

# Manny Ramirez - Perception vs. Reality.

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Let's pretend for a moment that tomorrow Manny Ramirez suddenly decides to do what Corey Dillon recently did in Patriots mini-camp, and hands Jeff Horrigan of the Boston Herald a sheet and asks him to read it. The sheet is a list of the career accomplishments of Ramirez. What would that list look like?

- .314 career batting average. 459 (and climbing) career home runs. 1479 (and climbing) career RBI.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> All Time in Grand Slams – 20 (Leader - Lou Gehrig, 23)
- 5<sup>th</sup> All Time in At Bats Per Home Run - 14.08
- 6<sup>th</sup> All Time AB / RBI Ratio - 23.08 (23.0819) (Active Leader)
- 9<sup>th</sup> All Time in Slugging % - .5988
- 10<sup>th</sup> All Time in OPS - 1.0076
- 2002 AL Batting Champion
- 2004 World Series MVP
- 8-time Silver Slugger Award Winner (1995, 1999-2005)
- Had a 17 game postseason hitting streak which is tied for longest in baseball history.
- Has 20 postseason home runs, good for second all time. (Bernie Williams has 22)



That's a very impressive resume, should Manny decide to retire right now.

But let's do a little projecting here. Manny has 23 home runs right now. Let's give him 20 more the rest of the season. That will put him at 479, around 20<sup>th</sup> all time. Manny has two more years on his Boston contract, and let's say he plays three years after that, somewhere, retiring at age 39. So that's five more active years after this one. Let's say he

averages just 35 home runs a year during that span. He'll end up with **654 home runs**, which would be good for 5<sup>th</sup> on the all time list. (As currently constituted)

He has 65 RBI right now. I'll give him 50 more the rest of the season. That will put him at 1529 for his career, that will place him about 42<sup>nd</sup> all time. Over the next five years, let's say he averages 100 RBI a season. At the end, he'll have **2029 RBI**, which will place him 4<sup>th</sup> all time. (Again, as currently constituted.)

**Ramirez could end up his career with 650 home runs and over 2000 RBI.**

He's probably bound to slip a little at the plate, and those numbers don't reflect possible injuries, but I think all in all, they're pretty conservative estimates.

The conclusion is simple. **We're witnessing an All Time Great at the peak of his production.**

However, is that the perception of Ramirez that we get from the Boston (and national) sports media? Not at all.

Thanks to a number of well-documented gaffes, episodes and incidents we have a very different perspective on Ramirez. The questions I have, and the ones I'm going to try to address here are these:

- **Is the depiction of Manny Ramirez that we get from the media fair and accurate?**
- **How much time is spent talking about Manny's shortcomings as opposed to his accomplishments and skills?**

Manny was in the news again this past week because of the fact that he was selected to the All Star game, but did not play. This was the third time in his career that Manny has been selected to the mid-season classic but did not play. It was enough to get the wags in the press going once again about Manny, to the point that Buster Olney on his ESPN blog declared that going forward, Ramirez's name should not even appear on the All Star ballot unless he indicates that he does intend to play. Now the rest of Olney's entry was really not at all harsh on Manny, but the buzz that has come from the piece is that Manny disrespects the game so much and that he shouldn't even be on the ballot in the future. On the FOX nationally broadcast game on Saturday, Ramirez was called a disgrace for not participating in the All Star game. (Which coincidentally, or perhaps not, FOX is broadcasting.)

Locally, the media seems convinced that Terry Francona is covering (lying) for Manny with the sore knee theory. They're upset that Manny won't talk to them and tell them himself that his knee is sore. They believe that he just doesn't want to play in the game. Radio hosts shout on the airwaves "JUST SAY YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY IN THE

ALL STAR GAME!!!” and of course if Manny ever actually did that, they’d kill him on the airwaves and in print.

Yes, there have been many Manny “episodes” over the years, too many to chronicle here, but they get to the point that you can’t tell whether the incident really **is** a big deal, or if the media is just **making** it into one. They’ve made “Manny being Manny” into a self-fulfilling prophecy as everything he does is viewed as suspect and labeled accordingly.

