



★ Willie MAYS | 72 | center fielder

"I don't like to talk about myself when it comes to baseball," says Willie Mays. "You've never seen me play. I could tell you a lot of things, but you *still* wouldn't know." The man has a point. He retired five years before I was born. But still, I know some things. I know about his twenty-four All-Star Game appearances and his two MVPs. I know about his 660 career home runs—a number that would be even higher had Mays not *(a)* spent two prime years in the military and *(b)* played the majority of his home games in Candlestick Park, the place where fly balls went to die. I also know that no player today does what Mays did. Nobody's as complete on the field; there's no point of reference. The closest thing would be this: a big-league freak with Ichiro's average, Torii Hunter's glove, Vlad Guerrero's arm, Albert Pujols's power ("I never lifted weights," Mays says. "I never worked on it"), and José Reyes's speed. The likelihood of such an athlete emerging is pretty close to nil, so the memory of Mays—running down moon shots at the Polo Grounds like some perfectly calibrated ball-retrieval system, then smashing a 450-foot bomb the next inning—has become all the more precious. "I don't think I had many bad games," says Mays. "But again, you've never seen me play." By which we think he means: We'll never see anything quite that good again. —HOWIE KAHN

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