

Baseball tidbits newsletter – interesting and random stuff, fodder for bar bets.

5.22.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

A lot this week about Roger Angell who died this week at 101. Baseball writer/genius, if you haven't had the pleasure he is a great airplane or lawn chair read. Also Reggie Jackson highlights, Schibe Park, Losing Streaks and of course, trivia. Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Only five players have hit 100 or more homers for three different teams. Two of them are Hall of Famers **Reggie Jackson and Jim Thome**. The others are: **Adrián Beltré, Darrell Evans and Alex Rodriguez**.

To win this week's trivia challenge, name the three teams each of the five hit more than 100 HRs for.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Legendary baseball writer Roger Angell died Friday at the age of 101, his wife Margaret Moorman told The New York Times. He reportedly died of congestive heart failure.

Angell began chronicling the sport professionally in 1962 when The New Yorker sent him on assignment to Florida to cover spring training. His final piece on baseball was published on The New Yorker's website in 2018; in total, his career as a late-starting baseball writer spanned 56 years.

He graduated from Harvard University, served in the Air Force during World War II (during which he worked as the managing editor at a military magazine), and had spent a decade working at a travel magazine called Holiday before following his mother, Katharine Sergeant Angell White, and stepfather, E. B. White, to The New Yorker.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame awarded him the J.G. Taylor Spink Award in 2014, making Angell the first baseball writer to receive the accolade despite never having held membership in the Baseball Writers Association of America. He also received the PEN/ESPN Lifetime Achievement Award for Literary Sports Writing — the inaugural edition of the honor — in 2011.

Throughout his career, Angell published a series of five baseball essay anthologies, starting with “The Summer Game” in 1972.

(appreciations later in this edition).

The only player drafted No. 1 overall to win a Cy Young Award is **David Price** (No. 1 pick in 2007 out of Vanderbilt; AL Cy Young winner in 2012 for the Rays).

Xander Bogaerts is on track to break the record for most starts by a Red Sox shortstop sometime in early June.

Everett Scott, who helped the Sox win three World Series, established the record of 1,081 way back in 1921, then was traded to the Yankees in the offseason.

His first trip to the United States from his native Aruba was to Bangor to play in the 2009 Senior Little League World Series. He then rode in a van four hours to Fenway Park and signed with the Red Sox.

Bogaerts was 16 at the time. He’s now 29 years old and a free agent at the end of the season. He made his major league debut at 20, helping the Red Sox win the 2013 World Series. There are now two World Series rings, three All-Star appearances, and four Silver Slugger awards on his résumé.

Speaking of shortstops, the Dodgers (**Corey Seager**) and Astros (**Carlos Correa**) let superstar shortstops walk last off season—both teams sit in first place.

Albert Pujols made his pitching debut with the Cards up 15-2 against the Giants. Pujols became the second player in baseball history to hit 600 home runs and allow a home run. The other was a guy named Babe Ruth.

There he was Sunday, a hulking first baseman in the waning days of his celebrated career, throwing 61-mile-per-hour fastballs and 54 m.p.h. curves in the ninth inning to help close things out in a blowout win without taxing the St. Louis Cardinals bullpen. He was lit up by the San Francisco Giants to the tune of three hits (two of which were homers), a walk and four earned runs, yet he walked away with the title of *second*-oldest player to pitch for the first time since at least 1929.

Sorry, Albert, **Lena Blackburne** had you beat.

At 42 years 119 days old, Pujols fell 106 days short of Blackburne, the manager of the Chicago White Sox, who inserted himself into a blowout in 1929 at 42 years 225 days old. Both were older than Satchel Paige, who got into an American League game for the first time at 42 years 2 days old in 1948 after having started his major league career in the Negro leagues in 1927.

In the same game **Adam Wainwright and Yadier Molina** broke the major league record for most wins together as a battery — 203 to the 202 amassed by **Warren Spahn and Del Crandall** of the Braves from 1949 to 1963.

More Pujols...the St. Louis Cardinals veteran first baseman continues to work his way up the MLB record books.

In the second inning of Wednesday's game against the New York Mets, Pujols hit a two-run single that was the 3,313th hit of his career, tying **Eddie Collins** for 10th in MLB history. (See piece later in this edition on Collins and how many hits did he really have.)

I think red Sox 3B Rafael Devers is one of the top plyers in the game. Graphic from last night's Red Sox game...Most multi-HR games before age 26 Red Sox all time:

Jim Rice 16

Mookie Betts 13

Rafael Devers 11

Nomar Garciaparra 10

Tony Conigliaro 9

Gerrit Cole is one of five players selected first overall in the MLB Draft to play for the Yankees, joining **Alex Rodríguez, Ron Blomberg, Tim Lincecum and Darryl Strawberry**.

Strawberry was the first overall selection in the 1980 MLB Draft, taken by the Mets from Crenshaw High School in Los Angeles. "Straw" played five seasons in pinstripes from 1995-99, hitting .255/.362/.502 with 41 homers and 114 RBIs in 231 games while winning three World Series rings.

Nathan Eovaldi of the Red Sox did not have a good second inning last week against the Astros. The Red Sox righthander faced 11 Astros batters and gave up homers to five, with Eovaldi matching the mark for most homers allowed by a pitcher in a single inning.

Astros cleanup hitter **Yordan Alvarez** initiated the bludgeoning in the second, leading off with a homer just over the Wall against a 98-mile-per-hour fastball. Two batters later, **Kyle Tucker** turned on a 96-m.p.h. fastball and sent a rocket into the right field bleachers behind the visiting bullpen for a 3-1 lead. Astros rookie shortstop and Providence native **Jeremy Peña**, making his first appearance at Fenway, then brought a childhood dream to life by clearing the Green Monster for a solo homer, his seventh of the season. **Michael Brantley** hammered a three-run homer into the Red Sox bullpen. After Alvarez hit a two-out single, Yuli Gurriel became the third Houston batter of the inning to clear the Wall. The two-run blast gave the Astros a 9-1 lead and ended Eovaldi's disastrous outing.

The Astros became the eighth team to go deep five times in one inning, a feat that had most recently been achieved by the 2020 Yankees. The Astros previous record was four home runs in an inning on Sept. 8, 2004, when **Craig Biggio, Jeff Bagwell, Lance Berkman and Mike Lamb** each went deep in the first against the Reds. Eovaldi joined Toronto's **Chase Anderson** (vs. Yankees, 2020) and Milwaukee's **Michael Blazek** (vs. Nationals, 2017) as the only pitchers to give up five homers in a single inning.

For the second time in three games, Double-A San Antonio Missions had four pitchers combine on a no-hitter. **Ryan Lillie, Michel Baez, Osvaldo Hernandez and Mason Fox** delivered the feat in a 4-0 blanking of Midland at Nelson Wolff Stadium on Wednesday.

None of the four hurlers who completed the nine-inning gem appeared in the club's previous no-no Sunday. That feat was accomplished by **Lake Bachar, Moises Lugo, Carlos Belen, Kevin Kopps**. It was the 16th nine-inning no-hitter in franchise history, and the ninth thrown in the Minors this year.

