

# Career Relief Pitching

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The following tables are generated from a database comprised of the “relief splits” as reported in *Retrosheet*. 500 career relief games (GR) are required for inclusion, yielding 174 qualifiers, and only relief data is counted. Interestingly, no reliever who qualified began his career before 1950. Each table consists of the top 15 and bottom 5 qualifiers.

ERA and several other measures represent earned runs per 9 innings pitched. This is misleading for relievers. However, we have become comfortable with these measures and they do not alter the order of the lists, so I have retained the events over 9 innings.

*Retrosheet* data is so extensive that we can determine slugging averages as well as batting averages. The only adjustment that needs to be made is to include the interference data, so that at bats can be accurately calculated. On base average is calculated without the inclusion of sacrifice flies. Their presence is a result of a misguided and erroneous conclusion that all sacrifice bunts are selfless acts and all sacrifice flies are selfish acts. Since every intention of every batter is unknowable, I’m comfortable with disregarding both. So in these tables, on base average is calculated using only at bats, hits, walks and hit batsmen.

## Earned Run Average (ERA)

## Hits per Game (H/G)

Reliever	Start	End	ERA	Rank	Reliever	Start	End	H/G
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	2.08	1	Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	5.96
Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	2.17	2	Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	6.08
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	2.39	3	Percival, Troy	1995	2009	6.08
Wilhelm, Hoyt	1952	1972	2.49	4	Benitez, Armando	1994	2008	6.30
Wetteland, John	1989	2000	2.62	5	Urbina, Ugueth	1995	2005	6.56
Smith, Dave	1980	1992	2.64	6	Dotel, Octavio	1999	2009	6.65
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	2.67	7	Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	6.78
Fingers, Rollie	1968	1985	2.73	8	Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	6.88
Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	2.73	9	Williams, Mitch	1986	1997	6.90
Locker, Bob	1965	1975	2.75	10	Wilhelm, Hoyt	1952	1972	6.90
Quisenberry, Dan	1979	1990	2.76	11	Henke, Tom	1982	1995	6.92
Gossage, Rich	1972	1994	2.77	12	Gordon, Tom	1988	2009	6.93
Hiller, John	1965	1980	2.78	13	Wetteland, John	1989	2000	7.08
Perranoski, Ron	1961	1973	2.78	14	Ryan, B.J.	1999	2009	7.11
Brewer, Jim	1960	1976	2.80	15	Gossage, Rich	1972	1994	7.14
Miceli, Dan	1993	2006	4.33	170	White, Rick	1994	2007	9.65
Heredia, Felix	1996	2005	4.33	171	Murray, Dale	1974	1985	9.70
White, Rick	1994	2007	4.45	172	Groom, Buddy	1992	2005	9.92
Groom, Buddy	1992	2005	4.47	173	Alfonseca, Antonio	1997	2007	9.94
Embree, Alan	1992	2009	4.54	174	Quantrill, Paul	1992	2005	10.07

**Walks per Game (BB/G)**

Reliever	Start	End	BB/G	Rk
Quisenberry, Dan	1979	1990	1.40	1
Eckersley, Dennis	1975	1998	1.40	2
Jones, Doug	1982	2000	1.98	3
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	2.04	4
Foulke, Keith	1997	2008	2.15	5
Borbon, Pedro Sr	1969	1980	2.20	6
Beck, Rod	1991	2004	2.24	7
Walker, Jamie	1997	2009	2.25	8
Shaw, Jeff	1990	2001	2.32	9
Face, Roy	1953	1969	2.32	10
Bradford, Chad	1998	2009	2.39	11
Quantrill, Paul	1992	2005	2.41	12
Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	2.49	13
Reed, Ron	1966	1984	2.54	14
Fingers, Rollie	1968	1985	2.56	15

Reyes, Dennys	1997	2009	5.01	170
Villone, Ron	1995	2009	5.07	171
Slocumb, Heathcliff	1991	2000	5.11	172
Romero, J.C.	1999	2009	5.20	173
Williams, Mitch	1986	1997	7.10	174

**Strikeouts per Game (SO/G)**

Reliever	Start	End	SO/G
Lidge, Brad	2002	2009	12.15
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	11.79
Dotel, Octavio	1999	2009	11.68
Urbina, Ugueth	1995	2005	11.03
Benitez, Armando	1994	2008	10.93
Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	10.73
Ryan, B.J.	1999	2009	10.48
Nen, Robb	1993	2002	10.06
Farnsworth, Kyle	1999	2009	9.94
Percival, Troy	1995	2009	9.91
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	9.81
Gordon, Tom	1988	2009	9.72
Marte, Damaso	1999	2009	9.65
Wetteland, John	1989	2000	9.62
Rhodes, Arthur	1991	2009	9.58

