importance is the same. These results speak to the vital nature of power production for winning teams (ISO, oddly enough, appears to be more important than SLG) and also to the overrated nature of batting average. It's also worth pointing out once again that the recent obsession with OBP is not quite justified, at least in comparison to the others. So when we think of the slugger and what makes offenses thunder in recent years, it's power that should be foremost in our analysis.

Among the teams I've studied, here are the top ten individual SLGs relative to the league average and adjusted for each player's home park:

Ranking	Player	Adjusted Percentage of League SLG
1.	Barry Bonds, '02 Giants	207.6
2.	Barry Bonds, '03 Giants	176.5
3.	Mike Schmidt, '80 Phillies	166.8
4.	George Brett, '80 Royals	166.4
5.	Pedro Guerrero, '85 Dodgers	166.0
6.	Darryl Strawberry, '88 Mets	162.8
6.	Barry Bonds, '92 Pirates	162.8
8.	Albert Belle, '95 Indians	160.2
9.	Rickey Henderson, '90 A's	158.2
10.	Jason Giambi, '01 A's	157.2

And here's the list–again relative to league and adjusted for park–for ISO:

Ranking	Player	Adjusted Percentage of League ISO
1.	Barry Bonds, '02 Giants	317.2
2.	Mike Schmidt, '80 Phillies	293.9
3.	Reggie Jackson, '80 Yankees	291.6
4.	Kevin Mitchell, '87 Giants	287.4
5.	Barry Bonds, '03 Giants	272.3
6.	Darryl Strawberry, '88 Mets	272.2

7.	Barry Bonds, '92 Giants	257.8
8.	George Brett, '80 Royals	255.1
9.	Pedro Guerrero, '85 Dodgers	246.7
10.	Albert Belle, '95 Indians	235.7
10.	Jose Canseco, '90 A's	235.7

Not surprisingly, many of the same names are on both lists. Several Barry Bonds iterations, Mike Schmidt and George Brett from the unheralded 1980 season, and Darryl Strawberry and Albert Belle all rank in the top ten for SLG and ISO. And, of course, there's Guerrero, lurking behind the potted palm of history.

As for Bonds, we're almost out of ways to rhapsodize about what he's done in recent seasons, but observe that his '92 season, long before he perhaps began indulging in performance-enhancing pharmacology or, I dunno, eating live howler monkeys to increase his hormone intake (read: cheating), still holds up as one of the best power seasons of recent history. In 2002, however, he was something else altogether. I once wrote a column for *Baseball Prospectus* that attempted to show what Bonds's numbers from his mind-blowing 2001–2004 epoch would look like if he were a pitcher. I did this by manipulating traditional pitching statistics so they'd yield the same Value Over Replacement Player/Pitcher (VORP)* figures that Bonds had produced as a hitter in these seasons. The results were stupidly sublime. If Bonds had, for instance, equaled his 2002 VORP of 147.4 as a pitcher, he would've worked 260 innings (innings totals were tied to the league-leading figure) and posted an ERA of exactly 1.00. As I said, stupidly sublime.

I'll leave it to historians to decide whether his place in the baseball pantheon has been compromised (hint: it has) by his use of this or that substance or his refusal to round the bases with head bowed like a

*VORP is a *Baseball Prospectus* invention that measures, in the currency of runs, a player's level of production relative to a hypothetical, widely available, and cheaply gotten "replacement" talent–the waiver claim, the B-list prospect, the minor league veteran, the bench player–who could be summoned in an emergency. The baseline that's established by the replacement player is always lower than the league average at that particular position, the logic being that the league-mean player is superior to players who are imminently available to teams in need of emergency filler talent.

penitent. That's beyond the concerns of this book. Still, wherever Bonds winds up along the daisy chain of history, his accomplishments will probably have the whiff of fraudulence about them.

What you might also notice about the above lists is that they comprise players who, one and all, played one of the four corner positions. On one level, this isn't surprising, since we expect those positions to produce the gaudiest power numbers. After all, left fielders usually aren't in the lineup for their artifice in the field. Yet how does this square with the buttoned-down notion that teams, if they're to be successful, must be strong up the middle (i.e., at the premium positions of catcher, shortstop, second base, and center field)? It's merely another baseball platitude that, it turns out, is largely fiction.

Teams–winners and losers alike–get the majority of their offensive production from the non-skill positions of first base, third base, left field, and right field. Lest this sound singularly obvious, I'll point out that this is true according to VORP, which, as detailed above, is adjusted for position and of decided benefit to hitters in the middle of the diamond. So even after correcting for positional scarcity, the corner spots for playoff teams (by a margin of 55 percent of the total offensive VORP to 45 percent and without including the DH) out-produce the up-the-middle hitters. For non-playoff teams, the margin is 57 percent to 43 percent for the corner hitters. While skill players for winning teams fare better than their less successful counterparts, they still don't measure up to their teammates manning the corners, even on a marginal level.

