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Clutch MLB Players—Delivering The Goods

By Paul Mroczka

They exist in every sport—players who can deliver when it counts the most and when the pressure

is on. After a while the feats of such players take on a life of their own—a mythology starts to surround them. In baseball, their final inning home runs soar out of stadiums like guided missiles, their fielding plays start to include jumps and stretches that would rate "10's" from Olympic diving judges, and their willingness to take one for the team makes you think they deserve the Congressional Medal of Honor. So who are those few ball players who rise to the occasion when that occasion demands something big, stunning, and final?

Part fact and part fiction, clutch players aren't judged so much by how many game-winning plays they make but by the circumstances under which they make them. Reggie Jackson built a career on heroics that annually occurred during the tenth month of the year, earning him the appellation "Mr. October."

Yankee third baseman Alex Rodriguez has had a lot of hits that have won games, but often they've come early in the game or in contests that were not in the limelight. He's also made amazing defensive plays throughout his career. However, large numbers of fans, including many lovers of the Bronx Bombers, see him as a goat—the ultimate choke artist. That's because more often than not when in a big game, he hasn't come through or he's made a mistake. His other problem is that he has never been on a World Series winning team.

His teammate, Derek Jeter, is known as one of the best clutch fielders and hitters in the game. When in the national spotlight, Jeter has delivered. Who can forget the play against the Red Sox a few years ago when Jeter gave up his body and sailed into the stands to catch a foul ball, getting injured in the process?

There's a certain cache that comes with being a cardiac kid—someone who takes the final game, the last play, the ultimate moment to the limit. In 2004, David Ortiz did it in both American League playoff series—first against the Angels and then against the Yankees. Last inning game tying and winning homeruns and hits seemed to fly off his bat at will. Big Papi became ensconced on the public stage. The following season, he continued his late game clutch performances, which resulted in Ortiz being compared to Boston's patron saint of the big hit—Carl Yastrzemski.

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Chicago White Sox third baseman Joe Crede, of last year's World Series Champs, was given the name Captain Clutch due to his unbelievable defensive plays and decisive late-inning hits. Crede had a dismal first playoff series, batting only .111. But in the American League Championship Series and the World Series, he batted a total of 4 homeruns and hit .333. The thing about being known as a clutch player is people will forget and forgive the .111 performance if you make up for it later in an even bigger situation. That's exactly what Crede did.

Consider Albert Pujols, first baseman for the St. Louis Cardinals. Many feel he's the best hitter in baseball and his performances in post-season contests underpin this reputation. Pujols has been in the post-season for the past 4 out of 5 years. His batting average for those games is .336. In 37 games, he's had 10 homeruns, 29 RBI and 28 runs scored. He's struck out only 27 times.

Is Pujols a clutch hitter? He is. Is he known as one? Pujols has only been in one World Series and in

those four games he had 5 hits, 0 RBI and 1 run scored. Although he batted .333, he didn't have one extra-base hit. It was the series in which the Boston Red Sox easily won their first World Series in 86 years. In those games, Pujols was a non-entity, as was the entire Cardinal team, and his former achievements paled in the glow of the charismatic Red Sox team of Idiots.

Clutch players are known as clutch players as much due to the public's perception of them as for their achievements, and the more buzz those achievements create the more clutch a player becomes.

The Braves' Andruw Jones, Blue Jays' Troy Glaus, and Mariners' Ichiro Suzuki, like Pujols, are some of the finest defensive and offensive forces presently in MLB. They've all had amazing performances in numerous games. They are true clutch players, especially in the eyes of the fans who see them play day-in and day-out.

However, where the general public is concerned, these players have not reached the status of a David Ortiz or a Derek Jeter. Before they can do that, they'll have to do amazing things on the biggest stage in Major League baseball. In order for that to happen, they need a little bit of luck, the right circumstances, and a great team that can give them the chance to make the unbelievable catch or smash the huge hit that wins the game and solidifies their reputation forever.

This article was written by Paul Mroczka for

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MLB Exhibition Baseball Betting

By Jason A. Martin

So it's the start of MLB exhibition season and you are all excited, because the season opener is a few weeks away. How exactly do you bet on MLB exhibition anyway? A closer look at MLB exhibition baseball betting reveals how much of a coin toss it really is. Let's look at some of the fundamentals affecting exhibition games you might want to bet on.

If you are at least a semi-decent sports bettor, the first thing (or one of the first things) you do is check to see if any players are injured or missing. Having a missing star from a team can impact the outcome of a game. In fact, if a major player is out, you might skip the play altogether. Enter exhibition baseball and it's cloudy playing picture. In an exhibition game, you don't know who will play until the game is being played. Last I checked no sports book would let you bet on the action after it occurs. If you locate one, let me know.

Looking at the box scores of MLB exhibition games, it becomes obvious that "stars" are played sparingly. For example, a starting pitcher who already has a spot on the team might see up to 2 innings of work. It's hit and miss with position players. They might play a whole game or simply one at bat. Also, it's the exhibition so players who have jobs cemented are more likely to test out new pitches, new swings and work on mechanics. The game becomes a roller coaster.

The second issue that affects exhibition baseball betting is what I like to call Hooks. A hook is basically a set point when you, as a manager, make a change. In the regular season, for example, if a relief pitcher comes in and has a rough time, he will most likely be replaced quickly. However, in exhibition baseball, there's no worry about losing since the games don't matter. Teams, up by say a run or two, have no problem letting a pitcher give up many runs in one inning. Your team could be cruising along and up comes Mr. Poor Pitcher to the mound. In just one inning of work, since the hooks are non-existent, he could throw away the game.

For these reasons, most MLB exhibition games are setup where the favorite is normally only slightly valued—normally -1.10 to -1.30 . You will find that the "home" team is favored always unless the visitor is perceived to be a better team in the regular season. For example, if the home team was the Detroit Tigers and the visitor team was the NY Yankees, the Yankees would most likely be the favorite. These games become multiple hour coin flips. A quick scan of action on one randomly selected exhibition baseball day revealed that of the 10 exhibition games, 6 of the favorites and 4 of the underdogs won. It is pretty even.

A better use for the MLB exhibition season would be to monitor talent and prepare to bet in the regular season. However, if you must throw down action, good luck to you. Some people do better in exhibition betting, because there's not too much to think about. Many sports bettors simply pick a favorite and bet them.

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