

# Introduction

There are very few American products that provide instant recognition upon the mere mention of their names. Among them is “Louisville Slugger”, a brand that has been synonymous with baseball bats for more than 120 years. For many players, one of their proudest early-career moments was seeing their name branded on a Louisville Slugger baseball bat for the first time.

Virtually every baseball great enshrined in the Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame has used a Louisville Slugger as their tool of trade. Louisville Sluggers have been used to make and break baseball’s most coveted hitting records. Babe Ruth wielded a Louisville Slugger to hit his record 60<sup>th</sup> home run in 1927 and his last home run in 1935. Roger Maris used a Louisville Slugger to break Ruth’s single-season record in 1961, and Henry Aaron swung one to break Ruth’s career home run record in 1974. Without a doubt, the Louisville Slugger trade name is the most famous and enduring trade name in all of professional sports.

What started out in the mid-1880s as a crude device fashioned out of wagon tongues has become one of the most coveted items in sports today. Clearly, the baseball bat has undergone some hefty redesigns since its inception, but perhaps the biggest change to the baseball bat, and perhaps to the world of sports in general, occurred a century ago on September 1, 1905. On that date, Pittsburgh Pirate great Honus Wagner signed the first ever sports endorsement contract, thereby allowing J.F. Hillerich & Son to brand Wagner’s name on baseball bats sold to the public.

This stroke of marketing genius was an instant hit with the public, and consumers eagerly purchased baseball bats modeled after, and endorsed by, their favorite professional players. I am sure many of you can remember your first Louisville Slugger player model bat, and how it instilled an added bit of confidence to use a bat that was modeled after one swung by Mickey Mantle or Jackie Robinson. Today, sports magazines and televised sporting events are plastered with sports celebrity ads, extolling the virtues of shoes, balls, and sports apparel—but it was Honus Wagner’s endorsement of a Louisville Slugger baseball bat that started it all.

What follows is, I hope, a comprehensive reference guide for all collectors of professional Louisville Slugger baseball bats, revered by many as the most desirable of all baseball artifacts. Bat collecting is the closest link we have in getting to know a player’s habits and style. With some bats now selling for astronomical prices, the hobby deserves no less than an organized account of the information available to collectors.

This book is the culmination of more than 10 years of research, gathered from studying thousands of bats in the vaults at the Louisville Slugger Museum in Kentucky, in the basement of the Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame, and in the hobby rooms of many private collections. The result is the most detailed and comprehensive analysis of professional Louisville Slugger baseball bats ever offered to the public.

***"Say this much for big league baseball—it is beyond question the greatest conversation piece ever invented in America."***

-Bruce Catton

While the basis of research for this book is extensive, by no means is it exhaustive. New information will undoubtedly surface that will improve upon the information provided. Anyone in the pursuit of knowledge and truth is welcome to add to, or correct, the findings of this book. As this hobby continues to grow, I hope that together we'll build it on a foundation of factual analysis rather than fables and hyperbole. And along the way, let's continue to enjoy all the pleasures of baseball, its rich history, and the incredible artifacts left in its wake, including some of baseball's greatest conversation pieces: Louisville Slugger professional player baseball bats.