And speaking of imposing corner hitters, a player who's been given short shrift because of the untrammeled "panty raid" on the record book by Bonds and others is Schmidt. Observers generally recognize Schmidt as the greatest third baseman of all time, but that designation–as exclusive as it may be–doesn't rise to the level of his accomplishments. He's one of the greatest hitters ever to play the game.

Schmidt's legacy suffers because he spent the vast majority of his career in what was historically a low-scoring era by modern standards. That means runs were hard to come by, and, ergo, the individual offensive statistics weren't so immoderately distributed. Nevertheless, Schmidt excelled.

The Phillies drafted Schmidt with a second-round pick in 1971 out of Ohio University, where he had been an All-American shortstop and graduated with a degree in business. He spent only one full season in the minors (as a second baseman in the Pacific Coast League), and by 1973 he was in the major leagues for good. The Phillies had such faith in Schmidt as a prospect that they created a point of entry for him by trading away 25-year-old incumbent third baseman Don Money (who would go on to become a four-time All-Star in Milwaukee). In '73 Schmidt split time at third with Cesar Tovar; however, Schmidt foundered badly at the plate, batting only .196 and striking out in almost 40 percent of his at-bats.

That off-season, Schmidt, while playing on the team's orders in the Puerto Rican winter leagues, began making adjustments to his swing. He found something that, as he told *Sport* magazine, "made things happen."

The following season, Schmidt hit 36 homers, drew 106 walks, and led the league in slugging. More was to come. In '80, the season that ranks so high in the above lists, Schmidt belted 48 home runs, which set the mark for homers in a season by a third baseman, breaking by one the record set by Eddie Mathews in 1953. Over the years, Schmidt would lead his league in home runs eight times, which is a feat outdone by only Babe Ruth. Schmidt also hit at least 30 homers in 13 seasons (and nine consecutive). Only Hank Aaron has done that. Additionally, Schmidt reached the 35-homer mark in 11 seasons, a plateau reached more often by, again, only Ruth. By the time his career was over, Schmidt ranked eighth all-time in ISO relative to league average.

For all his triumphs as a hitter (not to mention his ten Gold Gloves at the hot corner), Schmidt was never fully embraced by the fans and writers in Philadelphia. Part of this is Philly's self-styled reputation for bestowing its athletes with only hard-won and grudging affection. Part of it is that Schmidt's game was often misunderstood. First, Schmidt was prone to strikeouts, which have unduly raised the hackles of the sport's followers since anyone can remember. Over his first four major league seasons, he averaged more than 150 strikeouts per season–a proclivity that prompted teammate Willie Montanez to nickname him "A-Choo!"

On balance, a strikeout is no different from any other out at the plate. In the modern era, strikeouts and outs by other means cost the team a little more than 0.01 run, and it hardly justifies as much kvetching as strikeouts seem to elicit. If you're a right-handed batter who's

especially slow of foot (think Mark McGwire), give me strikeouts in place of ground balls so he's not hitting into 50 double plays a season.

There's also what logicians and pretentious people call the "confirmation bias." It's a phenomenon we're all prone to whereby we tend to notice, look for, or emphasize things that reinforce our preexisting beliefs. In Schmidt's case, those preoccupied with his strikeouts probably don't recall the countless times he struck out when it made no difference (at least relative to the other ways of making outs); rather, they fixate on the handful of times he whiffed with a runner on third and fewer than two outs. It's an understandable trap to fall into, but it clouds the reality that strikeouts are basically no worse than outs of other flavors.

Schmidt also suffered from the perception that he didn't perform in the postseason. This is an accurate perception (he hit .236 AVG/.304 OBP/.386 SLG in postseason series and .267 AVG/.380 OBP/.527 SLG for his career in regular season play), but it's likely not the result of some sniveling character flaw or an inability to handle pressure situations. I'm quite open to the idea that some players can wilt in especially urgent circumstances, but there's no evidence that Schmidt was of this stripe. I say that because his record of performance in the playoffs fluctuated more wildly than the stock-price chart of some high-beta outfit from the tech sector. In the first four postseason series of his career, he was ghastly. However, in the '80 World Series, which the Phillies won over the Royals, he posted a .462 OBP and slugged .714 over six games. He was strong again in the '81 division series and the '83 NLCS, but struggled in the '83 World Series. To buy into the notion of Schmidt's being or not being "clutch" based on his playoff travails would take a prescription-strength dose of credulity. He was decidedly nonclutch early in his career, but then, in 1980, summoned the necessary virtues to perform on the wide stage. Schmidt clung to those virtues through the penultimate series of the 1983 season (including a home run off Jerry Reuss in the Phils' 1–0 win over the Dodgers in game one), but then, in three days (from the end of the NLCS to the beginning of the World Series), he regressed into the malodorous layabout of yore. Value judgments, no. Sample size, yes.