Murray, Dale	1974	1985	3.98
Linzy, Frank	1963	1974	3.94
Minton, Greg	1975	1990	3.81
Borbon, Pedro Sr	1969	1980	3.60
Quisenberry, Dan	1979	1990	3.27

**Batting Average (BA)**

Reliever	Start	End	BA	Rk
Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	.186	1
Percival, Troy	1995	2009	.188	2
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	.189	3
Benitez, Armando	1994	2008	.195	4
Urbina, Ugueth	1995	2005	.200	5
Dotel, Octavio	1999	2009	.204	6
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	.206	7
Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	.208	8
Gordon, Tom	1988	2009	.211	9
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	.211	10
Wilhelm, Hoyt	1952	1972	.231	11
Wetteland, John	1989	2000	.214	12
Ryan, B.J.	1999	2009	.216	13
Williams, Mitch	1986	1997	.216	14
Isringhausen, Jason	1995	2009	.216	15

Borbon, Pedro Sr	1969	1980	.279	170
Groom, Buddy	1992	2005	.281	171
Murray, Dale	1974	1985	.281	172
Alfonseca, Antonio	1997	2007	.284	173
Quantrill, Paul	1992	2005	.288	174

**Slugging Average (SA)**

Reliever	Start	End	SA
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	.281
Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	.293
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	.299
Wilhelm, Hoyt	1952	1972	.303
Abernathy, Ted	1955	1972	.315
Ryan, B.J.	1999	2009	.318
Gossage, Rich	1972	1994	.319
Forster, Terry	1971	1986	.320
Smith, Dave	1980	1992	.323
Locker, Bob	1965	1975	.323
Gordon, Tom	1988	2009	.323
Isringhausen, Jason	1995	2009	.324
Perranoski, Ron	1961	1973	.324
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	.326
McMahon, Don	1957	1974	.326

Vizcaino, Luis	1999	2009	.417
Herges, Matt	1999	2009	.420
Speier, Justin	1998	2009	.422
White, Rick	1994	2007	.430
Walker, Jamie	1997	2009	.442

**On Base Average (OBA)**

Reliever	Start	End	OBA	Rk
Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	.257	1
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	.259	2
Eckersley, Dennis	1975	1998	.261	3
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	.265	4
Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	.265	5
Foulke, Keith	1997	2008	.275	6
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	.278	7
Wetteland, John	1989	2000	.281	8
Percival, Troy	1995	2009	.282	9
Urbina, Ugueth	1995	2005	.287	10
Wilhelm, Hoyt	1952	1972	.288	11
Sutter, Bruce	1976	1988	.289	12
Fingers, Rollie	1968	1985	.291	13
Fisher, Eddie	1959	1973	.292	14
Reed, Ron	1966	1984	.294	15
Villone, Ron	1995	2009	.353	170
DeJean, Mike	1997	2006	.357	171
Alfonseca, Antonio	1997	2007	.357	172
Slocumb, Heathcliff	1991	2000	.363	173
Williams, Mitch	1986	1997	.370	174

**On Base plus Slugging (OPS)**

Reliever	Start	End	OPS
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	.540
Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	.550
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	.564
Wilhelm, Hoyt	1952	1972	.591
Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	.600
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	.603
Percival, Troy	1995	2009	.610
Eckersley, Dennis	1975	1998	.613
Gordon, Tom	1988	2009	.679
Fingers, Rollie	1968	1985	.621
Wetteland, John	1989	2000	.621
Gossage, Rich	1972	1994	.623
Locker, Bob	1965	1975	.624
Smith, Dave	1980	1992	.625
Isringhausen, Jason	1995	2009	.627
Groom, Buddy	1992	2005	.759
Herges, Matt	1999	2009	.764
Alfonseca, Antonio	1997	2007	.767
DeJean, Mike	1997	2006	.768
White, Rick	1994	2007	.772

