

# A Page from Baseball's Past

Craig R. Wright

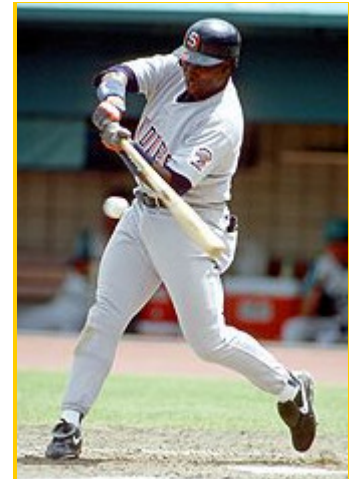
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## The Master of Two-Strike Hitting

We often hear a batter being described as a good "two-strike hitter" but what exactly does that mean? Dating back to the 1988 season, STATS Inc has kept a record of batting performance on the two-strike counts. They discovered the average non-pitcher sees his batting average decline by about 28% when down to his last strike, which means that most players hit under .200 in those at-bats.

Even the very best hitters rarely have a season in which they hit .300 with two strikes on them. Almost always that season is a fluke, likely caused by the small sample and rarely does the player ever repeat such a year. For example, in the 2000 season Derek Jeter hit .312 with two strikes on him, but he's never done better than .264 in any other season, and his career average when down to his last strike is only .234 (785/3354) –

which is a fairly normal 26% below his overall average.



Baseball's best two-strike hitter



Tony Gwynn © Tim Mantoani

It's a mite easier to win eight batting titles if you can still hit .300 when down to your last strike.

In the twenty years worth of data, there is only one player who has been a .300 hitter when down to his last strike, and no one else is even close. It is Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn. The data covers his last 14 seasons and nearly 70% of his career plate appearances. In over 2000 plate appearances where he was down to his last strike, Gwynn hit .302. That's miles ahead of the next best player, Ichiro Suzuki, who trails Gwynn by nearly 35 points, way back at .268 (518/1934).

When Gwynn was having his worst seasons hitting with 2 strikes he was still better than anyone else. If you split Gwynn's 14 seasons in the dataset into his best and worst seasons, in the bottom seven seasons he hit .272, still 4 points better than Ichiro's overall 2-strike average!

**It's not just technique. Be Prepared. You want to know what the pitcher likes to throw with two strikes.**

- Tony Gwynn

Gwynn's most amazing accomplishment came in the 5-year span from 1993 to 1997. In that period Gwynn hit a remarkable **.337** when he was down to his last strike. That covers 783 two-strike plate appearances and that .337 two-strike average was only 8% less than his overall batting mark of .368.

**Three-Thirty-Seven** as a two-strike hitter ... it boggles the mind. Consider this. Among all the other hitters in those five seasons, how many hit that high in their *overall* at-bats? The answer is .... none. Mike Piazza came the closest, hitting .3367 in his overall ABs, just a smidge behind Gwynn's two-strike average of .3374!

**Highest Batting Average 1993-1997**

1)	.368	Tony Gwynn	→	.3374	with 2 strikes)
2)	.3367	Mike Piazza	←	(.243	with 2 strikes)
3)	.334	Frank Thomas	←	(.251	with 2 strikes)

### Research Notes

🕒 All of the two-strike data cited comes from STATS Inc which has a professional scoring network working right out of the pressbox at each game, and usually a second scorer working off TV to provide a comparison of the game accounts. Baseball-Reference.com also has two-strike hitting data. I do not know what their source is, but their splits have a footnote saying they "may be incomplete due to a few missing play-by-play accounts." Their totals do slightly differ from what STATS Inc has recorded, including slightly fewer two-strike ABs than the 735 logged by STATS.

Tony Gwynn with 2 Strikes (STATS Inc data)

Year	Avg	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	BB	HBP	SO	PA	OBP	SLG
1988	.229	188	43	3	0	3	14	0	40	202	.282	.293
1989	.308	201	62	3	3	0	13	0	30	215	.349	.353
1990	.282	181	51	7	4	1	10	1	23	192	.323	.381
1991	.282	174	49	13	2	1	9	0	19	184	.315	.397
1992	.291	158	46	4	1	2	9	0	16	168	.327	.367
1993	.322	146	47	10	0	1	9	1	19	156	.365	.411
1994	.397	131	52	5	0	5	6	0	19	137	.423	.550
1995	.313	147	46	7	1	0	4	0	15	151	.331	.374
1996	.296	135	40	8	0	0	12	1	17	149	.356	.356
1997	.358	176	63	17	1	6	10	1	28	191	.387	.568
1998	.299	134	40	9	0	5	8	1	18	144	.340	.478
1999	.296	115	34	2	0	1	8	1	14	125	.344	.339
2000	.238	42	10	1	0	0	0	0	4	43	.233	.262
2001	.282	39	11	3	1	0	6	0	9	45	.378	.410
ALL	.302	1967	594	92	13	25	96	6	271	2102	.333	.400