Trevor Story of the Red Sox had a decent night Thursday against the Mariners. 3 homers, 4 hits, 7 RBIs, 1 steal. a 4-for-4 night that included five runs, seven RBIs and one stolen base, Story belted three homers -- the latter two of which soared over the Green Monster and onto Lansdowne Street -- at an aggregate Statcast-projected distance of 1,163 feet.

As the third homer left his bat, Story pirouetted in the batter's box before joyfully trotting around the bases. The power-packed performance led the Red Sox to a 12-6 victory over the Mariners. It was the second three-homer game of Story's career and the 35th in Red Sox

history. It had been nearly five years since a player had 3 HRs and a stolen base in a game—Twins **Bryon Buxton** did it in August 2017 against Toronto.

Story quickly picked up where he left off following his three-home run performance Thursday night. Story belted a grand slam in the third inning Friday off Seattle starter **Robbie Ray** that just snuck over the Green Monster, giving the Sox a 4-0 lead. He has 11 of the 18 RBIs for the Red Sox through the first two games of the series. The Sox won their third straight 7-3, first 3 game winning streak for Boston on the season.

1939 Tigers used 12 different starting pitchers in their first 40 games. That is tied for the MLB record (one of the four other teams with 12 was last year's Toronto Blue Jays). This year's Tigers – 10 starters through 40 games with number 11 slotted for today's 41st game..

The 1939 Tigers eventually overcame their turnover. They lost 20 of their first 30 games before finishing 81-73-1. A year later, with **Hal Newhouser** in the rotation, they won the American League pennant. This year's Tigers, now 13-26, hope for a similar rebound.

Speaking of a whole lot of players... The Seattle Mariners set a Major League Baseball (MLB) record by using 67 players in 2019. That broke the previous mark of 64 players used by the Texas Rangers in 2014. The Mariners also used a record 42 pitchers in 2019.

From the 'it ain't over 'til its over' file, The Indiana Hoosiers and Iowa Hawkeyes combined for 40 points when their football teams faced off last September. Their baseball teams met Thursday night and actually surpassed that scoring total in a wild, historic game.

Despite falling behind 13-2 after three innings, the Hawkeyes stormed back at home with 28 runs over their final five turns at bat to notch a 30-16 victory.

The last player to lead the Minors in home runs and go on to win an MVP Award in the Majors was **Kris Bryant**.

Kris Bryant. After leading NCAA Division I with 31 homers in 2013, when he exceeded the total of 223 of the 296 teams at that level, Bryant topped the Minors with 43 in 2014 between Double-A and Triple-A. He slammed 26 enroute to National League Rookie of the Year honors in 2015, then 39 while winning the NL MVP and a World Series championship in 2016.

The Red Sox Hall of Fame induction ceremony will be held at Fenway for the first time Thursday. The Class of 2020 — **David Ortiz, Manny Ramirez, Rich Gedman**, and the late **Bill Dinneen** (hero of the first World Series), as well as former GM **Dan Duquette** (who signed Ramirez) — will be honored.

May 22, 1998 (24 years ago today), saw the Mets receive **Mike Piazza** from the Florida Marlins for **Preston Wilson, Ed Yarnall and Geoff Goetz**.

You're forgiven if you don't remember Piazza's tenure with the Marlins. Florida acquired the All-Star catcher alongside **Todd Zeile** from the Dodgers just over a week prior to its trade with New York, sending **Gary Sheffield, Bobby Bonilla, Charles Johnson, Jim Eisenreich and Manuel Barrios** to Los Angeles in a blockbuster deal.

Piazza played just five games with the Fish, collecting five hits and five RBIs in 19 plate appearances.

Mike Trout reached yet another milestone on Saturday against the A's, becoming just the second player in franchise history to score 1,000 career runs.

Trout, who scored the run on an RBI infield single from **Luis Rengifo** in the sixth inning, joined **Garret Anderson**, who scored 1,024 runs during his 15-year career with the Angels.

Trout, 30, joined some elite company, as he became the third player in Major League history with at least 1,000 runs, 300 home runs and 200 stolen bases by an age-30 season, joining **Willie Mays and Alex Rodriguez**. And over the last 60 years, he became the fifth-fastest to 1,000 career runs by games played. It took Trout 1,325 games to reach the milestone and the only players who reached it in fewer games over the last 60 years were **Rickey Henderson (1,252), Rodriguez (1,261), Kenny Lofton (1,305) and Albert Pujols (1,306)**.

Trout also became the 341st player in Major League history to reach 1,000 runs.

The only active players with 1,000 runs scored are Pujols, **Miguel Cabrera, Robinson Canó, Joey Votto, Andrew McCutchen, Justin Upton, Nelson Cruz** and Trout. But Trout reached 1,000 career runs in fewer games than all of them except for Pujols.

SCROLLING THROUGH THE ALL-TIME HITS LIST

Would you have guessed:

Omar Vizquel 2877 had more hits than **Babe Ruth** 2873 and **Ken Griffey Jr.** 2781.

Bill Buckner 2715 had more hits than **Ted Williams** 2654 and **Jimmie Foxx** 2646.

Buddy Bell 2514 had more hits than **David Ortiz** 2472 and **Mickey Mantle** 2415.

Julio Franco 2586 had more hits than **Reggie Jackson** 2584 and **Ernie Banks** 2583.

WHAT WILL THE REDS DO NEXT?

Evan Easterling, The New York Times

The Cincinnati Reds accomplished a baseball rarity Sunday by losing despite conceding no hits.

Hunter Greene, a 22 year old rookie right-hander, had struck out nine batters through seven innings without allowing a hit. His counterpart, the Pirates' veteran left-hander **José Quintana**, nearly matched him, allowing only three hits and one walk in seven innings before turning the game over to the Pittsburgh bullpen.

Though Greene's pitch count had surpassed 100, Reds Manager **David Bell** allowed him to begin the bottom of the eighth inning in pursuit of a no-hitter in Pittsburgh. Greene induced a groundout, but then issued walks to **Rodolfo Castro** and **Michael Perez**. After seven and one-third innings, five walks and 118 pitches, Greene was finally pulled.

The right-hander **Art Warren** walked another batter to load the bases, and **Ke'Bryan Hayes** grounded into a fielders' choice to drive in the game's only run and hand Greene a hard-luck loss. It was only the sixth time in baseball's modern era that a team lost without yielding a hit, and the first time it had happened since 2008.

Unfortunately for Greene, Warren and the Reds, Sunday's feat will not be recorded as a no-hitter. In 1991, Major League Baseball changed the definition of a no-hitter, requiring that a team finish at least nine innings in a complete game, thus wiping out each of the no-hit losses, as well as several that were shortened by rain. By the same rule, a **Madison Bumgarner** start in 2021, in which he allowed no hits in a complete-game win, was not recorded as a no-hitter because it came in a seven-inning game as part of M.L.B.'s doubleheader rules that season.

Sunday's defeat was the latest for Cincinnati (9-26), which is more than 10 games out of first place in the National League Central. The Reds' 3-19 start with a minus-65 run differential was worse than both the 2003 Tigers, who finished with 119 losses, and the 1962 Mets, who lost 120, though they've been more competitive of late with six wins in their past 10 games.

