Evaluating Catchers

A revolutionary concept to evaluating catchers

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Note: I really have no idea if it's revolutionary. It's a catchy word, and it seems that headlines are a big deal to catch people's attention. Replace revolutionary with cool, and let's get on with it. Also keep in mind that all PAs exclude bunts and IBB.

Genesis

Craig Burley was writing about Charlie Hough and how much all his WP and PB must have cost his team, and how they would taint the way we view his catchers. He suggested that we should look at catchers totals only after removing knuckleballers. But, if we remove knuckleballers, why not other pitchers who are also wild, but for other reasons? So, that got me thinking.

Gary Carter and Steve Rogers were mates for 8104 PAs. During that time, there were 51 WP and 7 PB. Is that alot or a litte? Steve Rogers, throughout his entire career, whether with the Expos or not (though he was a lifetime member of the Expos), and whether Gary Carter was on the team or not (like 1985), had 3598 other PAs with someone other than Carter behind the plate.

Catcher with Steve Rogers	PA	WP	PB
Foote	2176	19	5
Stinson	309	3	2
Ramos	284	6	0
Boccabella	265	0	0
Fitzgerald	179	0	0
Blackwell	115	2	0
Dyer	78	2	0
Williams	71	1	0
Tamargo	34	1	0
Johnson	31	1	0
Herrmann	28	0	0
Morales	28	2	1
Total	3598	37	8
Total x 2.25	8104	83	18

With Rogers in these cases, there were 37 WP and 8 PB. Prorating these numbers up from 3598 PA to 8104 PA (by multiplying everything by 2.25), and we get 83 WP and 18 PB. That is, with Gary Carter behind the plate, and in 8104 PAs, Rogers had 51 WP and 7 PB. Without Carter, and in the same number of PAs, Rogers had 83 and 18. Therefore, we can say that Gary Carter was 32 WP and 11 PB better than the catchers that Steve Rogers had.

But, why stop there? Why not repeat the process with Charlie Lea, Ross Grimsley, Dwight Gooden, Bobby Ojeda, and…. heck, why not repeat the process with all 152 pitchers that Gary Carter has caught? Here we go:

Results of pitchers, with and without Gary Carter

	With Carter			Without Carter (WP,PB prorated)				
Pitcher	PA	WP	PB	PA	pWP	pPB	deltaWP	deltaPB
Rogers	8104	51	7	3598	83	18	-32	-11
Gullickson	3517	27	3	6007	13	5	14	-2
Darling	3375	23	4	4698	43	7	-20	-3
Gooden	3285	13	7	4565	19	4	-6	3
Sanderson	3193	13	3	6082	13	3	0	0
Lea	3061	26	3	815	38	15	-12	-12
Fernandez	2402	10	3	3618	5	4	5	-1
Schatzeder	2215	16	1	3354	26	9	-10	-8
Ojeda	1966	7	0	5792	7	2	0	-2
Grimsley	1760	4	0	6066	10	2	-6	-2
Fryman	1684	8	5	4308	10	5	-2	0
Bahnsen	1613	13	1	5001	15	3	-2	-2
Lee	1604	1	1	5817	5	1	-4	0
Smith	1591	9	1	5693	6	3	3	-2
Burris	1519	11	1	7922	11	3	0	-2
Aguilera	1423	17	2	1704	15	5	2	-3
Palmer	1383	8	2	3243	11	1	-3	1
McDowell	1378	13	4	2022	10	3	3	1
Reardon	1204	6	2	3201	5	2	1	0
Cone	1199	8	1	4056	18	7	-10	-6
The Rest	24909	180	34	320908	214	58	-34	-24
Total	72385	464	85	408470	578	161	-114	-76

In 72,385 PAs with Carter behind the plate, there were 464 WP and 85 PB. Looking at every single matchup as we did with Rogers, meaning that we looked at how other catchers caught those pitchers that Carter caught (and prorated to the same number of PAs), there were 578 WP and 161 PB. Carter was 114 WP and 76 PB better than the other catchers who caught his pitchers.

In case you missed it, this is the cool part…

Remember, we are not talking about Carter's backups, but ALL catchers who have ever caught any of his pitchers at any point in their careers.

All catchers, 1972-1992

Well, why stop there? Why not do this for all 430 catchers who caught between 1972 and 1992? And why stop with WP and PB? Why not include SB, CS, Pickoffs, Errors, and Balks?

Glad you asked.

(Interlude: I am forever grateful to the incredible efforts at Retrosheet. The work in this paper, and in most of my papers, would not have been possible without their work. And a big thanks to Ray Kerby for writing the best software anyone could ever hope for in parsing the Retrosheet data.)

