

Lou Gehrig by Lawrence S. Ritter

Lou Gehrig was a famous baseball player who suffered from a terrible disease that was named for him after his death.

- 1 Lou Gehrig was the classic case of playing in Babe Ruth's shadow. As the New York Yankees' first baseman from 1925 through 1938, there was no way he could escape the big man behind him in right field. However, this never seemed to bother Gehrig. He was a shy, modest person who was content to leave the spotlight to Ruth.
 - 2 Gehrig was born in New York City in 1903. After attending Columbia University, where he waited on tables to pay his way through school, he joined the Yankees in 1925 and soon became one of baseball's outstanding hitters.* He is remembered by the public mainly as the durable Iron Horse who played in 2,130 consecutive games between 1925 and 1939. His teammates and opponents, however, remember him more for his blistering line drives and his ability to drive in runs.
 - 3 For thirteen consecutive seasons, he batted in over 100 runs, seven of those times over 150. In 1931, when he drove in 184 runs, he set an American League record. He batted in a lifetime total of 1,990 runs, more than anyone in baseball history except Hank Aaron (who had 2,297) and Babe Ruth (who had 2,213). Had illness not cut him down prematurely, he probably would have added another 308, enough to top them both.
 - 4 One indication of his effectiveness when he came to bat with men on base is the twenty-three home runs he hit with the bases loaded, an all-time major league record.
 - 5 He hit over forty home runs five times and batted over .340 eight times. A left-handed hitter, his lifetime batting average was a notable .340, tenth highest in the twentieth century.
 - 6 Gehrig usually batted fourth in the Yankee batting order, right behind Babe Ruth. A reporter once mentioned to him that no matter what Gehrig did, he seemed to get almost no publicity.
 - 7 Lou laughed and said, "I'm not a headline guy, and we might as well face it. When the Babe's turn at bat is over, whether he belted a homer or struck out, the fans are still talking about it when I come up. Heck, nobody would notice if I stood on my head at home plate."
 - 8 On May 1, 1939, after playing in 2,130 consecutive games stretching over fourteen years, Lou Gehrig took himself out of the Yankee lineup for the good of the team. He felt weak and uncoordinated. Doctors discovered that he was suffering from an incurable rare illness, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, now called Lou Gehrig's disease, which destroys the central nervous system. The gentle first baseman died two years later, a couple of weeks before his thirty-eighth birthday.
 - 9 A widely praised 1942 movie about Lou Gehrig's life, starring Gary Cooper, was named *The Pride of the Yankees*. The dictionary defines "pride" in this sense as "someone to be proud of . . . the best in a group." The movie could not have been better named.
- *Some of the records mentioned in this article (written in the early 1980's) were later broken.