

To make this dream team, you
need to have spent 10 years in the majors
— and stuck with the team you came up with.
Only 15 players made the cut.

The Loyalists

Illustration by Julian Allen
Text by Stephen S. Hall

TEAM LOYALTY MAY BE THE MOST ENDANGERED of baseball's traditions. Marquee players of the past like DiMaggio, Gehrig, Williams, Clemente and Koufax played for just one team during their entire careers and to this day remain models of loyalty. And then came free agency.

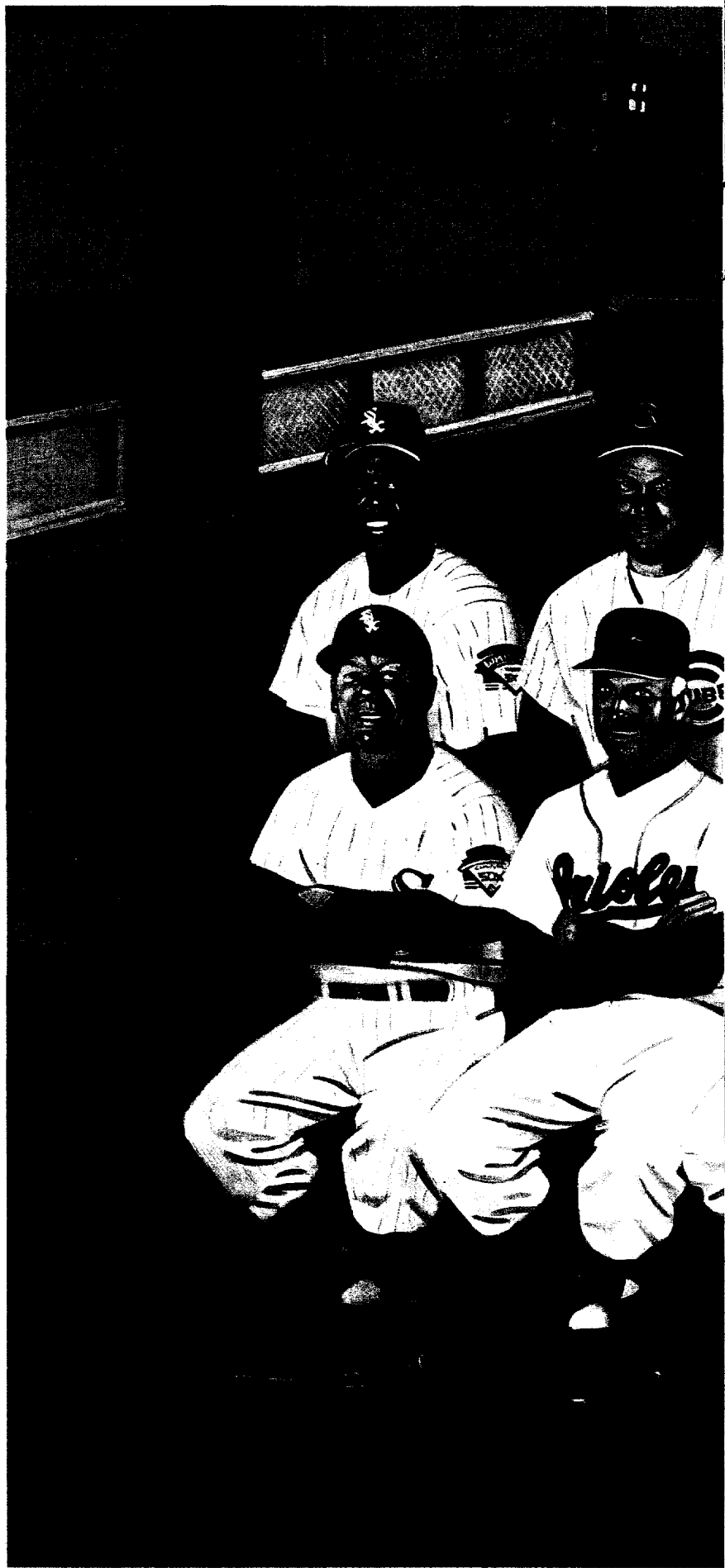
Since 1976, baseball players have been free to offer their services to the highest bidder, and general managers have been free to make pre-emptive trades. This leaves fans in a curiously hypocritical position. Sure, they celebrate loyalists like Don Mattingly, but they also demand that their teams open the checkbook when somebody else's loyalist comes on the market. (Yankee fans haven't talked much about Donnie Baseball since Tino Martinez passed 140 R.B.I.)

As the current season drew to a close, the Magazine asked the Elias Sports Bureau, baseball's official statistician, to see how many current major league players with a minimum of 10 years' service (at least one game appearance each year) are still playing for their original teams. Of the 700 active players, there are only 15 Loyalists. This fantasy franchise, pictured at right, features one ironman (Cal Ripken Jr.), the owner of the sport's best batting average over the past 10 years (Tony Gwynn), a journeyman who never journeyed elsewhere (catcher Ron Karkovice, a career .221 hitter) and four Atlanta Braves (Jeff Blauser, Mark Lemke, Tom Glavine and John Smoltz).

The cost of loyalty is hardly getting cheaper. The Chicago White Sox lured the slugger Albert Belle away from Cleveland, paying him about \$11 million a year. That's more than the payroll of the entire Pittsburgh Pirates team — which, as it turns out, was in the pennant race until the end of the season, while Chicago lasted not much longer than one of Belle's good moods.

Take a good look at the Loyalists. You may never see their like again. ■

Stephen S. Hall is a contributing writer to the Magazine and the author of "A Commotion in the Blood: Life, Death and the Immune System."



Tony Gwynn, San



Staying Power: Front row, left to right: Ron Karkovice, Chicago White Sox (since 1986); Cal Ripken Jr., Baltimore (1981); Tom Glavine, Atlanta (1987);

Diego (1982); Chuck Finley, Anaheim (1986); Tom Pagnozzi, St. Louis (1987). Middle row: Ozzie Guillen, Chicago White Sox (1985); Mark Grace, Chicago Cubs (1988); John Smoltz, Atlanta (1988); Edgar Martinez, Seattle (1987); Mark Lemke, Atlanta (1988); Craig Biggio, Houston (1988). Top row: Barry Larkin, Cincinnati (1986); Jeff Blauser, Atlanta (1987); Ramon Martinez, Los Angeles (1988).