The outing had to be encouraging for the Reds and Greene, who had a 7.62 E.R.A. and allowed 11 home runs in 26 innings entering Sunday's game. But it will surely come with some criticism as the total of 118 pitches is the most a pitcher has been allowed to throw this season, which stands in sharp contrast to how other teams have handled pitchers. The Dodgers, notably, pulled **Clayton Kershaw** after seven perfect innings because the veteran left-hander had thrown 80 pitches on a cold afternoon in Minnesota and they have designs on a deep postseason run.

After having **Tommy John** surgery in 2019 and the cancellation of the minor league season in 2020 because of the pandemic, Greene had a 3.30 E.R.A. across Class AA and AAA last year. And he ranks as one of the top 25 prospects, according to MLB.com.

After a record-setting year of no-hitters in 2021, there have been two official ones this season, a combined effort by the Mets' staff and a two-strikeout outing by the Angels rookie left-hander **Reid Detmers** in a blowout of the Tampa Bay Rays.

The Reds are 9-26 and on pace for 120 losses this season. The 1962 New York Mets hold the record for the most losses (120) in the modern era, but they only played 160 games that season. The good news is the Reds' .257 winning percentage is better than the 1916 Philadelphia Athletics (36-117), who finished at just .235. Silver linings, baby.

Saturday night update--the Reds have rallied to 11-28 for a .282 winning pct. They are 5-5 in their last 10.

THE A'S BEFORE THEY HEADED WEST

Last week I mentioned that the A's drew 2,488 fans to a game and that Las Vegas may be in their future. Oakland Coliseum was built in 1966, same year as the Angel's stadium in Anaheim. Only Fenway Park, Wrigley Field and Dodger Stadium are older MLB parks.

If a new stadium is ever built in Oakland, it will be the first time the Athletics — an original American League franchise dating to 1901 in Philadelphia before moving to Kansas City, Mo., in 1955 and then Oakland in 1968 — have had a stadium built specifically for them since Shibe Park opened in 1909. That stadium opened to much fanfare as the first concrete-and-steel

facility in baseball, but in a sign of things to come, the team was eventually forced to share it with the Phillies.



Shibe Park, known later as **Connie Mack Stadium**, was the home of the Philadelphia Athletics of the American League (AL) and the Philadelphia Phillies (also known as the Blue Jays from 1944 to 1949) of the National League (NL). When it opened April 12, 1909, it became baseball's first steel-and-concrete stadium.

The venue's two home teams won both the first and last games at the stadium: the Athletics beat the Boston Red Sox 8–1 on opening day 1909, while the Phillies beat the Montreal Expos 2–1 on October 1, 1970, in the park's final contest.

Shibe Park was named after A's team President **Ben Schibe**. It was five blocks west, corner-to-corner, from the Baker Bowl, the Phillies' home from 1887 to 1938. The stadium hosted eight World Series and two MLB All-Star Games, in 1943 and 1952, with the latter game holding the distinction of being the only All-Star contest shortened by rain (to five innings). In May 1939, it was the site of the first night game played in the American League.

The Shibe Park façade was in the ornate French Renaissance style, including arches, vaultings, and Ionic pilasters. The grandstand walls were to be of red brick and terra cotta and featured

elaborate decorative friezes with baseball motifs, while cartouches framed the Athletics' "A" logo at regular intervals above the entrances. T Gabled dormer windows on the upper deck's copper-trimmed green-slate mansard roof looked out over the streets below. Presiding over all were terra cotta busts of Shibe and Mack above the main entrances.

The signature feature of the exterior design was the octangular tower on the southwest corner. The upper floors would accommodate the A's offices, those of Shibe's sons Jack and Tom, who ran the day-to-day business aspects of the team, and the domed cupola on the very top were to house Mack's office

The original 1909 configuration was a double-deck grandstand in the southwest corner of the block, with open pavilion seating extending to the foul poles. The outfield was a large rectangle, surrounded by a 12-foot brick wall that bordered the streets. The deepest part of center field was a square corner 515 feet from home plate. It was 378 to the left field foul marker, and 340 to right field. The slight upslope of the land from south to north was reflected in a small "terrace" that ran across left and center field. The upper deck was built of wood mounted on steel girders, while the lower deck was built of concrete and steel. The only link with the Columbia Park was the transplanted sod, rolled out at the new venue. The 1909 seating capacity certainly was an upgrade from Columbia Park: 11,000 in the double deck and 12,000 in the two pavilions, for a total of 23,000. Overflow crowds were accommodated by roping off the left field area in front of the wall. Some 500 tons of steel went into the construction.

The Athletics and their new stadium were a hit: the A's won pennants – and brought World Series to town – in 1910 and 1911, and by 1913, when they would win another, Shibe initiated the first of the expansions of seating capacity that would continue right on through the 1950s.

The Shibe Park turnstiles registered some 47 million clicks over 62 seasons of baseball. The Phillies were first to break the million mark for a season in 1946 with a team that was a "harbinger of the Whiz Kids." The star-crossed 1964 Phillies drew the highest single-season attendance with 1,425,891 in that infamous year; the Athletics' best-attended season was 1948, when they drew 945,076 fans.

The largest single-day baseball crowd came on May 11, 1947, when **Jackie Robinson** made his Philadelphia debut; the Phillies beat the Brooklyn Dodgers in both ends of their doubleheader that day as 41,660 looked on. The Athletics' best single-day turnout was also for a doubleheader, with the Washington Senators, on August 3, 1931, as the Second Dynasty team was closing in on its third AL pennant in a row; they swept both games before a crowd of 38,800-plus.

Low-ebb seasons were the Phillies' 1940 turnout of 207,177 and the Athletics' turnout of 146,223 in 1915, the year after **Connie Mack** sold off the stars from his 1914 pennant-winning team.

With the A's off to Kansas City in 1955 and the Phillies opening Veterans Stadium in 1971, Schibe Park fell into disrepair and was leveled in 1976.

JOE POSNANSKI REFLECTING ON GEORGE CARLIN AND WHAT MAKES BASEBALL DIFFERENT

"What makes baseball different?" The inspiration was George Carlin's brilliant and essential "Baseball and Football" routine, which I memorized years ago and can still do, in its entirety, on command. There are so many insights in that routine that still boggle the mind, but the one that I think of most is this one:

"In football, basketball, soccer, volleyball and all sports played with a ball, you score with the ball. In baseball the ball prevents you from scoring."

What a mind he had. This is, of course, exactly right. No end zones, no goals, no baskets, no holes, no nets or lines. In baseball, you have to beat the ball home.

Baseball, of course, does not have a clock but instead measures time by outs.

— In baseball, every play is started by the defense, not the offense, and defensive players are the only ones allowed to touch the ball.

— In baseball, the locker room is called the clubhouse.

— In baseball, the coach is called the manager.

— Many people will talk about (as Carlin did) how the manager wears the same uniform as the players, something that would be ludicrous in pretty much any other sport. But I think it goes beyond that.