In any event, Philadelphia's appreciation of Schmidt never rose to meet the gravitas of his accomplishments. However, when he retired not two months into the 1989 season, fans nevertheless responded by voting him in as the starting third baseman on the National League's

All-Star team. Schmidt declined the invitation. He was voted into the Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility. That 96.5 percent of writers named him on their Hall of Fame ballots is historically impressive, but that 16 of those writers saw fit to leave him off reveals the strains of idiocy that still pollute the process.

Schmidt returned to Veterans Stadium, under reasonably amicable conditions, to throw out the first pitch before game three of the 1993 World Series. Just before going out to deliver the toss, Schmidt commented, "When I watch films of myself, I wish I had more fun playing. I wish I enjoyed myself more."

One player far more proficient at self-enjoyment was the Royals' George Brett. Brett was a California boy with honeyed, shaggy hair and a love of bacchanalian pursuits. He grew up in a family of gifted athletes (older brother Ken, who reached the majors as a 19-year-old, had a 13-year career, and two other brothers played in the minors). Brett made his major league debut in 1973 but struggled mightily in 13 games of action. The following year, he batted a respectable .282 but hit only two home runs on the season and slugged a paltry .363—inadequate power numbers for a corner defender. That off-season, Royal hitting coach Charlie Lau helped Brett concentrate on hitting to all fields and improve his pitch-recognition skills. How much credit Lau and his tutelage should get is hard to say, but Brett did indeed become a different hitter.

Over the years, Brett would bat at least .300 in 11 different seasons and claim three American League batting titles (one, in 1990, at age 37, which made him the first player in major league history to win a batting championship in three different decades). One of those batting titles, however, Brett claimed under questionable circumstances. Going into the final game of the 1976 regular season, the Royals were set to play the Twins. Two Royals, Brett and Hal McRae, and one Twin, batting titlist nonpareil Rod Carew, were in a dead heat for the league hitting crown. Going into the ninth inning, Brett and McRae both had two hits apiece and were due up in the bottom frame. Brett was first up, and, by partial dint of a Steve Brye misplay in left field, whipped an inside-the-park home run down the line. Brett's hit eliminated Carew from contention for the batting title, but McRae, if he were able to get a base hit, would claim the honor by percentage points. McRae grounded out and Brett had the title, but that was merely the beginning.

As he exited the field of play, McRae gestured angrily toward Twins manager Gene Mauch. Mauch returned the sentiment. McRae later accused Mauch of mandating that Twins defenders allow Brett to get a hit, which would help ensure that McRae, a black man, didn't win the batting championship. McRae never retracted his remarks, but later he, along with Carew, acknowledged that Brett deserved to win the title.

Three years later, Brett would begin a two-season dalliance with history. In '79 he became the first player since Willie Mays in 1957 to hit at least 20 homers, 20 doubles, and 20 triples in the same season. In 1980, the season you'll find him ranked on both adjusted percent of league SLG and adjusted percent of league ISO lists earlier in this chapter, he would fall narrowly shy of one of baseball's most hallowed benchmarks. As late as May 22 of that season, Brett was batting .255. Soon, however, he found his stroke and began cutting a swath through AL pitching. For the rest of the season, Brett batted .427 (including an imponderable .494 in July) and at one point set a franchise record by hitting safely in 30 straight games. On August 26 in Milwaukee, Brett stroked five hits to raise his average to a season-high .407. Not since Ted Williams in 1941 had anyone batted .400 over a full season.

Lau, Brett's hitting "Mr. Miyagi," said he felt like "Dr. Frankenstein watching his monster on the loose." When the calendar flipped to September, Brett's average stood at .403. However, he was bothered by a sore wrist, and a confluence of pressures was squarely upon him. The Royals, on September 1, led the AL West by an insurmountable margin of 19½ games, which meant they could play out the month with an eye toward resting their regulars for the playoffs. Nevertheless, Brett was acutely aware of the criticisms that would ensue if he were to make a light month of it and cosset away that .400 average. Also, he had missed 37 games before the All-Star break because of various injuries, and if he were to indulge in any rendezvous with history, he'd need to cobble together a qualifying number of plate appearances. So he appeared in 17 of the Royals' 26 games that month. Even with semi-frequent rest, his performance suffered, at least by "George Brett, 1980" standards. His last day above .400 was on September 19. Still, he finished the season at .390, the highest batting average since Williams in '41 and the best mark ever for a third baseman.

Brett's gripping chase for .400 was his personal story line that season, but his work in '80 was special in other regards as well. His .466

average with runners in scoring position is, to this day, the highest ever recorded since the statistic began being tracked. As detailed earlier, I'm not a fan of the RBI as an analytical tool, but it certainly bears mentioning that Brett that year became one of the few players in baseball history to record more RBI than games played in a qualifying season. Besides winning the batting title in 1980, Brett also claimed the AL MVP and paced the loop in slugging and on-base percentage. In terms of power, he also dwelled in rarefied air. His adjusted slugging is the fourth best of any player I've studied for this book, and his adjusted isolated slugging–despite the fact that he hit .390 (recall that ISO is SLG minus AVG)–is the eighth-best mark from that same pool of hitters. Imagine if he hadn't been bothered by a bruised heel, a case of tendinitis, torn ligaments, and an injured wrist that season.

