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All-star Jewish baseball team

BY PETER DREIER

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During Yom Kippur, many Jews fret over whether Jewish Major Leaguers will play on the holiest of holidays. This has become a growing problem, because the number of Jews playing Major League Baseball (MLB) has been increasing.

This season, for example, 13 Jews — Brewer Ryan Braun; the Mets' Ike Davis and Josh Satin; Padres pitcher Jason Marquis; Phillies reliever Michael Schwimer; Rangers' Scott Feldman and Ian Kinsler; the Rays' Sam Fuld; Red Sox's Craig Breslow, Ryan Kalish, Ryan Lavanway and Danny Valencia; and White Sox's Kevin Youkilis — wore big league uniforms. Another 53 Jews played professional baseball in the minor leagues this year.

There have been more than 160 Jews out of the roughly 17,000 players who have played Major League baseball since the National League (NL) began in 1876. Two of them — Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax — are in baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

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While Jews were inscribing themselves in the Book of Life, I was inducting the greatest players into the Jewish All-Time All-Star team.

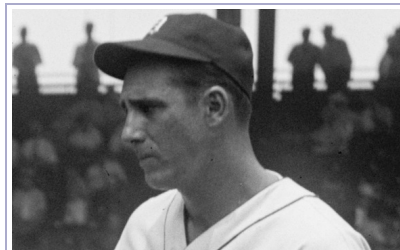
First base: Hammerin' **Hank Greenberg** (1911-1986) was the first Jewish baseball superstar. On Sept. 18, 1934, when Greenberg was leading the American League (AL) in RBIs and his Detroit Tigers were in a close battle for first place, he chose to attend Yom Kippur services rather than play. When he arrived at the synagogue, the congregation gave him a standing ovation.

During his playing career, the 6-foot-4 Greenberg — who hit 58 home runs in 1938, two short of Babe Ruth's 1927 record — faced anti-Semitic slurs and occasionally challenged bigots to fight him one-on-one. He often said that he felt every home run he hit was a home run against Hitler.

Playing between 1930 and 1947 (interrupted by the equivalent of four full seasons during his World War II service), Greenberg hit 331 homers, had a slugging average of .605 and batted .313. He led the AL in homers and RBIs four times. He had more than 100 RBIs in seven seasons, including an astounding 183 in 1937. Greenberg played in three World Series, was a five-time All-Star, and was the AL's Most Valuable Player in 1935 and 1940. In 1935, when the previous year's pennant-winning managers selected the All-Star teams, Greenberg's own skipper, Mickey Cochrane, didn't pick the Tigers slugger for the AL team even though he already had 103 RBIs at the All-Star break, a record that still stands. (Cochrane picked Lou Gehrig and Jimmy Foxx as the All-Star first basemen.) The Bronx native was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1956.

Second base: Since joining the Texas Rangers in 2006, **Ian Kinsler** (born 1982) has been selected to the All-Star team three times (2008, 2010 and 2012). He is one of only 12 players in baseball history to join the 30/30 club — to hit at least 30 homers and steal 30 bases — which he's done twice (in 2009 and 2011). On April 15, 2009, Kinsler went 6-for-6 and hit for the cycle. During his career he's averaged 25 homers, 81 RBIs and a .273 batting average.

Shortstop: The roster of good Jewish shortstops is pretty thin, so we've moved second baseman **Charles Solomon "Buddy" Myer**, an all-around infielder, to this position. Myer (1904-1974) played in the majors for 17 years. Except for two years (1927-28) with the Red Sox, he spent his entire career with the Washington Senators.



Hank Greenberg in 1937. Photo by Harris & Ewing

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Jakob Dylan covers "Ruby Tuesday," at Stonesfest, a group of performances that honors rock icons like the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and Tom Petty.

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Actress Sharon Stone visited the pediatric AIDS unit at Hadassah Hospital Ein Kerem.

Coming out of Mississippi A&M University (now Mississippi State), he joined the Senators in 1925 and had a lifetime batting average of .303, leading the AL in 1935 with a .349 average. He also led the league in stolen bases (with 30) in 1928. During his career, Myer had 2,131 hits in 8,190 at-bats. He played most of his career before the All-Star game began in 1933, but was selected to the AL teams in 1935 and 1937. Myer is probably the greatest player never elected to the Hall of Fame; his career statistics are equal to or better than those of other infielders, like Billy Herman and Bobby Doerr, who were voted into Cooperstown.

Third base: Al Rosen (born in 1924) dropped out of the University of Florida in 1942 to play minor league baseball, spent four years in the military during World War II and made it to the major leagues in 1947, becoming the Cleveland Indians' starting third baseman in 1950. That year he set an AL record for most homers (37) by a rookie, a milestone that wasn't broken until 1987 by Mark McGwire. Rosen spent his entire 10-year playing career with the Indians, winning the AL MVP award in 1953, when he led the league in homers (43), RBIs (145), runs (115), total bases (367) and slugging (.613), and finished second in batting average by less than one percentage point. Selected for the All-Star team four consecutive years (1952-1955), Rosen twice led the league in homers and twice had the most RBIs. He was a .285 career hitter, with 192 home runs and 717 RBIs in 1,044 games.

Outfield: During his 15-year career (1993-2007) with the Blue Jays, Dodgers, Diamondbacks and Mets, **Shawn Green** swatted 328 homers, accumulated 1,070 RBIs and hit .283. He made the 1999 (NL) and 2002 (AL) All-Star teams and won the Golden Glove award for fielding in 1999. He hit more than 42 homers three times (with 49 in 2001) and batted in more than 100 runs in four seasons. In 1999, he led the AL in doubles, extra base hits and total bases. On May 23, 2002, playing with the Dodgers against the Milwaukee Brewers, Green hit four home runs (tying the Major League record), a double and a single (going 6 for 6), setting a record (19) for most total bases. In 2001, Green ended a streak of 415 consecutive games played when he sat out on Yom Kippur. Three years later, as the Dodgers' leading hitter, Green missed the Dodgers game against the Giants on Yom Kippur even though his team was in the middle of a tight race.