The baseball uniform is the only one I know of that is not in any way designed for the sport. Like, football and hockey uniforms are designed to include pads to cushion the violence. In basketball and soccer (and tennis) they wear shorts, for comfort. But what's the actual point of a baseball uniform?

— In baseball, they wear a cap. Is there another sport where the players just wear stylish headwear?

— Baseball seems to me the only sport they stop to let people warm up.

— Baseball seems to me the only sport where the manager/coach is regularly allowed on the field of play.

— Baseball seems to me the only sport where they make a major production out of taking someone out of the game. The closest, I'd say, is soccer, where they hold up the number of the player coming out of the game, and then everyone stops to cheer or boo as they come off the field. But even this does not match a manager coming out to the mound and taking the baseball away from the pitcher.

— In baseball, fans bring gloves to the ballgame. In football, fans do not bring shoulder pads to the game.

— I've been thinking a lot about this one — baseball seems to me the one sport that appeals to all five senses. When you hear people talk about baseball, you will routinely hear them talk about sound (crack of the bat!), smell (nothing like those ballpark smells!), taste ("A hot dog at the ballpark is better than a steak at the Ritz," Humphrey Bogart said), sight (of course, but baseball is a particularly beautiful game) and touch (foul ball coming your way!). I can't think of another game that gets all five.

— Baseball, I believe, is the one game you play in a park.

— Baseball, I believe, is the only game with a specific advantage in the rulebook for the home team ... the home team bats last.

— This is opinion more than fact, but I feel pretty sure that baseball is the only game where a sizable number of fans believe the game is better on the radio than on television — better HEARD than WATCHED.

— In baseball, you can have an unlimited number of fouls without penalty.

— Baseball is the only sport that offers the fans a special moment to stretch.

— You cannot kneel on the ball, run out the clock or ice the puck in baseball. To win, you have to get the final out.

5 BIGGEST LOSING STREAKS IN BASEBALL HISTORY

Americans love a good losing streak. We thrill at the improbability of it. We ogle the emotional wreckage like it was a 23-car pileup. In a nation that usually roots for the underdog, sometimes we just want them to get pummeled -- again, and again, and again. Until it seems they can't possibly lose another, which of course they do, and then we quietly cheer.

Baseball has produced some monumental and memorable losing streaks. Longtime fans of the following teams still carry the memories of these streaks like scars. World Series championships come and go, but the slow burn of a 20-game losing streak is seared into the heart forever. You can't escape the nagging fear that the impossible will somehow happen again, and a month of summer with pass without a "W."

And now, our list of the five longest losing streaks in baseball history, starting with a summer at the turn of the 20th century that Bostonians would rather forget.

5: Boston's Twin Streaks

Boston is famously cursed as a baseball city. The Curse of the Bambino, as it was known, held the Red Sox without a pennant from 1918 until 2004. What makes the curse so cursed is that before the 86-year dry spell, the Red Sox were arguably the best team in baseball, winning the first World Series in 1903 and picking up four more titles in 1912, 1915, 1916 and 1918. The only truly miserable year was 1906. And boy was it miserable.

In 1906, there were two major league clubs in Boston, the Braves (aka the Beaneaters) and the Americans, the team that became the Red Sox in 1908. Both teams tallied record-breaking losing streaks in 1906, making Boston the most joyless place to watch baseball outside of Mudville.

The Americans were the worst of the worst that year, with a 20-game losing streak and a phenomenal 49-105 record. The Braves put up a fight, though, with a 19-game losing streak and more than 100 losses for the season.

Next on our list of the biggest losers is another double streak, this time from the same team.

4: The 1916 and 1943 Philadelphia Athletics

Connie Mack is easily one of the greatest managers in baseball history. The Hall of Fame skipper coached the Philadelphia Athletics to nine American League pennants and five World

Series titles. Incredibly, his career in Philadelphia spanned 50 years from 1901 to 1950. Even more incredible, this gold-plated winner and baseball legend also holds the record for two of the longest losing streaks in the game's history.

In 1916, just two years after he took the Athletics to the World Series, Mack presided over one of the most dreadful end-of-season performances by any pro baseball club, before or since. The A's dropped 56 out of their last 60 games, including a 20-game losing streak. The final 1916 record was 36-117. It would signal the start of a seven-year slump in which the Athletics came in last in the American League every season.

While the rest of the country slogged through the Depression, Athletics fans had a lot to cheer for in 1929 and 1930, when Mack led his Athletics to back-to-back World Series titles. But as Mack is famously quoted as saying, "You can't win them all." And from the mid-1930s through the mid-1940s, the A's lost many more than they won. In 1943, Mack matched his 1916 season with another 20-loss streak, ending the season at 49-105.

3: 1988 Baltimore Orioles

Few people expected the 1988 Baltimore Orioles to be World Series contenders, but no one could have predicted their astonishingly bad start to the season. **Cal Ripken Sr.** was at the helm of the struggling Orioles franchise, which finished 13th in the American League in 1987, ending the season with a dismal 42 losses over their last 56 games. That's momentum, all right, just the wrong kind of momentum.

For the 1988 season opener, a crowd of 52,395 packed Memorial Stadium in Baltimore to watch their hopes of redemption crushed by a 12-0 slaughter at the hands of the Milwaukee Brewers. The embarrassing loss included a botched bunt, a run scored from second on an infield hit, two wild pitches, two hit batsmen and even a rare stolen base by the Brewers: home.

Somehow, things only got worse from there. The Orioles lost their next game, then the next, then the next. After the seventh consecutive loss of the season, the Orioles management fired Cal Ripken, Sr., despite the awkward fact that Ripken's two sons were playing shortstop and second base.

By the time the cursed Orioles faced the Minnesota Twins on April 26, 1988, they were a national media sensation for all of the wrong reasons. They had lost an unprecedented 19 of their first 19 games. It seemed quite possible that they would never win, ever. Still, the Orioles kept hope alive. Cases of champagne were on ice in the locker room. President Ronald Reagan even called the team before the game to wish them luck. But did they win one for the Gipper? Nah.

The Orioles finally snapped their headline-grabbing losing streak with a 9-0 drubbing of the Chicago White Sox, 26 days and 21 losses into the season. The mood in the clubhouse was relief, not elation. No one even bothered to crack open the champagne.

"The worst we could do is lose one more," said Orioles pitcher **Mark Williamson**. "I'm relieved, but we have to keep it in perspective. It's not like we just won the seventh game of the World Series. Maybe we won't be so much of a household name now".

To top the incredibly poor performance of the 1988 Orioles, we have to travel back to the 1961 Philadelphia Phillies.

2: 1961 Philadelphia Phillies

In late July of 1961, a very young Philadelphia Phillies team went on a five-game losing streak before winning the second game of a double-header against the San Francisco Giants on July 28. A five-game slump isn't great news, but it's nothing to cry in your beer about. What came next, though, had Phillies fans sobbing into their Yuengling for three straight weeks.

