

Lou Gehrig was a famous baseball player who suffered from a terrible disease that was named for him after his death.

Lou Gehrig

by Lawrence S. Ritter

Lou Gehrig was the classic case of playing in Babe Ruth's shadow. As the New York Yankees' first baseman from 1925 through 1938, there was no way he could escape the big man behind him in right field. However, this never seemed to bother Gehrig. He was a shy, modest person who was content to leave the spotlight to Ruth.

Gehrig was born in New York City in 1903. After attending Columbia University, where he waited on tables to pay his way through school, he joined the Yankees in 1925 and soon became one of baseball's outstanding hitters.* He is remembered by the public mainly as the durable Iron Horse who played in 2,130 consecutive games between 1925 and 1939. His teammates and opponents, however, remember him more for his blistering line drives and his ability to drive in runs.

For thirteen consecutive seasons, he batted in over 100 runs, seven of those times over 150. In 1931, when he drove in 184 runs, he set an American League record. He batted in a lifetime total of 1,990 runs, more than anyone in baseball history except Hank Aaron (who had 2,297) and Babe Ruth (who had 2,213). Had illness not cut him down prematurely, he probably would have added another 308, enough to top them both.

One indication of his effectiveness when he came to bat with men on base is the twenty-three home runs he hit with the bases loaded, an all-time major league record.

He hit over forty home runs five times and batted over .340 eight times. A left-handed hitter, his lifetime batting average was a notable .340, tenth highest in the twentieth century.

Gehrig usually batted fourth in the Yankee batting order, right behind Babe Ruth. A reporter once mentioned to him that no matter what Gehrig did, he seemed to get almost no publicity.

Lou laughed and said, "I'm not a headline guy, and we might as well face it. When the Babe's turn at bat is over, whether he belted a homer or struck out, the fans are still talking about it when I come up. Heck, nobody would notice if I stood on my head at home plate."

On May 1, 1939, after playing in 2,130 consecutive games stretching over fourteen years, Lou Gehrig took himself out of the Yankee lineup for the good of the team. He felt weak and uncoordinated. Doctors discovered that he was suffering from an incurable rare illness, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, now called Lou Gehrig's disease, which destroys the central nervous system. The gentle first baseman died two years later, a couple of weeks before his thirty-eighth birthday.

A widely praised 1942 movie about Lou Gehrig's life, starring Gary Cooper, was named *The Pride of the Yankees*. The dictionary defines "pride" in this sense as "someone to be proud of . . . the best in a group." The movie could not have been better named.

*Some of the records mentioned in this article (written in the early 1980's) were later broken.

"Lou Gehrig" excerpted from *The Story of Baseball* by Lawrence S. Ritter. Text copyright © 1983, 1990, 1999 by Lawrence Ritter.

1. Which qualities **best** describe Lou Gehrig?
- A talented, successful, humble
 - B successful, careful, impatient
 - C showy, serious, wealthy
 - D funny, shy, clumsy
2. Why was Gehrig called the "Iron Horse"?
- A He did not like publicity.
 - B He always batted after Babe Ruth.
 - C He survived an incurable disease.
 - D He played in more than 2,000 consecutive games.
3. Based on the selection, what was the **main** difference between the way the public remembered Gehrig and the way his teammates remembered him?
- A The public remembered his blistering line drives, but his teammates remembered his ability to drive in runs.
 - B The public remembered him playing in the shadow of Babe Ruth, but his teammates remembered his breaking Hank Aaron's record.
 - C The public remembered his consecutive games record, but his teammates remembered his hitting ability.
 - D The public remembered his getting no publicity, but his teammates remembered him as becoming prematurely ill.
4. Suppose this selection were divided into sections with headings. If one of those sections contained paragraphs 3, 4, and 5, what would be the **best** heading for that section?
- A "Setting Records"
 - B "Playing with Babe Ruth"
 - C "Hitting Home Runs"
 - D "Yankee Batting Averages"

5. The author says that Gehrig “seemed to get almost no publicity.” Why was this so?
- A Gehrig was not a pitcher.
 - B Babe Ruth got most of the attention.
 - C The Yankees would not allow it.
 - D Gehrig did not like newspaper reporters.
6. Why did Lou Gehrig leave the New York Yankees in 1939?
- A He was jealous of Babe Ruth.
 - B His team asked him to leave.
 - C He got too old to play.
 - D He had a serious illness.
7. In the last paragraph, why does the author give the dictionary definition of the word *pride*?
- A because it is a definition that is not commonly known
 - B because Gehrig’s life was an illustration of the meaning given
 - C because the author does not trust readers to look up the word
 - D because the author wants to show that Gehrig was a proud person
8. Which quote from this selection states a fact?
- A “Lou Gehrig was the classic case of playing in Babe Ruth’s shadow.”
 - B “Had illness not cut him down prematurely, he probably would have added another 308”
 - C “his lifetime batting average was a notable .340”
 - D “The movie could not have been better named.”

End of Set

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