Here is a table that goes through this entire process, and presents the "deltas" on a per season basis (about 148 games) for the 29 catchers with the most playing time. That last column is the linear weight run value of all those events.

nameLast	nameFirst	effSeasons	deltaWP	deltaPB	deltaBK	deltaSB	deltaCS	deltaPkO	deltaE2	Final
Sundberg	Jim	11.9	-6	-5	-2	-25	7	4	-6	14
Benedict	Bruce	5.8	-21	-10	-4	-0	5	-2	-5	12
Carter	Gary	13	-9	-6	-1	-13	10	-1	-5	12
Dempsey	Rick	9.2	-10	-3	-0	-23	3	2	-2	11
Bench	Johnny	7	-8	-3	1	-35	-4	5	-3	10
Yeager	Steve	7.1	-8	-4	-3	-20	0	4	0	9
May	Milt	6.2	-3	-3	2	5	11	4	-2	7
Parrish	Lance	10.8	-5	4	-1	-30	-2	1	-4	7
Boone	Bob	13.8	2	-3	0	-21	2	2	1	6
Martinez	Buck	5.1	-9	-2	-5	-9	-2	3	-2	6
Wynegar	Butch	7.9	-4	-5	-2	-10	3	-5	-3	6
Davis	Jody	6.4	4	3	4	3	14	5	-0	4
Ashby	Alan	7.9	-8	-5	1	13	4	1	0	3
Pena	Tony	10	7	-3	-3	-9	4	-1	-1	3
Kennedy	Terry	8.4	-7	-4	2	10	5	-1	0	3
Fisk	Carlton	13.7	-3	-0	-1	-12	-2	-2	-2	2
Munson	Thurman	6.6	11	2	-4	-21	3	1	4	2
Porter	Darrell	9.3	9	4	-0	-6	7	4	-1	2
Simmons	Ted	9.9	0	5	-0	-0	3	2	-6	2
Santiago	Benito	5	4	4	-1	-33	-7	5	11	0
Heath	Mike	6.3	-3	-1	-0	-18	-5	-6	4	0
Cerone	Rick	7.6	9	2	-0	-15	-1	-0	-2	-0
Diaz	Bo	5.8	-1	3	3	6	7	-3	1	-0
Scioscia	Mike	8.4	-4	-1	3	6	-1	3	2	-1
Slaught	Don	5.5	-8	-2	3	-6	-5	-5	3	-1
Whitt	Ernie	7.1	-1	0	-0	6	1	-4	-2	-1
Gedman	Rich	5.7	-1	3	2	-7	-1	-2	2	-1
Hassey	Ron	5.6	1	0	1	-3	-9	1	-7	-2
Moore	Charlie	5.1	8	2	-2	3	2	-1	4	-3

And of course, we can do the same thing with pitchers too! Joe Niekro, Bobby Witt, Charlie Hough, and Tom Candiotti bring up the rear with 8 runs worse than the average pitcher their catchers faced.

Conclusion

I'm not including blocking the plate or framing the pitches, though that last part might be doable (though I'd have to look at the pitcher's age as well; I'm guessing that the above numbers aren't too dependent on the pitcher's age, which may or may not be a good guess.)

You may also be asking, "Well, I get it. You compared Carter to all other catchers who have ever caught his pitchers. But, were those catchers, when weighted by how often Carter caught those pitchers, league average catchers? Maybe some catchers are being compared against a different baseline?"

Well, that's a great question. So, I went back, and using the run values of all 430 catchers (that last column in the above chart), I redid the whole thing to figure out what the "strength of other catchers" each of these catchers was up against. For 28 of the 29 catchers, the "other catchers" was between -1 to +1. Benedict was compared to a +2 baseline. In essence, by doing this huge meshing, we are just about capturing a league average baseline.

Anyway, just treat this as another tool to use to evaluate your catchers. I don't think it's revolutionary, but it is kinda cool.

Related Links

P.S.: After I did all this, I then looked for other articles that I remembered reading on catchers, namely by Chris Dial, Tom Ruane, and Keith Woolner. And, lo and behold, the process that I followed, albeit only for SB, was put forth by Tom Ruane at the end of his article. I'm glad that I tripped my way over to Tom Ruane's line of thinking, as that usually tells me that I'm doing something right.

Here are other articles that may interest readers on catcher evaluation.

by [Dial, Chris](#)
by [Ruane, Tom](#)
by [Woolner, Keith](#) (with an extra two links in this article)

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