From July 28 through August 20, the Phillies lost 23 straight games. If you overlooked that lone "W" against the Giants, it was more like 28 games. The colossal losing streak still stands as the longest in major league history since the advent of the World Series in 1903.

The '61 Phillies were young, but they weren't terrible. They just had a very, very bad run. During the streak, they batted a collective .248 and couldn't seem to convert with runners in scoring position. Many of the games could have gone either way, though: Eight of the matches, painfully enough, were lost by a single run.

Phillies manager **Gene Mauch** loved his players, but hated losing. After one crushing loss, he smashed the dugout lights. When they installed protective cages around the lights, he took them out with a bat. When one of his players was tagged hard at home, Mauch led the rest of the team in a bench-clearing brawl.

Phillies fans can be brutal, but they are nothing if not loyal. When the Phillies finally broke the cursed streak, they boarded a late flight back to Philadelphia, arriving close to midnight. From their windows, the team saw a crowd assembled at the gate. A player joked that that someone was selling rocks to the crowd for a dollar a bucket.

To the Phillies' great surprise, the crowd of 2,000 was there to cheer the return of their triumphant heroes. A brass band played as the crowd lifted the tortured Phillies manager Gene Mauch on their shoulders and paraded him for a long-awaited victory lap.

1: 1899 Cleveland Spiders

Baseball fans have terrific long-term memories, particularly for the worst teams to ever play the game. It turns out that two of the longest losing streaks in Major League Baseball history didn't happen in this century, or the last one for that matter. The shame of the longest losing streak in baseball (24 games!) belongs to the atrocious Cleveland Spiders of 1899, who broke the 23-game record previously held by the miserable Pittsburgh Alleghenys squad of 1890.

You might not recognize the names, but these two clubs were legitimate National League teams back in the late 19th century. The Alleghenys earned the nickname "the Pirates" in 1891 when they "stole" (signed, technically) a prized second baseman from the Philadelphia Athletics. The Cleveland Spiders, however, didn't evolve into the Cleveland Indians of today. Instead, the Spiders were born in 1879 and died in 1899 after playing arguably the worst season of baseball in the game's history.

The most important number here is 24, which is the number of consecutive losses that the Spiders endured during that fateful 1899 season. Equally impressive in shamefulness is the team's season record of 20 wins and 134 losses. The blame for the appalling record certainly rests on the players, but also on the team's owner, who gutted the club of its best players and sent them to his new team in St. Louis.

The 1890 Pittsburgh Alleghenys suffered a similar fate. After the close of the 1889 season, an Alleghenys star player named **Ned Hanlon** defected for the Pittsburgh Burghers of the newly created Player's League and took all but four of the Alleghenys' roster with him. The abandoned Alleghenys not only lost 23 in a row in 1890, but amassed a demoralizing 23-113 record.

The Burghers folded after only one season, and Hanlon and his fellow defectors went back to the Alleghenys and returned the club to its former pretty-goodness. The 1899 Spiders weren't so lucky: After their record-breakingly bad season, the National League squashed the lowly Spiders for good.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE DRAFT

Mlb.com

"Have you heard when **Kumar Rocker** is going to pitch again?"

We finally have an answer.

On Friday, Rocker signed with the Tri-City ValleyCats of the independent Frontier League. He'll join them later this month and is expected to make a half-dozen appearances in advance of the Draft, which begins July 17 in Los Angeles.

It wasn't supposed to work out this way. One of the most famous and accomplished pitchers in college baseball history, Rocker threw a 19-strikeout no-hitter as a Vanderbilt freshman against Duke in the NCAA Super Regionals before winning Most Outstanding Player honors at the College World Series in 2019. After the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, he returned last year to help pitch the Commodores to the CWS finals and tied teammate Jack Leiter for the Division I strikeout lead with 179 in 122 innings.

Rocker went 10th overall to the Mets in July and agreed to a \$6 million bonus. But when they didn't like the results of his post-Draft physical, they reduced their offer to \$0. That was a formality so New York could get the 11th overall pick in the 2022 Draft as compensation if he didn't accept, which he obviously wasn't going to do.

In a 2022 Draft riddled by injuries to potential first-round pitchers, Rocker could factor as high as the 10-20 range if he displays the stuff he had in the past and his medical records check out. He's capable of running his fastball up to 99 mph, owns a wipeout slider with power and depth and can miss bats with a hard curveball. But his velocity also fluctuated at times during the 2021 college season, and there's no confirmation on what exactly spooked the Mets about his physical.

Here's hoping that Rocker is healthy and fares well in the Frontier League and the Draft. He pitched and won a lot of big games at Vanderbilt and deserved a better fate than he got last summer.

REGGIE, REGGIE

Mlb.com notes to commemorate **Reggie Jackson's** 76th birthday.

Courted by several major universities for football, Jackson ultimately chose Arizona State University because the school allowed him to remain a two-sport athlete. He tried out for ASU's baseball team wearing his football pants and cleats and still homered four times off one of the team's varsity pitchers. He set a single-season school record as a sophomore in 1966 with 15 home runs.

The A's selected Jackson with the second overall pick in the second MLB Draft in 1966, two years before the franchise moved from Kansas City to Oakland. The Mets' first overall pick in that year's draft was catcher **Steven Chilcott**, one of only four No. 1 picks that never made it to the Major Leagues. Meanwhile, Jackson is probably the greatest No. 2 overall pick in Draft history.

Jackson burst onto the big league scene less than three years after he was drafted, blasting an incredible 37 homers in 91 games before the 1969 All-Star Game. After more than 50 years, that total is *still* the AL record (tied with **Chris Davis**, 2013) for most homers before the All-Star break, and it's two shy of **Barry Bonds'** AL/NL record 39 first-half dingers set during his all-time record 73-homer 2001 campaign. **Mark McGwire** also belted 37 first-half taters for the Cardinals on his way to 70 in '98.

That 1969 season marked the first of 16 years in which Jackson bopped at least 20 home runs, a total that is still tied with **Eddie Murray, Alex Rodriguez, Babe Ruth, Jim Thome and Ted Williams** for the sixth-most 20-homer seasons in AL/NL history. The only legends with more are

Hank Aaron (20), Barry Bonds (19), Willie Mays (17), Albert Pujols (17) and Frank Robinson (17).

Of course, as fans who watched Jackson can tell you, all those homers did come with a prodigious amount of strikeouts. Jackson's 2,597 strikeouts are the all-time AL/NL record, though Jim Thome came very close by retiring with 2,548. Jackson and Thome combined for nearly 1,200 career home runs and they are both Hall of Famers, of course, so their teams lived with all the whiffs.

Jackson struck out at least 100 times in 18 of his 21 big league seasons, four more than any other hitter in AL/NL history.

Even though strikeouts are vastly more prevalent in today's game than when Jackson played, he was still head and shoulders above his peers when it came to punching out. FanGraphs' era-adjusted stats list Jackson's strikeout rate at 74% above the league average across his playing career, tied for the 11th-highest K%+ total (min. 3,000 plate appearances) since Jackie Robinson broke the AL/NL color barrier in 1947.

