

Trot Nixon: A Red Sox Player Profile

Too Long an Unsung Hero of the 1999 to 2005 Red Sox

Christopher Trotman Nixon, better known as “Trot,” was a first-round selection of the Boston Red Sox in the Major League Baseball draft. He would go on to become a fan-favorite, and although he struggled against left-handed pitching, his “dirt dog” mentality, excellent batting eye, and ability to hit right-handed pitching made him a more valuable player than most baseball fans of the late 90’s and early 2000’s might realize.

Fortunately, while Nixon was too long an unsung hero of the 1999 through 2005 Red Sox, he did finally get recognized for his achievements. Along with Red Sox legends Dustin Pedroia and Jonathan Papelbon, Trot Nixon was inducted into the [2024 Red Sox Hall of Fame class](#). That’s some incredible company. Those are two guys that were borderline Hall of Famers before their careers came to abrupt ends; Pedroia due to injury and Papelbon due to simply not being as dominant in the second half of his career (along with having some run-ins with various people).

So, as one of my favorite players as a young Red Sox fan in the late 90’s, I feel this is the perfect time to revisit my profile on Nixon that I wrote a couple years ago. As you’ll see, if not for some injury problems — and those pesky lefty hurlers — Trot may have had a career on par with Pedey and Paps.

Trot Nixon’s Minor League Days

Despite how highly Nixon was regarded as an outfield prospect at the time, Trot’s first few seasons in the minor leagues weren’t all that exciting. Nixon did get called up to the Major Leagues in 1996, and got 2 hits in 4 at-bats. As cups of coffee go, that’s really solid. His 1997 season at AAA Pawtucket was merely OK, although he did hit 20 HR and steal 11 bases.

I’m not entirely sure why Trot wasn’t brought up in 1997. They had the serviceable Wil Cordero in left field, but “Dude” Darren Bragg didn’t hit that well. However, both were excellent fielders. (Actually, Bragg’s glove was beyond outstanding, and I have to cover him at this point.) I still think Trot should’ve been at least a September call-up. Of course, GM Dan Duquette loved Rudy Pemberton a bit too much...

Anyway, it wasn’t until 1998 when Trot broke out at AAA in a big way, hitting .310/.400/.513 with 23 HR and stealing 26 bases. Trot was rewarded with another cuppa coffee in 1998, but this time didn’t do much to impress. He collected just 7 hits in 27 at bats. The 1999 season, however, his true rookie season, would be a very good one.

As 1999 was the first season in which I personally began to watch MLB on a regular basis, Trot Nixon was a star in the making in my eyes. In 126 games, Nixon hit .270/.357/.472 with 15 HR, 51 RBI, and stole 3 bases. Those Red Sox teams didn't really run, after all. Also, despite 7 errors, Nixon flashed the leather with defense worth 15 runs above average thanks to his above-average range.

Trot finished only 9th in Rookie of the Year voting, although it was a pretty stacked year in 1999. His own teammate, Brian Daubach, in his own first full MLB season finished 4th. It was also Carlos Lee's rookie year, although he didn't outperform Trot. Meanwhile, Chris Singleton, who finished 6th in voting, actually did. (Yes, the same Singleton who's a color commentator today.)

The well-deserved winner of the RoY Award that year was Carlos Beltran, which was honestly a smart decision, especially considering the career Beltran would have. (I think he's a hall of famer despite all the Astros-gate drama, but that's neither here nor there right now.)

Trot Nixon's Solid Numbers and 2003 Career Year

Because of various injuries, Trot Nixon never would display his once above-average speed in the major leagues. So, while he was once thought of as a 20 HR/20 SB threat, that never came to be. Fortunately, Trot translated his spectacular plate discipline and above-average power to above-average major league performance. Injuries would also limit his range in the field, but he'd still be an above-average defender overall until the tail end of his career.

However, from 1999 to 2005, Trot was never a below-average player. Keep in mind that 2 WAR is a roughly average regular in the major leagues playing a full season.

1999: 2.9 WAR in 124 games
2000: 2.5 WAR in 123 games
2001: 3.8 WAR in 148 games
2002: 2.9 WAR in 152 games
2003: 5.1 WAR in 134 games
2004: 0.9 WAR in 48 games
2005: 3.4 WAR in 123 games

Trot's best year was 2003, a year that many expected the Red Sox to make the World Series. Of course, Aaron Boone made sure that didn't happen... Still,, Trot posted a career best slash line of .306/.396/.578 for a 152 wRC+ with 28 HR and 87 RBI. Those results were fueled by a slightly high .334 BABIP, but he did have a truly good year.