The glow of the postseason didn't dampen Brett's performance. In the ALCS win over the hated Yankees, he slugged a preposterous .909, and in the World Series loss to the Phillies he batted .375 with four extra-base hits in six games.

Years later, as the music swelled on Brett's career, he provided what was, for him, a rare example of bathos. On September 30, 1992, Brett, with his older brother Ken broadcasting the game for the Angels, became the first player in baseball history to reach the 3,000-hit threshold by collecting four hits in one game. However, immediately after notching hit number 3,000, he was picked off first base while idly chatting with Wally Joyner on a snap throw by lefty Tim Fortugno.

In the following season, which would be Brett's last, he regained his penchant for the dramatic. By this point in his career, his 21st season in the majors, he was strictly a DH, and the domestic tethers of his wife and new baby led many to speculate that 1993 would be his last go-round. Early in the season, Brett did his best to squelch the retirement rumors. However, in late September he told fans and media that he would retire from baseball following the '93 season. Brett hit four homers in the week following his announcement.

The final game of Brett's career, in Arlington, Texas, against the Rangers on October 3, was also the final game of Nolan Ryan's career. As Brett ambled to the plate for the final at-bat of his career, Ranger catcher Ivan Rodriguez rested a hand on his shoulder and told Brett to look for fastballs. It was indeed a 1–2 Tom Henke fastball that Brett laced up the middle for a base hit. He'd later score on a Gary Gaetti home run.

On January 4, 1999, writers named Brett on 98 percent of their Hall of Fame ballots, which was the fourth highest total in history. Later that year he was inducted into Cooperstown, alongside Ryan.

Since SLG has been revealed to be the most important of the traditional offensive measures in terms of run scoring, and since ISO is associated with winning teams, let's look at the best teams in terms of park-adjusted SLG and ISO relative to the league average. First SLG:

Ranking	Team	Adjusted Percentage of League SLG
1.	'82 Brewers	116.0
2.	'02 Giants	114.9
3.	'03 Braves	114.4
4.	'88 Mets	113.7
5.	'97 Indians	111.4
6.	'95 Indians	111.2
7.	'80 Yankees	110.7
8.	'96 Orioles	110.3
9.	'84 Tigers	109.9
9.	'85 Dodgers	109.9

And ISO:

Ranking	Team	Adjusted Percentage of League ISO
1.	'80 Yankees	148.6
2.	'82 Brewers	134.7
3.	'88 Mets	129.9
4.	'02 Giants	129.4
5.	'03 Braves	125.8
6.	'96 Orioles	123.8
7.	'84 Tigers	123.7
8.	'97 Indians	121.9
9.	'98 Braves	120.9
10.	'95 Reds	120.5

No team places as highly on both lists as the '82 Brewers. Fittingly known as "Harvey's Wallbangers" (in reference to manager Harvey Kuenn), the '82 Brewers rank as the best team in adjusted SLG and the second-best team in adjusted ISO–a genuine colossus of an offense. In '82 they flogged the opposition with 216 homers, 30 more than the next most powerful team and the highest team total in the American League since the '64 Twins tallied 221 (this was 16 years before the Brewers would be gerrymandered into the National League). You may have noticed that no '82 Brewer showed up on the individual lists, but five regulars hit at least 20 homers–Gorman Thomas (39), Ben Oglivie (34), Cecil Cooper (32), Robin Yount (29), and Ted Simmons (23). Paul Molitor added 19, and the aforementioned Don Money came off the bench to chip in 16. The Brewers that year also paced all of baseball with 891 runs scored. Relative to the league, that lofty run total made theirs the 12th most potent offense in baseball since 1900 and the best in the AL since the 1950 Red Sox. This, of course, was long before the playoffs expanded to three rounds of play, and the Brewers that season became the first team in major league history to play three "elimination" games in the same season. First, they won the final regular season contest over the Orioles, which determined the AL East title, then bested the Angels in the decisive game five of the ALCS. Finally, the Brewers fell to the Cardinals (whom they had outhomered by 149 in the regular season–an unimaginable mismatch in terms of power) in the seventh and final tilt of the World Series.

The "snow globe" version of Milwaukee's unseemly power that season occurred on June 5, when the Brewers persecuted the A's by the score of 11–3. On that day the Brewers hit back-to-back-to-back homers for the second time in a week, and all five 20-homer hitters in waiting–Thomas, Oglivie, Cooper, Yount, and Simmons–went deep.

Shortstop Robin Yount, who won the AL MVP in '82, had more to do with the Brewers' success that season than any single player. In 156 games he clouted 29 homers, which in those days was an astounding total for a shortstop. Additionally, he paced the AL in doubles (46), hits (210), total bases (367), and slugging percentage (.578). Also, with a .331 average, Yount finished second to Willie Wilson by a single point for the '82 AL batting title. Yount's 12 triples ranked third in the AL, and he won a Gold Glove.