But, again, Jackson swung big for a reason. His era-adjusted isolated slugging (ISO) -- which gives added weight to extra-base hits -- was 80% better than his peers, also a top-20 mark within the Integration Era.

Jackson's second All-Star Game appearance in 1971 was his most memorable. He pinch-hit for teammate **Vida Blue** in the third inning against Pirates pitcher **Dock Ellis** and walloped arguably the most famous homer in All-Star Game history off the light tower on top of the right-field grandstand at Tiger Stadium. Coming decades before Statcast, we might never know for sure how long Jackson's moonshot went (500 feet? 550? 650, as a group of Wayne State University physicists estimated?), but that has only added to the mystique surrounding that dinger.

Fully formed as a Major League superstar, Jackson made five consecutive All-Star teams from 1971-75 while helping the A's become only the second franchise to capture three straight World Series championships from '72-74. Jackson, however, did not get to play in the '72 Series against the Reds; he tore his hamstring while successfully stealing home as part of a double steal in the decisive Game 5 of the ALCS.

A motivated Jackson did just that in 1973. He rebounded from the sting of the previous October with one of his greatest seasons, leading the AL in homers (32), RBIs (117), runs (99), slugging (.531) and OPS (.914) to claim the league's MVP Award by unanimous vote. In October, he batted .310 with six RBIs to take home World Series MVP honors in Oakland's seven-game triumph over the Mets. That play netted Jackson the \$125,000 salary he sought for '74.

Many longtime baseball fans can instantly recognize Hall of Fame reliever **Rollie Fingers'** mustache, but did you know Jackson was instrumental in Fingers' decision to grow it? Jackson showed up to A's Spring Training in 1972 with a mustache, and his teammates wanted him to

get rid of it. Four teammates, including Fingers, grew mustaches hoping that manager **Dick Williams** would order everyone on the team -- including Jackson -- to shave.

Instead, A's owner **Charlie Finley** liked the mustaches so much that he offered \$300 to every player that grew one. Fingers grew to like his 'stache so much that he chose to retire instead of play for the Reds in 1986 after Cincinnati told him to shave.

Jackson won the second of his four career home run titles in 1975, but it would be his last campaign in Oakland as Finley dismantled the A's dynasty. Finley traded Jackson to the Orioles seven days before the start of the '76 season, and Jackson played just one season in Baltimore before taking advantage of the brand new free-agent market and signing a five-year deal with the Yankees worth roughly \$3 million.

"Some clubs offered several hundred thousand dollars more -- possibly seven figures more," Jackson told the press, "but the reason I'm a Yankee is that [owner] **George Steinbrenner** outthrustled everybody else."

Thus began one of the most famous player tenures in Yankees history, though Jackson's first season in pinstripes was anything but smooth. Manager **Billy Martin** famously pulled Jackson from a game in June and nearly got into a brawl with his new slugger in the dugout as a national audience watched on television. Jackson's personality did not always mix with his teammates, making the Yankees' clubhouse one of the most volatile in modern baseball history across the late 1970s. Martin benched Jackson in the final game of the 1977 ALCS after he began the series 1-for-14 against Royals pitching, though Reggie came off the bench to deliver a key pinch-hit single late in the decisive Game 5.

All the headlines and attention of 1977 led up to the World Series, where Jackson stole the show. He homered in Games 4 and 5 against the Dodgers, but that was only a preamble to Game 6, in which Jackson homered in three consecutive at-bats (all on the first pitch) against three different pitchers to lead the Yankees to a championship-clinching victory.

How hard is it for a player to homer in three consecutive plate appearances while seeing just three total pitches? Per the Elias Sports Bureau, **Joey Votto** (June 9, 2015) is the *only* player to do so since 2000.

Jackson would always be known as "Mr. October" from that point forward, but the nickname was well earned from more than just one incredible night in the Bronx:

1. Jackson was part of five World Series champion teams, and his clubs went 4-1 in Fall Classics in which he participated.
2. For a 15-year run from 1971-86, Jackson was a near-continuous presence in October. He appeared in 77 total postseason games for the A's, Yankees and Angels in that span, the most

by any player before the introduction of wild cards expanded the MLB postseason format to three rounds beginning in 1995.

3. Jackson actually hit better in the postseason (.278/.358/.527) than he did in the regular season (.262/.356/.490) throughout his career.

4. His 10 total World Series homers are tied for the fifth most in history, but he tallied those across five Fall Classics, fewer than all the men above or equal to him at the top: **Mickey Mantle** (12 World Series appearances), **Babe Ruth** (10), **Yogi Berra** (14), **Duke Snider** (six) and **Lou Gehrig** (seven).

5. Jackson's five homers in the 1977 World Series remains the standard for any Fall Classic, tied with **Chase Utley** (2009) and **George Springer** (2017).

6. Jackson's .755 slugging percentage across his five World Series appearances is still third in Fall Classic history (min. 50 plate appearances), trailing only George Springer (.839) and **David Ortiz** (.795). His 1.212 career OPS is fifth in World Series history behind Ortiz (1.372), Springer (1.295), Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth (1.214 for each).

7. Starting with his last three games of the 1977 World Series and stretching over to Game 1 of the following year's ALCS against the Royals, Jackson hit a sublime .714/.765/2.143 (10-for-14), with two doubles, six home runs and 10 RBIs. That stretch still contains the all-time best marks for homers, slugging, OPS (min. 15 plate appearances) and total bases (30) by any player across a span of four postseason games.

Jackson's heroics in October 1977 inspired the Standard Brands company to create the "Reggie!" chocolate bar in time for the Yankees' home opener in '78. Fans were given Reggie! bars at the gate and Jackson obliged, of course, by hitting a homer. When he trotted back out to right field the next inning, fans threw Reggie! bars on the field in appreciation.

Jackson retired after the 1987 season with 563 career home runs, the sixth-highest total at the time he hung up his spikes. As one of the first great sluggers of the free agency era, he also became the first player to belt at least 100 homers for at least three different franchises (A's, Yankees, Angels).

HOW MANY HITS DID EDDIE COLLINS HAVE? IT VARIES.

When **Albert Pujols** collected hit No. 3,314, the Cardinals celebrated him for passing **Eddie Collins** on the career hits list. Some recordkeepers weren't so sure.

Benjamin Hoffman, NYT

Albert Pujols passed Eddie Collins for 10th place on the career hits list when he went 2 for 4 in a loss to the Mets on Wednesday. Or he tied Collins. Or maybe he was still one short. It all depended on where you looked.

One thing is certain: Pujols, who is thoroughly enjoying his farewell tour with the St. Louis Cardinals, had 3,314 hits after going 0 for 5 in Thursday's loss to the Mets. As for Collins, who played for the Philadelphia Athletics and the Chicago White Sox from 1906 to 1930, his hits total is murkier.

The good news? There is an official total for Collins. The bad news? It is hard for a fan to find. And the differences serve as a reminder that while baseball statistics feel set in stone, there is more variation to them than many would guess, mostly because of a predictable factor: human error.

