



SPORTS 16

“As the National League MVP was considered, standing in a category of his own was Bryce Harper, rightfielder for the Washington Nationals.”

Olivier Dumont

Why Bryce Harper Was the Right Pick for MVP

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At 6:30 pm on a Thursday night, the National League MVP winner was announced. Standing in a category of his own, Bryce Harper won that title.

Looking at the final decisions and results of the MLB Season Award Winners, many names really stand out, mainly because the winners of this past season are one's that are new to the winner's platform and showed everyone that these titles are up for grabs for anyone in the MLB to take.

Take National League Cy Young Award winner Jake Arrieta for example, who had a win to loss record of 105 with a 2.53 ERA last season in 25 games played. Those numbers are pretty solid and even placed him as an MVP candidate last year. But his numbers were not sufficient enough to win among the NL's best pitchers.

The amazing part is that he was able to continue right where he left off from last season and perfected his pitching to such an incredible degree this year, which led to his well deserving CY Young winner pitching performance.

This was seen with Josh Donaldson as well, this year's winner for the American League MVP who surpassed baseball's golden boy in Mike Trout. What is shocking to me, however, is to find someone who didn't find themselves last year amongst the NL MVP candidates, whose statistics were significantly lower than the statistics he mustered this season, and who encompassed all aspects of an "MVP" player this year. I'm talking about none other than 23 year old phenomenon and the 2015 National League MVP winner, Bryce Harper.

An MVP is a game changer, a person that carries a large impact on a team's success, an individual that is comprised by numerous forms of excellence and skill, placing that person on the podium of the "semi super soldier" category in their respective sport. The reason why the superstar outfielder Bryce Harper was unanimously voted for this award was because none of the other contenders resembled the precise definition of what an MVP has to have, as stated previously.

To begin with, Harper exceeded

the criteria of an MVP winner through his overall skill and talent that he brought on both the offensive and defensive sides of the game. ESPN senior writer Eddie Matz, in his article titled, "Why Bryce Harper was the obvious MVP of the National League" beautifully dives in the X-Factor combination that made Harper so lethal individually to compete against.

Matz states, "Anyone who watched the Nationals with any degree of regularity this past season could tell you that Harper deserved the MVP. They could tell you that, thanks to a rare blend of patience and power, he was easily the NL's most dangerous hitter. That because pretty much every bluechip player in the Washington lineup got injured at one point or another, he was literally a oneman wrecking crew. That in his first full season as a right fielder, his bazooka arm made opposing runners think once about taking an extra base (they didn't think twice because they didn't need to once was enough for them to know it was a bad idea)."

This young superstar placed himself in third with most home runs hit in the MLB this season with 42, a .330 batting average placing him in third yet again in the MLB, and in the course of the six month baseball season, beginning in April and ending at the end of September, his batting average hit it's low at .286 during the month

of April. To begin with, in baseball standards of analysis, when a player is batting .286 that is considered pretty good. Secondly, his average didn't drop below .300 for the rest of the season following April! To maintain such a high average is challenging already and is accomplished by a select few in the MLB each year by the end of the season.



Moreover, he was not only able to accomplish this phenomenal success in hitting the ball, but he established himself as a power hitter on top of that. When you see a guy like this come up to the plate from a pitcher's perspective, you realize that one, not only can he hit the ball pretty damn well to begin with but two, if I place anything in the strike zone that is remotely close to his wheelhouse and area of hitting expertise, which could be the majority of the strike zone, he could smash the ball out of the park no problem.

But before I continue to babble about his offensive expertise, Harper as Matz said, had a rocket launcher of an arm, making him an elite right fielder, who are generally required and seen to have the best throwing arms in the outfield.

In an article on MLB.com written by Bill Ladson called, "Harper unanimous BBWAA NL MVP after huge year," Ladson pinpoints a statistic that Harper triumphed in this season defensively.

He states, "According to Stats Inc., Harper ranked third among NL outfielders in range factor per nine

innings (2.07) and putouts per nine (2.01). To clarify, Sportschart.com explains that the Range Factor is a statistic used to "determine a fielding player's true contribution to the defense of a team based on his position. Rather than the statistic being based on the amount of safely fielded balls (putouts), it instead stresses the actions the particular player took that directly resulted in outs."

The important part of this statistic is the phrase, "stresses the actions the particular player took that directly resulted in outs." For an outfielder, this can include throwing out a base runner going for extra bases, performing a diving catch on a fly ball, or simply timing your run properly to make a catch near the fence or in the shallow outfield. The interesting part about this is that it's a specific statistic that is heightened in catchers who partake in many strikeouts per game from great pitchers or infielders that tend to perform many double plays per game, which is a combined effort by a team (Sportscharts.com).

However, to see an outfielder such as Harper averaging this Range Factor at 2.07 per nine innings he played indicates that his personal defensive actions resulted in his excellent defensive play this year. Bryce Harper's strong play made him such a tough force to compete against this season.

But his play fueled his team's success as well, and he was a large key factor in making his team a success in reaching the playoffs when facing times throughout the season where fellow great teammates were plagued with injuries.

In Ladson's article, he was able to interview the General Manager Mike Rizzo of the Washington Nationals, the team that Harper plays for, who really summed up Harper's MVP play this season quite nicely, showing why he deserved the award: "That was one thing I was cognizant of the whole season," Rizzo said. "You could see throughout the season what this guy meant to this ballclub. And don't forget, this guy carried us throughout the whole season. The hitters around him were dropping like flies, and this guy was the cornerstone of an offense. Every team we played circled his name and said, 'This guy's not going to beat us,' and with that being said, he beat a lot of teams."