Yount's 1982 was one of the greatest seasons ever for a shortstop. At the time, his SLG that season was the second best mark ever recorded by an AL shortstop, second only to Rico Petrocelli's .589 in 1969, and Yount's total base count was the highest ever for a junior-circuit shortstop. He became the first shortstop ever to lead the league in SLG and total bases in the same season, and he also became the first AL shortstop to hit more than .300 and tally at least 20 homers and 100 RBI in the same season. When the lights shone brightest in '82, Yount was at his best. In the decisive final game of the regular season against Baltimore, he launched a pair of homers off future Hall of Famer Jim Palmer, and in the World Series loss to the Cardinals, he batted .414 with a .621 SLG.

Yount was a lifetime Brewer who, in 1974, made the majors for good at age 18, thus becoming one of the youngest everyday players in major league history. He had learned the nuances of professional baseball from his older brother Larry, who spent eight seasons as a pitcher in the Astros' farm system. The younger Yount was a ballyhooed athlete at Taft High in Woodland Hills, California, and the Brewers made him the third overall pick of the 1973 draft (ahead of him, the Rangers selected David Clyde, and the Mets took John Stearns) and offered him a bonus sufficient for Yount to decline a baseball scholarship to Arizona State.

In '75 and '76 Yount had the ineffable honor of playing alongside Hank Aaron, who spent the final two seasons of his career in Milwaukee. By the '77 off-season, Yount found himself in a contract dispute with management. He walked out of spring training and, perhaps emboldened by a recent two-over-par round at Pebble Beach, threatened to join the PGA tour. Eventually, at the urging of his father, Yount returned to the Brewers in May 1978. He was introduced to his new double-play partner, a handsome young rookie named Paul Molitor. The two would anchor the Brewers for the next 15 seasons.

A chronic shoulder problem that he aggravated in 1984 eventually forced Yount to the outfield, but he never stopped hitting. In 1986 he became the seventh-youngest player ever to record 2,000 career hits and also became the first player in AL history to lead the league in fielding percentage as an outfielder and an infielder. Three years later he won his second MVP Award and in doing so joined Stan Musial and Hank Greenberg as the only players to win an MVP at two different positions. While Musial and Greenberg did it as first

basemen and corner outfielders, Yount garnered top honors while manning shortstop and center field—two of the most demanding positions on the diamond.

By the time Yount retired after the 1993 season, he ranked 14th on the all-time hits list with 3,142 (he's presently 17th) and 11th on the all-time doubles list (he now ranks 13th). Yount was inducted to the Hall of Fame in 1999 in the company of George Brett and Nolan Ryan.

First baseman Cecil Cooper in '82 helped the Brewer cause with a .313 average, almost 75 extra-base hits, and strong defense. Also impressive is that, as a corner defender who logged almost 700 plate appearances on the season, he hit into only four double plays.

Cooper came up with the Red Sox. For the first two years of his major league career the Sox toggled him between Boston and the minors, and once Cooper did arrive for good, he was relegated to spot duty in deference to Carl Yastrzemski, who was winding down his fabled career. Things reached critical mass in '75 after Yaz had been removed from the lineup because of injury (the result of his throwing a bat out of frustration). Manager Darrell Johnson told Cooper to replace Yastrzemski at first, but Cooper refused. On a certain level, it's possible to sympathize with Cooper's dismay, if not his insubordination; in 1975 he was manifestly a superior player to Yaz. Still, a dismal one-for-19 effort in the World Series loss to the Reds that October snuffed out Cooper's welcome in Boston for all intents and purposes. The winter after the '76 season, the Sox dealt him to the Brewers for George Scott and Bernie Carbo.

In Milwaukee came regular playing time and a more accommodating environment. And Cooper thrived. Beginning in 1978, his second year in Milwaukee, he gave the Brewers six seasons that ranged from solid to outstanding and seven straight seasons in which he hit .300 or better. The best year of his career came in 1980, when he batted .352 (most years worthy of a batting title, but that season second to George Brett's .390), finished fourth in the AL in slugging, topped the loop in total bases, swatted 25 homers, stole 17 bases, and tallied 219 hits. For his toils, he finished fifth in the AL MVP voting, made his second All-Star team, and won a Gold Glove. According to VORP, Cooper that season was far and away the most productive first baseman in the game. Cooper's 17-year career in the majors ended following the 1987 season. He was a five-time All-Star and four-time top-ten finisher in the voting for AL MVP.

Like Cooper, Ben Oglivie was another estranged Red Sock who unearthed productivity and contentment only after arriving in Milwaukee. A native Panamanian raised in the Bronx, Oglivie, nicknamed "Spiderman" for his rangy build and prevailing sense of physical awkwardness, struggled early in his career in Boston. He was a voracious reader and a devotee of Zen Buddhism, and he attended four different colleges in pursuit of his degree. That's to say, he was a bit of a pariah in "jock" culture, which probably contributed to the garden-variety fits and starts experienced by almost all young players. Following a .218 AVG/.269 OBP/.333 SLG season in 1973, the Red Sox traded him to the Tigers for second baseman Dick McAuliffe, who gave Boston 287 mostly useless at-bats after the trade.