Baseball Reference, a typical first stop for people looking for such a number, says Collins ended his career with 3,315 hits — one more than Pujols, through Thursday. MLB.com's accounting, which typically matches up with the old Total Baseball encyclopedia, had Collins tied with Pujols at 3,314. The Elias Sports Bureau, which is the official statistician of Major League Baseball and its clubs, had him at 3,313.

The Elias number is the official one — hence St. Louis's celebrating the feat Wednesday — but because Elias does not have a searchable website, the total is all but hidden from fans and journalists who are doing their own research.

Baseball Reference, which collects its statistics from numerous sources, often differs from the official Elias numbers, but both agree on Collins's hit total in 24 of his 25 seasons. Where they differ is in 1920: Elias credits him with 222 hits that year, while Baseball Reference has him at 224. (Either way, it was Collins's single-season career high.)

The difference, as noted in the past by Alan Schwarz and others, is explained in research done by Retrosheet, an archive of every box score since 1906. In a doubleheader on Sept. 4, 1920, the official record book has Collins 0 for 3 in the second game. But box scores from the time indicate he actually was 2 for 4. Retrosheet attributes the error to a "swap," in which the totals for one player are accidentally recorded for another. The veracity of that box score, as of Thursday morning, was the difference between Collins's being in 10th place on the career list or 11th.

There does not appear to be as simple an explanation for MLB.com crediting Collins with 10 hits from 1906 to 1907, while Baseball Reference and Elias credit him with 11.

Potential errors in a statistic as prominent as the hit total of a Hall of Famer might seem like something Elias would want to correct, but it is understandable why the company would not want to delve too deeply into disputed numbers from the first few decades of the 20th century: In Collins's career alone, Retrosheet has identified what it believes are 173 box score

discrepancies. Apply that across all of the players from that era, and it would most likely be thousands of revisions, each with little more than newspaper box scores to serve as evidence.

Pujols can make things easy by collecting another two hits and passing Collins on each list. Should he catch fire and collect another 122 hits this season — highly unlikely given his age and role — he could start a new debate, about whether he has more hits than **Cap Anson**.

Anson, a Hall of Famer who notoriously helped create baseball's color line, has 3,012 hits by most accounts, but he had 423 other hits taken away from him in 1968 when M.L.B.'s special records committee determined the National Association was not a major league — a decision that many baseball historians believe was a mistake.

If those hits were ever to be restored, Anson would vault to seventh on the list, pushing a parade of Hall of Famers down one spot each.

ROGER ANGELL--TRIBUTES FROM JOE POSNANSKI, THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE NEW YORKER, PETER GAMMONS AND TOM VERDUCCI

Roger Angell, and Succeeding Utterly

Teams in Arizona and Florida play with identical rules and before the same sort of audiences, but the two spring flavors are quite different. I don't understand it. Florida ball seems more citified, hurried and temporary; no matter how rustic the setting, I always have the sense that the regular season impends, and that these humid, sunny afternoons are just postcards, to be landed at later on and then thrown away. Arizona baseball is slower, sweeter and somehow better fixed in memory.

— **Roger Angell, *La Vida***

Some years ago, I covertly followed around Roger Angell before a World Series game. Well, I'm not sure how covert it was; I imagine by that point in his life, Angell simply understood that some green sportswriting kid was probably following him around, trying to pick up his rhythms, trying to get at his secret.

"You know you're being shadowed?" Ferrari asked Victor Laszlo in *Casablanca*.

"Of course," he replied. "It becomes an instinct."

What struck me was how Angell moved inside baseball's cadence. You know how certain songs will begin with a simple drumbeat and then an instrument will join in, maybe a synthesizer, and

then a guitar will enter, and then a different drumbeat, and then a saxophone, on and on, one sound piling joyously on top of another until it somehow melts into a beautifully ordered tune.

That, to me, is the harmonious cacophony of a World Series pregame, with batting practice crackling, while coaches hit grounders to infielders while outfielders talk and sprint, while VIPs wearing dark suits and colorful credentials shake hands, while television reporters face bright lights and report back home that the game will begin soon, while reporters sit in the dugout and wait for something or someone to show up. I'm always surprised that no one gets conked on the head with a fly ball or is interviewed by mistake.

Angell danced effortlessly through the din. He walked around the field, moving from one dugout to another and then back again, pausing now and then to turn toward the field and take in ... something. A catch? A throw? A long hit? Every now and again, someone said, "Hiya, Roger," and he stopped to talk for a moment. Those conversations, in my memory, were never particularly interesting. "When did you get in?" one might have asked the other. Or, "Have you talked with John, yet?" I didn't know who this mysterious John was. **John Schuerholz? John Smoltz? Tommy John?**

In some ways, I was disappointed by how uneventful his pregame routine was. It's hard to say what I expected, but at that age, I felt sure that he had to be doing something different from everyone else to write the way he did. But, no, he blended into the scenery, with his gray mustache and blue blazer and little notepad and crumpled baseball cap. He looked at the same stuff the rest of us looked at. He talked the same way the rest of us talked. Most people did not notice him at all.

But a few others did. I could see them. I could see the awe in their eyes, the same awe I felt, and I could read their lips: "Oh my gosh: That's Roger Angell!"

A box score is a precisely etched miniature of the sport itself, for baseball, in spite of its grassy spaciousness and apparent unpredictability, is the most intensely and satisfyingly mathematical of all our outdoor sports. Every player in every game is subjected to a cold and ceaseless accounting; no ball is thrown and no base is gained without an instant responding judgment—ball or strike, hit or error, yea or nay—and an ensuing statistic.

— **Roger Angell, *Box Scores***

The miracle of Roger Angell to me is that he never ran out of words. Take this section above — it has been quoted many times by many people. It's a perfect little encapsulation of baseball's box score and why it means so much to so many of us.

But this was not where the paragraph ended. And I would argue that the next sentence is, if anything, even more wonderful.

This encompassing neatness permits the baseball fan, aided by experience and memory, to extract from a box score the same joy, the same hallucinatory reality, that prickles the scalp of a musician when he glances at a page of his score of Don Giovanni and actually hears bassos and sopranos, woodwinds and violins.

My gosh. That's the part that, for the most part, DOES NOT get quoted.

Angell was literary royalty. His mother was a fiction editor at *The New Yorker*. His stepfather was E.B. White, author of *Charlotte's Web* and co-author of the indispensable, "The Elements of Style." Looking back, his literary future seems preordained ... but it did not have to be baseball. He began writing fiction after graduating from Harvard and being discharged from the army. Angell became a fiction editor with *The New Yorker* (where, for a time, he was stationed in his mother's old office). In 1960, he first read his friend John Updike's essay on Ted Williams' final game: "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu."

That, I believe, is still the best baseball essay ever written — it's the one where Updike writes of Williams' refusal to acknowledge the fans after his last home run: "Gods do not answer letters." It changed Roger Angell's life.

"When he and I talked about the article, as we did a few times," Angell would write of Updike, "we each admitted — I with gratitude, he with customary modesty and class — that 'Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu' might have set the tone for my own baseball stuff."

