Academic study predicts Yastrzemski and Seaver next in line for statues

Red Sox legend Carl Yastrzemski should be next the next player to be honoured by a statue outside Fenway Park according to a study by academics from the University of Sheffield, UK.

In the last 20 years, over 65 US Major League baseball players and 30 English soccer players have been honoured by a statue outside of the stadiums they once graced. Research by Dr Chris Stride and Ffion Thomas to be presented at the New England Symposium On Statistics In Sports at Harvard University on Saturday 24 September, identifies the factors that are most important in determining which baseball and soccer greats are immortalised in this way, to what extent such commemoration is meritocratic, and which players are unlucky to not yet be depicted.

Personal and team performance statistics from 202 Baseball Hall of Fame players (who include 75% of MLB baseball players currently depicted by statues at ball parks), and from each soccer player on the English Football League's '100 Legends' list (who include 72% of soccer stadia statue subjects), were collected and analysed.

Within both sports, loyalty was found to make a significant impact on the probability of being depicted. Unsurprisingly, loyal 'one-club' players were most likely to be chosen as statue subjects. For both sports the odds of a 'one-club' player being depicted are 3 times those of a player with just 80% of his appearances for his primary club, reflecting the value that fans place on absolute loyalty of 'their' players.

Career era was also found to predict depiction for both sports, with soccer players from the

1950's and baseball players from the 1960's the most likely to be portrayed. Statues of players who played during the early years of the game or the past two decades are far less common. This is likely to reflect the use of statues by clubs as a marketing tool appealing to the nostalgia of fans, particularly within US baseball where a new wave of retro-styled ballparks has been built over the past two decades; these recently constructed ballparks were found to be more likely to have statues erected around them than older stadia.

A sport-specific predictor for subject selection in English soccer was whether a player featured in the 1966 World Cup winning team; 6 of the team and the manager have been depicted so far. In US baseball, players who appeared for franchises such as the Giants and Dodgers that subsequently moved location are less likely to be portrayed, leaving storied players such as Christy Mathewson and Roy Campanella currently without a statue at an MLB ballpark. Likewise, Yankees and Orioles stars have a reduced probability of being sculpted due to their franchises' use of alternative commemoration methods.

Of baseball Hall of Famers, Carl Yastrzemski of the Boston Red Sox and Tom Seaver of the New York Mets are the players with the highest predicted probability of being a statue subject who are yet to be depicted, and thus might be expected to be honoured with one in the near future. Amongst English soccer legends, Jimmy McIlroy of Burnley FC and Jimmy Dickinson of Portsmouth FC could similarly be considered the 'unluckiest' players.

Dr Stride, a statistician from Sheffield University's Institute of Work Psychology, said: "Far from merely being memorials to past heroes, sporting statues say much about the preferences of fans and the increasingly sophisticated marketing strategies of sports organisations. They are not an entirely meritocratic honour; the eras in which a player appeared and the team he appeared for are influential in being honoured in this way".

Notes for Editors:

For further information please contact:

Dr Chris Stride: 0044 795 2210227 c.b.stride@sheffield.ac.uk and/or
Ffion Thomas: 0044 787 5833217 ega07fet@sheffield.ac.uk

**To read other news releases about the University of Sheffield, visit
http://www.shef.ac.uk/mediacentre/**

**To read the NESSIS Press Release visit
http://www.prweb.com/releases/2011/9/prweb8777848.htm**

/ends