Once in Detroit, the lefty-swinging Oglivie found a park more suited to his abilities, and his numbers improved. By '76 and '77 he was showing the rudiments of the power stroke that would later make him one of the most feared hitters in the league (five seasons he would rank in the top five for intentional walks). Still, he wasn't getting the playing time he warranted, as evinced by the fact that he led the AL in pinch hits in 1976. Despite the progress Oglivie showed in Detroit, the Tigers, following the '77 season, dealt him to the Brewers for pitchers Jim Slaton and Rich Folkers, whose very name is a bellowing phonetic assault upon society's upper strata. Once in Milwaukee, things changed immediately for Oglivie. In '78, his first season as a Brewer, he set career bests in AVG, OBP, SLG, extra-base hits, RBI, runs scored, and walks. Still, most of the time Oglivie was being spotted against lefthanders.

The following year, Larry Hisle, Oglivie's platoon partner, lost his season to an injured shoulder, and Oglivie was at last an everyday player–at age 30. He was at his best in 1980, his third year as a Brewer, when he batted .304/.362/.562 and led the AL in homers (41) and finished second to teammate Cecil Cooper in total bases (333). In '82, the season in question, Oglivie's production dropped notably (.244 AVG/.326 OBP/.453 SLG), but he did launch 34 home runs and set a career high in walks (70). Moreover, Oglivie, despite an otherwise lackluster postseason, launched a critical home run in game five of the ALCS and another in the final contest of the World Series.

Oglivie lasted for another four years of steady decline before signing a contract to play with the Kintetsu Buffaloes of the Japanese Pacific League. He spent two reasonably successful seasons with them

before returning to sign a minor league contract with the Brewers in 1989–an arrangement that came to grief for both parties. Not long after agreeing to what was in effect a ceremonial agreement to return to Milwaukee, Oglivie retired from baseball for good.

Another vital contributor in 1982 was "Stormin' Gorman" Thomas. Thomas, whose lumberjackian mustache, vast swaths of hair (hair that formed wings coming out from under his cap and made Thomas look as though he were wearing Mickey Mouse ears on the field), and all-or-nothing style of play endeared him to the fans of Milwaukee, manned center field for the Brewers for five seasons and change in the late '70s and early '80s. Thomas played the field like a hydroplaning car and seemed to either strike out or homer in every at-bat. Such a novelty should be rented out for parties. "The fans come to see me strike out, hit a home run, or run into a fence," Thomas once observed. "I try to accommodate them at least one way every game."

In '82 Thomas batted only .245 and whiffed 143 times (only Reggie Jackson and Dave Kingman tallied more strikeouts that season), but Thomas's secondary skills were substantial. Besides capably manning a key defensive position, Thomas walked 84 times and tied Jackson for the AL lead in homers with 39. In the '82 postseason Thomas recorded only four hits in 41 at-bats, but the Brewers never would have gotten there without him.

Thomas was the first-ever draft pick of the Seattle Pilots; however, he never played a game for them. Before he could reach the majors, the Pilots went belly up and resurfaced as the Milwaukee Brewers under an ambitious young owner named Allan H. "Bud" Selig. The highly discernible (but overemphasized) flaws in Thomas's game kept him from being a full-time player until age 27, when he broke out with 32 homers, 73 walks, and a .515 SLG. The following season, 1979, was the best of his career. That year, Thomas led the AL in homers with 45 and ranked third in the league with 98 walks. Of course, his 175 strikeouts also topped the loop, and that unjustly detracted from what was, on balance, an excellent season. Over the five-year span from 1978 to 1982, only Fred Lynn had a higher total VORP among AL center fielders.

Midway through the '83 season the Brewers, perhaps sensing Thomas's looming decline, traded him along with Ernie Camacho and Jamie Easterly to the Indians for Rick Manning and Rick Waits.

Shoulder problems and age ended Thomas's days as a center fielder, and, other than a solid '85 with the Mariners, his offensive skills were squarely on the wane. Seattle released him in June '86, and the Brewers signed him as their DH. Thomas, however, had nothing left. He ended his career with the lowest career batting average (.225) of any player to log 2,500 at-bats. For his career, Thomas also struck out once every 3.49 at-bats–one of the worst ratios in history. However, it was his substantial secondary hitting skills that made him a near-great player for half a decade. Thomas wound up with 268 home runs for his career and 697 walks in 5,445 plate appearances. He hit for power, played an up-the-middle position for several years, and got on base at a solid clip–those are far more important than striking out too much or posting a low batting average. Thomas remains an underappreciated ballplayer.

