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Michael Jordan Tops List of Greatest Sports Stars of All Time

Tiger Woods and Babe Ruth are number 2 and 3 on list

New York, N.Y. — October 28, 2009 — The debates are legendary – who is the greatest baseball player of all time? Tiger versus Nicklaus? Well, when those adults who follow at least one sport are asked which two are the greatest sports stars of all time, basketball legend Michael Jordan comes in at number one followed by Tiger Woods at number two and the man who “built” a stadium, Babe Ruth comes in at number three.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,293 adults, of whom 1,494 follow at least one sport, surveyed online between October 5 and 12, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

The man who called himself “the greatest”, boxer Muhammad Ali is number 4, while quarterback Brett Favre who has yet to stay retired is number five on the greatest sport star list.

Next on the top ten are another quarterback, Joe Montana at number 6 and hockey legend, Wayne Gretzky at number 7. There is still another quarterback, Peyton Manning, tied for number 8 along with baseball’s Ted Williams. Finally, tied for number 10 are baseball’s Hank Aaron and basketball phenomenon LeBron James. This top ten list (actually 11 because of the tie for number 10) includes 3 baseball players, 3 football players and two basketball players.

Greatest baseball player

Each sport is different, so each sport has different players that are deemed the greatest. As the World Series gets underway, the New York Yankees can claim two of the top five greatest baseball players – number one, Babe Ruth and number five, Lou Gehrig. Sandwiched in between these two Yankee legends are Hank Aaron at number two, Willie Mays at number three and Ted Williams at number four.

Greatest football player

When it comes to greatest football player, number one on the list is someone who keeps trying to retire, but keeps staying in the game, Brett Favre. Next is running back and actor Jim Brown followed by 49ers quarterback Joe Montana at number three. Chicago Bears running back Walter “Sweetness” Peyton is number 4 on the greatest football player list and one of Joe Montana’s key receivers on the 49ers, Jerry Rice rounds out the top five.

Greatest basketball player

He’s number one on the overall list, so it’s no surprise that Michael Jordan is considered number one on the greatest basketball player list. The rivalry extends beyond the hard court as the Lakers star Magic Johnson and Celtics star Larry Bird come in next at number two and three respectively. Rounding out the top five greatest basketball stars are Wilt Chamberlain, who started his professional career with the Harlem Globetrotters at number 4 and Celtics’ great Bill Russell at number five.

Greatest golfer

For years, the debate has been Tiger Woods versus Jack Nicklaus. And, Tiger wins as he is considered the greatest golfer of all time followed by Jack at number two. The great Arnold Palmer is number three on the list followed by Phil Mickelson and then Bobby Jones at number 5.

Greatest tennis player

With the recent win at Wimbledon, Roger Federer became the all time Grand Slam winner with 15, beating Pete Sampras' 14 wins. And, Federer is also considered the greatest tennis players of all time followed by Pete Sampras at number two. Jimmy Connors is number three and Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras' greatest rival is number four on the list of greatest tennis players of all time. Rounding out the top five is Arthur Ashe.

So what?

While the debates may not yet be answered, these lists can begin new ones at the same time. One thing that is interesting to note is that these selections really represent players of all times, going back to the early 1900s with Babe Ruth. In fact, just four players on the overall greatest list are currently playing their respective sports. And, there are no current players on the greatest baseball player or greatest football player list. One great season can make someone "great," so who knows what names may be added next year.

TABLE 1

GREATEST SPORTS STAR – TOP 10 RANKING

"Thinking about the sports you know, please indicate which two you think are the greatest sports stars of all time."

(Spontaneous, Unaided Responses)

Base: All adults who follow at least one sport

	Rank
Michael Jordan	1
Tiger Woods	2
Babe Ruth	3
Muhammad Ali	4
Brett Favre	5
Joe Montana	6
Wayne Gretzky	7
Peyton Manning	=8
Ted Williams	=8
Hank Aaron	=10
LeBron James	=10

TABLE 2
GREATEST BASEBALL PLAYER

"Thinking about baseball players over time, please indicate which you think is the greatest baseball player of all time."
(Spontaneous, Unaided Responses)

Base: All adults who follow baseball

	Rank
Babe Ruth	1
Hank Aaron	2
Willie Mays	3
Ted Williams	4
Lou Gehrig	5

TABLE 3
GREATEST FOOTBALL PLAYER

"Thinking about football players over time, please indicate which you think is the greatest football player of all time."
(Spontaneous, Unaided Responses)

Base: All adults who follow football

	Rank
Brett Favre	1
Jim Brown	2
Joe Montana	3
Walter Payton	4
Jerry Rice	5

TABLE 4
GREATEST BASKETBALL PLAYER

"Thinking about basketball players over time, please indicate which you think is the greatest basketball player of all time."
(Spontaneous, Unaided Responses)

Base: All adults who follow basketball

	Rank
Michael Jordan	1
Earvin 'Magic' Johnson	2
Larry Bird	3
Wilt Chamberlain	4
Bill Russell	5

TABLE 5
GREATEST GOLFER

"Thinking about golfers over time, please indicate which you think is the greatest golfer of all time."
(Spontaneous, Unaided Responses)

Base: All adults who follow golf

	2009
Tiger Woods	1
Jack Nicklaus	2
Arnold Palmer	3
Phil Mickelson	4
Bobby Jones	5

**TABLE 6
GREATEST TENNIS PLAYER**

"Thinking about tennis players over time, please indicate which you think is the greatest tennis player of all time."
(Spontaneous, Unaided Responses)

Base: All adults who follow tennis

	2009
Roger Federer	1
Pete Sampras	2
Jimmy Connors	3
Andre Agassi	4
Arthur Ashe	5

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States October 5 and 12, 2009 among 2,293 adults (aged 18 and over) of whom 1,494 follow at least one sport. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

J37076

Q910, 915, 920, 925, 930, 935

The Harris Poll® #122, October 28, 2009

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