**Game Finished Percentage (GF%)**

Reliever	Start	End	GF%	Rk
Wetteland, John	1989	2000	87.02	1
Aguilera, Rick	1985	2000	86.63	2
Nen, Robb	1993	2002	85.92	3
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	85.36	4
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	85.34	5
Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	83.25	6
Isringhausen, Jason	1995	2009	82.07	7
Quisenberry, Dan	1979	1990	82.05	8
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	81.71	9
Eckersley, Dennis	1975	1998	81.27	10
Smith, Lee	1980	1997	79.04	11
Reardon, Jeff	1979	1994	78.98	12
Montgomery, Jeff	1987	1999	78.54	13
Marshall, Mike	1967	1981	78.43	14
Fingers, Rollie	1968	1985	78.17	15
Romero, J.C.	1999	2009	19.05	170
Reyes, Dennys	1997	2009	18.77	171
Eyre, Scott	1997	2009	18.29	172
Cormier, Rheel	1991	2007	18.26	173
King, Ray	1999	2008	16.36	174

**Save Percentage (SV%)**

Reliever	Start	End	SV%
Hoffman, Trevor	1993	2009	60.00
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	57.99
Eckersley, Dennis	1975	1998	54.93
Wetteland, John	1989	2000	54.91
Isringhausen, Jason	1995	2009	51.49
Percival, Troy	1995	2009	51.00
Aguilera, Rick	1985	2000	49.46
Wagner, Billy	1995	2009	49.23
Nen, Robb	1993	2002	49.14
Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	49.01
Myers, Randy	1985	1998	48.46
Henke, Tom	1982	1995	48.44
Smith, Lee	1980	1997	47.05
Sutter, Bruce	1976	1988	45.39
Montgomery, Jeff	1987	1999	43.49
Romero, J.C.	1999	2009	0.73
Eyre, Scott	1997	2009	0.68
Reyes, Dennys	1997	2009	0.53
Cormier, Rheel	1991	2007	0.35
King, Ray	1999	2008	0.34

**Home Runs per Game (HR/G)****Won Lost Percentage (Pct.)**

<b>Reliever</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>HR/G</b>	<b>Rk</b>	<b>Reliever</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Minton, Greg	1975	1990	.35	1	Nathan, Joe	1999	2009	.667
Perranoski, Ron	1961	1973	.37	2	Jackson, Grant	1965	1982	.653
Murray, Dale	1974	1985	.37	3	Borbon, Pedro Sr	1969	1980	.651
Forster, Terry	1971	1986	.38	4	Hrabosky, Al	1970	1982	.646
Smith, Dave	1980	1992	.38	5	Cook, Dennis	1988	2002	.642
Linzy, Frank	1963	1974	.39	6	Romero, J.C.	1999	2009	.630
Tekulve, Kent	1974	1989	.39	7	Radinsky, Scott	1990	2001	.627
Locker, Bob	1965	1975	.41	8	Leskanic, Curt	1993	2004	.623
Lavelle, Gary	1974	1987	.42	9	Heredia, Felix	1996	2005	.622
McDowell, Roger	1985	1996	.42	10	Brocail, Doug	1992	2009	.613
Carroll, Clay	1964	1978	.43	11	Powell, Jay	1995	2005	.610
Agosto, Juan	1981	1993	.43	12	Rhodes, Arthur	1991	2009	.608
Rivera, Mariano	1995	2009	.45	13	Plunk, Eric	1986	1999	.600
Miller, Bob	1957	1974	.46	14	Miller, Trever	1996	2009	.600
Eichhorn, Mark	1982	1996	.48	15	Burgmeier, Tom	1968	1984	.598
Springer, Russ	1992	2009	1.20	170	Myers, Randy	1985	1998	.424
Vizcaino, Luis	1999	2009	1.30	171	Fossas, Tony	1988	1999	.415
Guardado, Eddie	1993	2009	1.31	172	Shaw, Jeff	1990	2001	.405
Speier, Justin	1998	2009	1.44	173	Davis, Mark	1980	1997	.405
Walker, Jamie	1997	2009	1.48	174	Farnsworth, Kyle	1999	2009	.373

I have avoided coming up with an overriding measurement for relief pitchers. Condensing this data into one number per reliever would be attractive, but subjective. However, a good argument can be made for Mariano Rivera being the best reliever in baseball history. He finished out of the top fifteen in only two categories and out of the top seven in only three:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Rank</b>		<b>Category</b>	<b>Rank</b>		<b>Category</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<b>ERA</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>BA</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>GF%</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>H/G</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>SA</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>SV%</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>BB/G</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>OBA</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>HR/G</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>SO/G</b>	<b>32</b>		<b>OPS</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>Pct.</b>	<b>23</b>