And now for the worst power teams in terms of SLG to make the playoffs since 1980. These are the clubs that, obviously, won in spite of lackluster power numbers. In other words, they won by other means. When we examine winning clubs that underperform in a given statistical area, it generally means that they thrive at other elements that have been proved to be vital to winners. These clubs won not because an emphasis on "manufacturing runs" or whatnot ferried them to success, but because generally they prevented runs much better than they scored them. To the list:

Ranking	Team	Adjusted Percentage of League SLG
1.	'95 Red Sox	81.5
2.	'95 Yankees	89.2
3.	'95 Rockies	89.7
4.	'90 Red Sox	91.0
5.	'91 Blue Jays	92.6
6.	'82 Braves	92.7
7.	'87 Cardinals	93.4
8.	'02 A's	94.3
9.	'01 Yankees	94.6
10.	'83 White Sox	94.7

And now for the worst ISO playoff teams since 1980:

Ranking	Team	Adjusted Percentage of League ISO
1.	'90 Red Sox	78.5
2.	'87 Cardinals	80.4
3.	'95 Yankees	80.9
4.	'82 Braves	81.1
5.	'95 Rockies	82.1
6.	'82 Cardinals	83.8
7.	'88 Red Sox	85.6
8.	'01 Yankees	88.2
9.	'96 Cardinals	88.5
10.	'91 Blue Jays	88.7

As intimated earlier, the '82 Cardinals managed to win the World Series despite a terribly flaccid power attack. In fact, among the playoff teams ranked on the pair of lists immediately above, only the '82 Cards managed to run the postseason table. As I've already mentioned, St. Louis hit a paltry 67 home runs that season, which is the lowest total for a World Series–winning team since the 1942 Cardinals, who combined for only 60 circuit clouts. The '82 model hit the fewest homers of any team in baseball that year. In fact, they were the first team to win the World Series and finish last in home runs in the same season since the '65 Dodgers.

The Cardinal teams of the 1980s were, of course, famous for stealing bases and generally running wild on the basepaths. Stealing bases, however, was not the catalyst for their successes on offense. The '82 team, despite the fact that they easily paced the rest of the NL in steals, scored runs because they also led the league in OBP, which, to indulge in understatement, is ridiculously more important than stolen base totals. Considering how the front office and manager Whitey Herzog (who also served as general manager) constructed the team, it's hardly surprising that the Cardinals didn't show much power.

Outfielder George Hendrick led the team in home runs with 19 and in SLG with an equally modest mark of .450. Hendrick was one of only four Cardinal regulars that season to slug at least .400, and four lineup mainstays—Tom Herr, Darrell Porter, Ken Oberkfell, and Ozzie Smith—tallied fewer than 50 RBI, with Willie McGee having only 56.

Nicknamed "Silent George" for his Rifleman-like taciturnity, Hendrick (of whom teammate Clint Hurdle once said, "I don't think he even talks to his wife") spent 18 years in the majors and won two World Series rings, one with the '82 Cards and another as a young reserve on the '72 A's. Oakland had made Hendrick the top overall pick of the 1968 draft, but by the 1972 off-season, after Hendrick had put together two underwhelming auditions in the majors, the world champion A's shipped him, along with future pitching mahatma Dave Duncan, to the Indians for catcher Ray Fosse and infielder Jack Heidemann. However, Hendrick's time in Oakland was not without purpose; he often credited his Athletic teammate Joe Rudi for teaching him to play baseball at the highest level.

Once in Cleveland, Hendrick established himself as a capable regular by averaging more than 22 homers per season over his four years as an Indian. Despite the uptick in production, the Indians in the winter of '76 shipped him to the Padres for Johnny Grubb, Fred Kendall, and Hector Torres. The first year following the trade, Hendrick, despite playing half his games in run-suppressing Jack Murphy Stadium, put together a .311 AVG/.381 OBP/.492 SLG season, which placed him in the top ten in the league for AVG and SLG. Apparently, however, Hendrick's strong numbers in '77 didn't curry much favor with Padre brass; not two months into the 1978 season, they dealt him to the Cardinals for pitcher Eric Rasmussen. The 1980 season, his second full year as a Cardinal, brought Hendrick some overdue notoriety (although he still maintained a strict policy of nonengagement with the media). That year, Silent George batted .302 AVG/.342 OBP/.498 SLG, totaled 60 extra-base knocks, was selected to his third All-Star team, finished in the top ten for AVG, SLG, hits, homers, doubles, extra-base hits, and total bases, and placed eighth in voting for NL MVP.

In '82 Hendrick, as mentioned, paced the world champion Cardinals in every conceivable power indicator. However, he simultaneously failed to crack the NL top 15 for significant power indicators–SLG, ISO, extra-base hits, home runs, doubles, triples, and total bases. Following the 1984 season the Cardinals, in what turned out to be a tremendous trade for them, dealt Hendrick to the Pirates for lefty John Tudor and then-utility man Brian Harper. Tudor, of course, would be one of the best starters in baseball for the '85 pennant-winning Cardinals, while Hendrick, at age 35, began his slide out of baseball. He put together one final respectable season as a reserve for the AL West

champion Angels in 1986, but he'd play sparingly over the next two seasons before retiring.

