

baseman. Defensively, he had few peers, particularly on the double-play pivot, and he deserved his eight Gold Gloves. But with a lifetime batting average of only .260 and just 138 home runs in 2,163 games, he was not a strong hitter. Second basemen, like shortstops, aren't paid for their offense—or weren't in those days, at least—but it is wrongheaded to rank Maz so high when other second basemen who were almost as good in the field were so much better at the plate, players like Joe Gordon, Joe Morgan and the man below.

UNDERRATED

Bobby Grich



LARGE (6' 2", 200 pounds) for his position, Bobby Grich, who played 17 seasons from 1970 to '86 with the Baltimore Orioles and the California Angels, was that rare middle infielder (this was before the Nomar/Derek/A-Rod era) who combined power with outstanding D. A lifetime .266 hitter, Grich slugged 224 homers, including a 30-dinger season in 1979. That may not sound impressive considering that Bret Boone, Rich Aurilia and Miguel Tejada routinely bang 30 these days, but in Grich's era the home run leader would often be in the low 30s. Grich was also first-rate with the leather, earning four Gold Gloves in his first four full seasons at second; he led AL second basemen in putouts four times, assists and double plays three times and set the major league record for fielding average at the position in '85. Alas, the overlooked Grich never enjoyed a Homeric, Maz-like moment. —Jack McCallum



OLYMPIC SPORT

OVERRATED

Gymnastics

BLAME OLGA KOR BUT. Point the finger at Nadia. Say it's all thanks to you, Mary Lou. If it weren't for those pixies and the TV producers who fell in love with them, Americans wouldn't be subjected to numbing hours of little contortionists tumbling, swinging from bars and prancing on beams like so many midget circus performers. Most of the world sees cute, smiling Muppets performing feats of balance, strength and flexibility. I see underfed victims of child abuse who train so hard for so many hours that their growth is stunted and their adolescent bodies deformed. For every Olympic gymnastics champion, there are dozens of Olga wannabes who end their careers with permanent back, neck or shoulder

injuries. And for what? Until someone thinks up some new apparatuses, there are only so many things a human body can do on a mat, on a beam, swinging from uneven parallel bars or while vaulting off a horse. With minor variations, a flip is still a flip, a cartwheel a cartwheel, so judging is every bit as politicized and inscrutable as it is in figure skating. Whether a competitor "sticks" her landing or not becomes the great drama of each performance.

I've got an idea where to "stick it." On satellite channel 293. At 3 a.m. Somewhere where Mary Lou's smile, and the sun, never shine.

UNDERRATED

Badminton

STOP YOUR SNIGGERING—badminton is not the backyard, precocktail, white-flanneled lawn game that provided diversion for British aristocrats and fam-

ily fun for postwar America. Olympic-level badminton is a fast-paced, tactical, sweat-soaked contest that beats the bejesus out of tennis when it comes to spectacular rallies. The shuttlecock—gotta love that name—has the flight patterns of a bumblebee, shooting ahead when whacked, suddenly running out of steam, then diving earthward until it can be returned with ferocity by some lightning-quick dervish in shorts. The serves are lobbed or slammed in a mesmerizing array of arcs and speeds, and the doubles game is so fast it looks like pinball played with a net. It's inexpensive, easy to understand and can be played indoors or out. So what's holding badminton back from taking the nation by storm? Three little letters: NBC, whose provincial Olympic coverage doesn't allow airtime for a sport dominated by the Chinese and Koreans. It's time for the shuttlecock to play a starring role on the peacock. —E.M. Swift