

DAILY NEWS

Team Roger Clemens rips into Wharton stats study

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Hendricks Sports Management, the longtime representatives of Roger Clemens, issued a rebuttal to Sunday's New York Times article in which four University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business professors disputed the value of the 45-page, 18,000-word statistical report that Clemens' agents released last month.

In that lengthy tome issued Jan. 28 - complete with 38 charts and detailed statistical analysis of Clemens' 24-season career - the Rocket's overall performance is compared with those of Red Sox ace Curt Schilling, former Yankee Randy Johnson and Hall of Fame righty Nolan Ryan. It is an attempt to quash the accusations that performance enhancers played a part in Clemens' later success. All four pitchers excelled late in their careers as they approached and passed 40, with Clemens winning Cy Young Awards in 1998, 2001 and 2004, when he turned 42 that August. The report cited Clemens' development of a split-finger fastball later in his career - to compensate for the loss of velocity on his fastball - as one of the reasons for the success.

"The report correctly observes that (Clemens) is not the only pitcher to excel at a comparatively old age, but it fails to note that he has taken an unusual path to the late-career success," the Times article said.

The Times analysis takes a broader look at the stats, analyzing the careers of 31 pitchers since 1968 who started at least 10 games over at least 15 seasons and pitched at least 3,000 innings. In the analysis, Clemens shows improvement after his mid-30s while the other pitchers peak in their late 20s and then show considerable decline past age 30. The Times also downplays the earned run average (ERA) statistic - which it says "is affected by factors, like defense, that have nothing to do with (Clemens) pitching" - while underscoring Clemens' walks-plus-hits per innings pitched stat (WHIP) as taking "an even more unusual trajectory late in his career, one that raises some suspicion.

"Our reading is that the available data on Clemens' career strongly hint that some unusual factors may have been at play in producing his excellent late-career statistics," write the Penn professors, Eric Bradlow, Shane Jensen, Justin Wolfers and Adi Wyner.

The Hendricks brothers responded with their own analysis.

"The Clemens Report does not state that the statistics 'prove' anything, something missed by the four professors. The purpose of the report is to provide the statistical background of Roger Clemens' career and to correct misconceptions about his career in the public forum," Hendricks Sports Management said in a statement. "There are many variables at work that affect a starting pitcher's longevity. For example, Roger Clemens' workout regimen, which has been often cited as a significant factor in his success, has certainly extended his career. Just because it is difficult to measure the impact of a challenging workout regimen does not mean it does not favorably impact performance. Another factor that helped Clemens remain effective was his ability to adjust his pitching style over time, something the professors choose to disregard because pitch selection is not quantified in the report."

Clemens' agents also point out that their report incorporates the "ERA Margin" statistic, "which is an advanced version of ERA that takes into account league differences. Second, ERA Margin and similar versions of ERA are widely accepted throughout baseball as superior measures of the quality of starting pitchers, something ignored by the Wharton professors."

"The Wharton professors state that 'his performance declines as he enters his late 20s.' This statement is demonstrably false. After the 1990 season, at age 28, Clemens was second in voting for the AL Cy Young Award behind Bob Welch, a season in which Clemens' ERA was 1.93. The next year, at age 29, he won the Cy Young Award. Pitching from the age of 27 to the age of 30, Clemens was an All-Star in 1990, 1991 and 1992, and he achieved an ERA below 3.00 in each year. He turned 30 in August of 1992. These are clear indications that Clemens was not in a 'decline' in his late 20's, as asserted by the professors.

"As Bill James stated in a salary arbitration case while working with Hendricks Sports Management, 'Anyone can make a chart.' The professors have proven this axiom, but they have not added anything substantive to a discussion of Roger Clemens' career," Clemens' agents said.