This has spawned a number of memorable hatchet jobs on Manny in the local newspapers and on the airwaves. John Tomase, then of the *Lawrence Eagle-Tribune* composed probably the most vicious attack on Ramirez in an article that appeared last June. The actual facts of the article were generally considered to be pretty accurate, but the tone in which the denunciation was delivered was, even by Tomase’s own admission, “needlessly over the top”. Others have also teed off on Manny, not holding back at all in

their attempts to be as scathing and nasty as possible.

**The media is full of guys who routinely show up late for gigs, fail to do any sort of show prep and only hustle when notified that the buffet table is now open in the press box.**

Dan Shaughnessy refers to Manny’s “crimes against baseball” during an era when numerous superstars of the game are being accused of steroid use. Manny himself has never had his name surface in any discussions on this topic. Instead, Manny’s “crimes” include not running hard to first base. Would it surprise you that Albert Pujols has occasionally been accused of the same thing? Yet when Manny does it, it is a crime against baseball and is talked about

incessantly on WEEL, to the point that he’s accused of hating America and not caring about or respecting the hallowed game of baseball. Just yesterday, Glenn Ordway referred to Manny several times as a “pain in the ass”.

He has been accused of taking games off, missing games because of questionable injuries and begging out of the lineup on a regular basis. A simple look at his games played and at-bat totals per season show this to be nothing more than a media creation. Since Manny joined the Red Sox in 2001, the team has played 896 games. Ramirez has appeared in 802 of those. That includes the 2002 season where he missed 42 games with a broken finger.

Even some of Manny’s accomplishments are discarded because of his perception. He led the majors in outfield assists with 17 last season, but when that is brought up, the reaction is usually a snicker from the media, who dismiss the mark because of the short Fenway left field. Somehow that same argument doesn’t come up as often when discussing Carl Yastrzemski leading the league seven times in that category.

I hear sports radio talkers refer to Manny as “lazy” and failing to hustle 100% of the time, which to me is a total joke. The media is full of guys who routinely show up late for gigs, fail to do any sort of show prep and only hustle when notified that the buffet table is now

open in the press box. You have guys who have lost jobs because they couldn't show up on time, (or sober) who knock this all-time great because he doesn't (in their eyes) concentrate fully all the time on the field. An "artist" can go to Google image search, find a photo that someone else took, trace it, and make a "cartoon" out of it, yet knock Manny for not "hustling" down the first base line.

It has come to the point that they cannot say or write his name without adding some sort of snide comment or voice inflection indicating mockery or disapproval of his effort. This takes away from his incredible achievements in the game, which are overshadowed by the media's need to deride him because they don't approve of his manner.

In a similar vein, some knock him because he appears too laid back, too lackadaisical for their taste. They would prefer that after he strikes out or forgets how many outs there are in an inning that he start throwing things and fuming and yelling like his outfield teammate Trot Nixon.

Note what *Baseball Prospectus 2006*, had to say about Nixon their publication this year:

*"For many people in New England, he is the symbol of the gritty guy with the dirty uniform, in contrast to Manny Ramirez, team space case. But Nixon is similarly prone to the occasional baserunning or defensive gaffe, and he spends part of every year on the DL."*

Trot Nixon is lauded by most in the media for his hustle and "dirt dog" style of play. However, he's been known to make even more egregious errors on the field than Manny. Who can forget Trot making a catch, forgetting how many outs there were in the inning, and tossing the ball to a fan, allowing baserunners to advance? Afterwards, Nixon angrily swatted a fan's beer off the nearby ledge. His demonstrated anger at himself endeared him to the media, whereas, had Manny done the same thing, his reaction would likely be a self-conscious, embarrassed grin, which would infuriate the various guardians of the gate for the great game of baseball.

Others question or even ridicule his intelligence. His hitting skills are minimized as he is described as a "slugging savant". On the surface, that's might sound like a compliment, as a "savant" is a "learned person, or scholar." However, it is clear in the context in which the term is often used that it is meant more along the lines of "idiot savant", or someone defined as "a mentally retarded person who exhibits genius in a highly specialized area"; in this case, hitting. This of course implies that Ramirez's incredible hitting ability is something that he has no command of. It would indicate that he doesn't need to work at it. This of course is another fallacy, as Manny's work habits in the batting cages, film room and off season training are well documented. Yet, all of that is dismissed with the "slugging savant" label.