First baseman Keith Hernandez was famous for his deft glovework and on-base abilities. What he wasn't, however, was a power hitter. Despite playing a position where power is part of the required skills, Hernandez never hit more than 18 homers in a season. In '82 he batted .299 AVG/.397 OBP/.413 SLG, while the league-average first baseman in the NL hit .277 AVG/.346 OBP/.422 SLG. As you can see, Hernandez's SLG was worse than that of the average first baseman in 1982. However, he ranked third in the league in OBP and third in walks with an even 100. Additionally, that season "Mex," as his teammates called him–back in those happy days when you could get away with heritage-prompted nicknames–claimed one of his 11 career Gold Gloves (only shortstop Ozzie Smith, pitchers Jim Kaat and Greg Maddux, and third baseman Brooks Robinson collected more).

Hernandez was a native of the San Francisco Bay Area, and as a prep athlete he became the first student in the history of Capucino High School to be named all-league in baseball, football, and basketball. During his senior year of high school, Hernandez quit the baseball team because he was at loggerheads with his coach. The tarnish on his record caused him to drop to the 40th round of the June baseball draft in 1971. After signing with the Cardinals, Hernandez reached Triple-A in his first season as a pro–an exceedingly rare occurrence for a high school draftee. By the middle of the '75 season he was the regular first baseman in St. Louis.

He promptly established a reputation as a tremendously capable defender. For many years prior to Hernandez's arrival, first basemen were viewed as sluggard liabilities whose sole job was to receive the throws of other infielders. However, Hernandez's athleticism and defensive artistry reminded us of the capabilities of the position. Like Hal Chase and Ferris Fain generations before him, Hernandez made a habit of fielding sacrifice bunt attempts on the third-base side of home plate in an (often successful) attempt to extinguish the lead runner. He also defied convention with his preferred method of holding runners on. To make tags as quickly as possible, Hernandez, who threw left-handed and, hence, had his glove on his right hand, would position himself with both feet in foul territory and await a pickoff throw. Still, he was nimble and alert enough to get back into defensive position when a pitch was delivered.

Hernandez set an NL record by leading the league in double plays six times, the result of his devilish ability to turn the 3–6–3. His record for career assists by a first baseman stood until 1993, when Eddie Murray broke it. Such was Hernandez's feel for and intellectual grasp of the game that he often oversaw the positioning of his fellow infielders and occasionally called pitches from first base.

On the offensive side, Hernandez did everything but what you'd expect from a first baseman—that is, he hit for average, drew walks, showed power to the gaps, but didn't hit home runs. In 1979 Hernandez, even though he toiled for a third-place team, shared the NL MVP award with Willie Stargell thanks to a .344 AVG/.417 OBP/.513 SLG season. That year Hernandez paced the NL in AVG and doubles. He also ranked second in OBP, hits, and times on base, fifth in triples, and sixth in extra-base hits. It was also the only season of his career in which he slugged at least .500.

By the middle of the 1983 season Hernandez had fallen out of favor with manager-cum-GM Whitey Herzog and, in a trade that staggered and puzzled Cardinal Nation, he was traded to the last-place New York Mets for manifest nonentities Neil Allen and Rick Ownbey. After the trade, Allen and Ownbey accomplished nothing of consequence for St. Louis, while Hernandez helped ferry the Mets to near-dynasty status in the mid-to-late '80s. Herzog intimated that the trade was prompted by Hernandez's cocaine use. Hernandez responded by threatening Herzog with a libel suit; however, the ballyhooed MLB drug trials of 1985 vindicated Herzog and the Cardinals. As a result of his testimony, baseball threatened to suspend Hernandez for a full year. However, he dodged punishment by donating more than $150,000 to drug rehabilitation programs, submitting to periodic drug tests, and performing 100 hours of community service.

During his 5½-year run in New York, Hernandez won a second World Series and endeared himself to Met fans of all stripes with his leadership and broad skills. In 1989, his final season in New York, Hernandez posted a career low in AVG, notched his worst OBP and SLG since his rookie season, and lost more than two months to a broken kneecap. That winter the Mets allowed him to depart via free agency. Hernandez signed a two-year contract with the Indians. In his first season in Cleveland he didn't hit and made three trips to the disabled list with an injured calf muscle. After missing all of 1991 while

recovering from back surgery, Hernandez attempted a comeback in '92 but found little interest in his services, so he retired. Because of his astonishing defensive skills and 2,182 career hits, Hernandez gained modest traction as a Hall of Fame candidate, although he never approached the vote total needed for election.

Although the Cardinals in '82 were productive in their own ways, they stand as outliers. That's because they didn't hit for power, which distinguishes them from most other great teams throughout the modern era. It's certainly possible to assemble a winning offense around speed and on-base abilities, as the Cardinals did, but it's not how most great teams score their runs. Imagine, for instance, a Cardinals amalgam featuring the pitching and defensive chops of the '80s models and the Albert Pujols–, Scott Rolen–, and Jim Edmonds–powered versions of the aughts.