Trot also hit very well in the playoffs — famously hitting the 11th inning, pinch-hit walk-off in Game 3 of the 2003 ALDS off Rich Harden — and may have been the ALCS MVP that year had

the Red Sox not been eliminated. Fortunately, he'd get that ring in 2004 even after an injury-riddled season.

Nixon wasn't a below average player until 2006, when he posted only 1.1 WAR in 114 games. Injuries finally caught up to him and he was never the same player again. He was truly awful after leaving the Red Sox for the Indians in 2007. He didn't fare too well in 2008 with the Mets, either.

Trot Nixon's Ability to Drive in Runs

There were a couple of knocks against Trot Nixon that limited his overall numbers. As I've already mentioned in the outset, Trot was dreadful against left-handed pitching (.630 career OPS vs LHP, .872 career OPS vs RHP). The other major knock against him was that in the "clutch," it seemed like Trot was more likely to draw a walk rather than get a big hit.

This may sound like a silly knock in today's game where walks are much more highly valued. But, according to Baseball Reference, it's true that in high leverage situations, Trot hit just .256/.348/.433. That's compared to .290/.380/.480 in medium leverage plate appearances and .270/.359/.466 in low-leverage PA's. (Notably, Fangraphs seems to measure leverage slightly differently, although they tell pretty much the same story.)

However, I argue Trot was much more "clutch" than some commentators suggest. After all, Trot had 223 RBI in 864 plate appearances and 711 at-bats in high leverage situations. That means Trot had an RBI for every 3.87 plate appearances and an RBI for every 3.19 at-bats. Notably, he had the best walk-to-strikeout ratio in high leverage: 108 walks to 130 strikeouts (1.2 K/BB). Those ratios are pretty spectacular. So, he made the hits he did get count! Trot was also an extremely good hitter in the 8th inning, with a career .879 OPS in that inning.

The reason he has a poor reputation in the clutch? He was below average in the 9th inning, hitting merely .220/.332/.390 (.722 OPS), and he hit a dreadful .200/.304/.300 (.604 OPS) in extra innings. Those things being said, not all of those 9th inning plate appearances were high leverage situations and 71 PA's in extra innings is an awfully small sample size. He also has positive career marks in WPA (Win Probability Added) and WPA/LI (Win Probability Added in Late Innings). The one downside is that his "Clutch" score was negative in every season except 2004 and 2005.

So, was Trot Nixon bad in the clutch? Far as the leverage indexes are concerned, he was about average. What I can say is that Trot helped his teammates trot across home plate in high leverage situations on a regular basis. In that way, I've always felt he was underrated.

Trot Nixon's Time with the Indians & Mets, Retirement, and Career Overview

Somewhat ironically, Trot Nixon played for the Indians that the Red Sox came back to beat down three games to one in the 2007 ALCS. After a lousy regular season, Nixon was actually a good contributor for the Indians in the Championship Series. It was a strange feeling for him, especially when he came back to Boston, where he received a very warm welcome.

Nixon retired before the 2009 season after a subpar stint with the New York Mets and a failed comeback in early 2009 with the Milwaukee Brewers. Trot went home to Wilmington, North Carolina to spend more time with his two children. He went on to serve as a co-host for a high school football highlight show called "The 5th Quarter" for a local channel.

In Nixon's absence, the Red Sox turned to J.D. Drew to replace Nixon. Somewhat ironically, Drew took Nixon's #7 with the Sox. While it was a frustrating five years for Drew, who dealt with many nagging injuries, overall he was actually a very similar player to Nixon. Of course, Drew had a great 2007 playoffs and helped the Sox win the World Series. But, replacing the popular Nixon, he never really endeared himself to fans.

Trot Nixon wasn't just a fan favorite for his consistent production, often underappreciated by non-Red Sox fans. He was a great teammate and his explosive temper actually endeared him to fans. Most of all, Boston fans loved him for his hustle and enthusiasm for the game. He constantly was getting his uniform dirty making great plays and hard slides on the basepaths. Trot became the inspiration for the term "Boston Dirt Dogs."

Had Nixon been a bit better against left-handed pitching, he may have posted even better numbers; the Red Sox often spelled Nixon against lefty starters for guys like Gabe Kapler, Wily Mo Pena, and other lefty mashers. Still, from a sabermetric standpoint, Nixon was an above average player for a long time, even playing through injuries and ineffectiveness against same-side pitching.

Trot, hope you're having a great time with your new career and with your family!

~ Amelia Desertsong

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