

# Ty Cobb

Ty Cobb is one of the most storied baseball players in history. Dominating the game during the early part of the 20th century, he set numerous records, some of which still stand today. In the first year of voting for the Hall of Fame, he was named on all but four of 226 ballots.

Nicknamed the “Georgia Peach,” Cobb was born on a farm in that state in 1886. He played briefly for the Augusta Tourists before joining the Detroit Tigers in 1905 as a centerfielder. He remained with the team for 22 seasons. Playing hard and living hard, he is remembered for his intimidating and intense attitude both on and off the field.

Cobb was married twice and fathered six children. Good investments made him a millionaire and, following his retirement from baseball, he spent most of his time at Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Prior to his death in 1961, he established the Ty Cobb Health System and the Cobb Educational Fund in his native Georgia.



# Ty Cobb's Detroit

By the beginning of the 20th century, Detroit had become one of the country's foremost industrial cities. Established companies manufactured stoves, railcars, ships, pharmaceuticals and steel. In addition, new enterprises emerged to construct adding machines and automobiles.

Foundries and factories paid good wages and drew workers from around the country. In three decades Detroit's population grew from 285,000 to more than 1.5 million. The city limits expanded to its current 139-square-mile area and the suburbs were increasing in population as well.

A new middle class emerged, with both leisure time and disposable income. Theaters, clubs and concert halls flourished, despite the legal prohibition of alcohol during the 1920s. New forms of entertainment emerged, notably radio and moving pictures. Sports organizations of all types competed regionally and by the mid-1930s Detroit boasted professional teams playing baseball, hockey and football in nationwide leagues.



# Hero?

Even 80 years after he hung up his spikes for the last time, one can legitimately argue that Ty Cobb is the greatest professional baseball player ever. Among his contemporaries, only Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner and Rogers Hornsby were considered competitors for that lofty acclaim.

When Cobb retired as an active player, he held 90 baseball records, some of which were believed insurmountable. The two most formidable career records, 4,191 hits and 892 stolen bases, were surpassed by stars Pete Rose and Rickey Henderson respectively. Cobb still holds the record with 12 batting titles, and his .366 lifetime batting average is considered a standard that should go unmatched for a long while.

Cobb was a five-dimensional player, excelling at batting, fielding, running, throwing and, most importantly, sheer cunning. A very intelligent man he outwitted his opponents with a mind that was as quick as his feet. He employed every trick in the book, and his aggressive style, nerve and lightning speed caught many a fielder just a tad late. He masterfully employed deception; for example, he was known to constantly kick the bases, thus moving them a few inches closer to his ultimate destination.

After leaving professional baseball, Cobb generously donated a portion of his fortune to charity. He established a hospital in his hometown and set up the endowed Cobb Educational Fund, which has provided more than \$11 million in scholarships to Georgia students since the 1950s.



# Villain?

For all his brilliance, Ty Cobb had a very dark side that continues to plague his standing in baseball history. More than a few sportswriters observed that Cobb was the most disliked player in all of baseball. People admire competitiveness, but in Cobb's case it was widely considered excessive. He was viewed as arrogant, mean and willing to play mind games with those he thought he could exploit. His explosive temper made him ready to fight whenever he felt provoked and, by today's standards, Cobb would have been viewed as a blatant racist.

Ty Cobb had few positive relationships on his ball club. As a rookie in 1905, he received the usual harassment, but he reacted with sullenness and anger. "I hated them as much as they hated me," said Cobb. Outfielder Davy Jones played with Cobb for seven years and stated, "He had such a rotten disposition and antagonized so many people it was hard to be his friend." With another outfielder, Sam Crawford, relations were so strained that they seldom spoke to each other. Like Jones, Crawford claimed that Cobb "had a lousy attitude. But who knows, maybe if he hadn't had that terrible persecution complex he never would have been about the best ballplayer who ever lived."

Ty Cobb readily conceded most of the charges leveled at him and was obviously proud of his combative approach to the game – likening it to war. He opened his autobiography by writing: "My critics have had their innings. I will now have mine."