**An "idiot savant" is defined as "a mentally retarded person who exhibits genius in a highly specialized area."**

Many jokes are also made about his alleged lack of awareness about certain events. We've all heard the stories. How many of these are urban legends and how many are actually true is a matter of debate. He is referred to as a 12 year old. He is called goofy, flaky and oblivious – all of which he might act like at times – but these are allowed to overshadow and demean his accomplishments.

It seems clear that there is clearly an imbalance of reporting here. Manny's quirks and incidents are covered much more than are his on-field accomplishments and statistics. The perception being given by the media is that Ramirez is simply a simpleton who just gets in the batters box and hits, and doesn't care about anything else.

So why does the media portray Ramirez in this manner, which much more focus on his "incidents" with little attention instead paid to his greatness as a baseball player? I can think of several reasons off hand.

**1) He won't talk to them.**

How many times do we need to read in a writer's story that Manny refused to talk to them? Almost every day, some writer has a mention of it somewhere. Manny doesn't fill up their notebooks with material, so he instead becomes an object of derision. This also ties in with point number two.

**2) They know he won't confront them**

The same writers realize that they can write or say almost anything about Manny because he's not going to confront them in the clubhouse. They're free to generate "good copy" by ripping him to their heart's content without fear of retribution.

**3) It's easier and better copy to write about his goofiness than to acknowledge his accomplishments.**

It probably also sells more papers. It generates more outrage and talk and phone calls. They can be viewed as "edgy" and controversial. It might even lead to career advancement if they do a good enough rip job and get noticed by others.

**4) For sports radio, it's an easy "hot button" topic.**

Again, a no-brainer. The hosts can throw around terms like "lazy" and "doesn't care" and "disrespecting the fans and the game" and just wait for the phone lines to light up. They don't have to do any further work or show prep, they can just feed off the fury for up to two weeks per incident.

**5) His huge contract**

Manny's huge contract also makes him an easy target. "He's making \$20 million a season; he'd better hustle every single time down the first base line!"

## **6) The Red Sox attempts to trade him (and waive him in 2003)**

For the most part, the Red Sox haven't really helped take any of this off of their superstar. When they placed him on waivers following the 2003 season and then *very publicly* tried to trade him in a package for Alex Rodriguez that offseason, many in the media felt validation of their attacks on Ramirez. The reasoning was, the Red Sox don't want him, he must really be a disruption and distraction to the rest of the team. The team has gotten better in this regard, with Terry Francona working very hard over the last year or so to defend Manny.

## **7) It feeds their inflated sense of self importance.**

For some reason, a number of the media in Boston feel that they are guardians of the legacy of the game of baseball. They feel they must speak out on anything that could possibly tarnish the reputation of the game, and because of Manny's many alleged "crimes against baseball" they must repeatedly point out these scandals. Of course, when steroids were being used by Jose Canseco in the Red Sox clubhouse, were these self-appointed guardians speaking out? I don't remember it, if they were. Instead they were becoming buddies with Canseco, to the point that even now at least one Boston media member is considered a pretty close personal friend of Canseco, and exploits that friendship for interviews and ratings.

50 years ago, Ted Williams was nearing the end of his fantastic career with the Red Sox. Williams is rightfully viewed with awe and respect in this day and age, yet during his playing career, sportswriters like Dave Egan did nothing but criticize his every move. Because of the benefit of history, Egan is now generally seen for what was: an agenda driven hack and ultimately a joke.

The Boston sports media today is in danger of fulfilling the old adage that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. In 50 years, the little Manny incidents will have been long forgotten, and with simply a glance at his career numbers we may be looking back at these media people and wondering how in the world they could've been so foolish, blind and agenda-ridden so as to have attempted to mar the reputation of a Hall of Fame player such as Manny Ramirez.

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