Outfield: Ryan Braun (born 1983) has been a superstar since he first arrived in the majors in 2007. He was selected by the Milwaukee Brewers out of the University of Miami in the first round of the 2005 draft (fifth overall). He was the first Jew to win Rookie of the Year honors, hitting .324 with a league-leading .634 slugging average. He was the NL's MVP in 2011 and an All-Star every year since 2008. In his six seasons he's averaged 37 homers, 118 RBIs and 23 stolen bases, with a .313 batting average. (He's currently leading the NL in homers, RBIs and slugging). Braun, who grew up in Mission Hills, once lived with his grandfather in a house that once belonged to Hank Greenberg.

Outfield: Brooklyn-born slugger **Sid Gordon** (1917-1975) joined the New York Giants in 1941 from Long Island University and played outfield, first base, second base and third base with the Giants, Boston and Milwaukee Braves, and Pittsburgh Pirates until he retired in 1955. He slammed 202 home runs and batted .283. He hit 25 or more homers in five seasons and had more than 100 RBIs three times, and was picked for the 1948 and 1949 All-Star teams. In Gordon's first Major League game, on Sept. 11, 1941, the Giants put four Jewish players on the field, including outfielder Morrie Aronovich, pitcher Harry Feldman, catcher Harry Danning and Gordon.

Catcher: Harry ("the Horse") Danning (1911-2004), born in Los Angeles, played his entire career with the New York Giants, from 1933 to 1941. His playing years were cut short when he entered military service during World War II and quit baseball at age 30. In 890 games, with 2,971 at bats, he hit .285, played in two World Series (1936 and 1937) and was selected to the NL All-Star team four consecutive years (1938-1941). On June 15, 1940, Danning hit for the cycle, including an inside-the-park homer. His best season was 1939, when he hit .313 with 16 homers and 74 RBIs. Danning led NL catchers in putouts three times and in base runners caught stealing twice. In 1934, while the Giants were in spring training in Florida, a hotel refused entry to Danning and another Jewish player, Phil Weintraub. After Giants manager Bill Terry threatened to move the World Series champion team to another hotel, the management relented.

Pitcher: Many baseball experts consider **Sandy Koufax** the greatest pitcher of all time. Born in Brooklyn in 1935, the left-handed Koufax was a better basketball player than baseball player at Lafayette High and then at the University of Cincinnati. Because he was signed (for \$4,000) as a "bonus baby," the Brooklyn Dodgers had to put him on their roster before he was ready for the majors. Joining the team in 1955, Koufax's first five years were plagued by wildness. In 1961, three years after the team had moved to Los Angeles, catcher Norm Sherry (a fellow Jew) urged Koufax to take something off his fastball. His control dramatically improved and Koufax became the game's premier pitcher from 1961 through 1966, when arthritis in his left elbow ended his career prematurely at age 30.

During his career, he won 165 games and lost only 87. Despite his short career, he had 2,396 strikeouts. He was selected the NL's MVP in 1963. He won the Cy Young Award as the game's outstanding pitcher, unanimously in 1963, 1965, and 1966 when the honor was for all of baseball, not just one league. In those three years, Koufax led all major league pitchers in wins, strikeouts and earned run average. In 1963, he won 25 games (and lost only five), struck out 306 batters, had an ERA of 1.88, threw 11 shutouts (still a record for left-handers) and led the Dodgers to a four-game World Series sweep over the Yankees. Over his career, he hurled four no-hitters, including a perfect game against in 1965. In 1972, Koufax (then 36), was the youngest player ever elected to the Hall of Fame.

When Koufax decided to skip the Dodgers' first game of the World Series against the Minnesota Twins, on Oct. 8, 1965, which fell on Yom Kippur, his decision made headlines and sparked controversy around the country. But he also became a source of great pride among American Jews. In his 1966 autobiography, Koufax wrote: "There was never any decision to make ... because there was never any possibility that I would pitch ... the club knows that I don't work that day." On Sept. 25, 1966, one day after Yom Kippur, Koufax lost a 2-1 game to the Cubs' Ken Holtzman, the next standout Jewish Major League pitcher. Both players had refused to pitch on the Jewish holy day.

Had we expanded the All-Time All-Star Jewish roster to include backup players, we could have added such outstanding athletes as pitchers Steve Stone (the 1980 Cy Young Award winner with a 25-7 record), Holtzman (who threw two no-hitters and was a two-time All-Star), Barney Pelty (with a career 2.63 ERA) and Erskine Mayer (who had 91 wins and only 70 losses, with a career 2.96 ERA, between 1912 and 1919), three-time All-Star Youkilis, two-time All-Star catcher Mike Lieberthal, Ron Blomberg (the No. 1 pick in the 1967 amateur draft, MLB's first-ever designated hitter in 1973 and a career .293 hitter), slugging outfielder Mike Epstein and Lipman Pike, the first known Jewish major leaguer, who hit .322 in an 11-season career that began in 1871, before the modern baseball era. Some lists of Jews claim the great Hall of Fame Cleveland Indians shortstop Lou Boudreau, but although he had a Jewish mother, he was not raised, and did not identify, as a Jew.

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Peter Dreier is professor of politics and chair of the Urban & Environmental Policy Department at Occidental College. His book, "[The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame](#)," was recently published by Nation Books.

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