Angell began writing baseball two years later, 1962, with an essay about taking his 14-year-old daughter to see a Mets game. He was already 41, but as a baseball writer he was still a rookie — it would take time for him to find what would become the literary voice of the game. Already there were signs, though, like his description of watching **Willie Mays** play ball:

He hit a homer each day at the Polo Grounds, made a simple, hilarious error on a ground single to center, and caught flies in front of his belt buckle like a grocer catching a box of breakfast food pulled from a shelf. All in all, I most enjoy watching him run bases. He runs low to the ground, his shoulder swinging in huge strides, his spikes digging up great chunks of infield dirt; the cap flies off at second, he cuts the base like a racing car, looking back over his shoulder at the ball, and slopes grandly into third, and everyone who has watched him finds himself laughing with excitement and shared delight.

In that paragraph, you can see so much of what would make Roger Angell, well, Roger Angell. He wrote with a deep love for baseball, but he was always determined to stay close to what he could see, what he could hear, what he could touch, he never wanted to collapse into the dreamy sentimentality that, in his mind, wrecked baseball. He wrote attentively but loathed being called baseball's poet laureate. He loved baseball's romance but hated "Field of Dreams."

"It's mostly fake," he said with disgust.

Instead, he cared about what was real about baseball.

Hold a baseball in your hand. As it happens, this one is not brand new. Here, just to one side of the curved surgical welt of stitches, there is a pale-green grass smudge, darkening one edge almost to black—the mark of an old infield play, a tough grounder now lost in memory. Feel the ball, turn it over in your hand; hold it across the seam or the other way, with the seam just to the side of your middle finger. Speculation stirs. You want to get outdoors and throw this spare and sensual object to somebody or, at the very least, watch somebody else throw it. The game has begun.

*He circled the bases in triumph, in sudden company with several hundred fans, and jumped on home plate with both feet, and **John Kiley**, the Fenway Park organist, played Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus,' fortissimo, and then followed with other appropriately exuberant classical selections, and for the second time that evening I suddenly remembered all my old absent and distant Sox-afflicted friends (and all the other Red Sox fans, all over New England), and I thought of them—in Brookline, Mass., and Brooklin, Maine; in Beverly Farms and Mashpee and Presque Isle and North Conway and Damariscotta; in Pomfret, Connecticut, and Pomfret, Vermont; in Wayland and Providence and Revere and Nashua, and in both the Concords and all five Manchesters; and in Raymond, New Hampshire (where **Carlton Fisk** lives) and Bellows Falls, Vermont (where Carlton Fisk was born), and I saw all of them dancing and shouting and kissing and leaping about like the fans at Fenway—jumping up and down in their bedrooms and kitchens and living rooms, and in bars and trailers, and even in some boats here and there, I suppose, and on back-country roads (a lone driver getting the news over the radio and blowing his horn over and over, and finally pulling up and getting out and leaping up and down on the cold macadam, yelling into the night), and all of them, for once at least, utterly joyful and believing that joy—alight with it.*

— **Roger Angell on the Carlton Fisk homer, *Agincourt and After***

I never spoke with Roger Angell. He's the only one of my sportswriting heroes — **Jim Murray, Frank Deford, Dan Jenkins, Peter Gammons, Leigh Montville, Bill Nack, Bill James**, on and on — who intimidated me to the point of silence. Over the years, I came to at least understand how those other writers did what they did ... as a hack tennis player, I can at least fathom the genius of Novak and Rafa and Roger.

But what Angell did seemed different from the rest of us. It was alchemy in the purest sense. He took the same lead the rest of us had — the same plays, the same quotes, the same angles — and turned it into gold. I didn't know what to say to him.

Instead, I followed him around that one World Series game ... and learned little about how I could follow him — how I could become him. Instead, I would read and reread his essays, and rather than simply highlighting those passages that grabbed my heart and turned my mind, I would write them out longhand in a notebook or I would type them two or three times into a

word processor, in the vague hope that just writing the words would trigger something in my own writing.

Since baseball time is measured only in outs, all you have to do is succeed utterly; keep hitting, keep the rally alive, and you have defeated time. You remain forever young.

— Roger Angell, *The Interior Stadium*

All sporting memories are suspect—the colors too bright, the players and their feats magnified in our wishful recapturing. The surprising rally or splendid catch becomes incomparable by the time we fight free of the parking lot, epochal before bedtime, transcendental by breakfast.

— Roger Angell, *Mets Redux*

Maybe this is the real dividing line between pros and bystanders, between the players and the fans. All the players know that at any moment things can go horribly wrong for them in their line of work—they'll stop hitting or, if they're pitchers, suddenly find that for some reason they can no longer fling the ball through that invisible sliver of air where it will do its best work for them—and they will have to live with that diminishment, that failure, for a time or even for good. It's part of the game. They are prepared to lose out there in plain sight, while the rest of us do it in private and then pretend it hasn't happened.

— Roger Angell, *Quis*

He was 101 years old when he died at his Manhattan home on Friday. The eulogies and appreciations have come from every corner of America, from eloquent writers to exacting editors to incurable baseball fans. All of them, it seems, have a favorite line, a particular description of, say, **Luis Tiant's** pitching motion (*In midpitch, the man suffers an agonizing seizure in the central cervical region, which he attempts to fight off with a sharp backward twist of the head,*) or **Howard Cosell's** baseball broadcasting style (*Mr. Cosell has been a long-term disparager of baseball, which he considers to be old-fashioned and draggy, but it became clear within the first inning or two of the first game that his handicap was not prejudice but lack of knowledge*).

But what seems more true than any one quote or description is that Angell has helped us appreciate baseball by reaching deep into our chests and saying what we feel but cannot quite convey why we care so much about this odd and wonderful game.

“More and more,” he wrote, “each sport resembles all sports; the flavor, the special joys of place and season, the unique displays of courage and strength and style that once isolated each game and fixed it in our attentions have disappeared somewhere in the notice and crush.

“Of all sports, none has been so buffeted by this unselective proliferation, so maligned by contemporary cant, or so indifferently defended as baseball. Yet the game somehow remains the same, obdurately unaltered and comparable only with itself.”

Looking back, maybe I wish I had summoned the courage to tell Roger Angell how much he meant to me and to my life. Then again, maybe it’s better this way, a one-way conversation, where I just write down his words, marvel at them, and hope that just a bit of his brilliance might rub off.

A Roger Angell Reader

A look back at some of The New Yorker writer and editor’s most beloved books.

Tina Jordan, NYT

Roger Angell, who died at 101 on May 20, 2022, was best known for his books about baseball — most of them essay collections, as clean and sharp as a perfectly batted line drive. But he also wrote humorous articles, parodies and autobiographical pieces, many of which were collected elsewhere. If you want to read some of his work, any of these books would be a fine place to start.

[The Summer Game \(1972\)](#)

“Finely observed and finely written reportage on Major League Baseball during the past decade,” [The Times said in its review](#). “Page for page, ‘The Summer Game’ contains not only the classiest but also the most resourceful baseball writing I have read.”

[Season Ticket \(1988\)](#)

As The Times’s [review of these baseball essays](#) — which were published in The New Yorker between 1983 and 1987 — notes, “One does not ordinarily encounter such poetry in discussions of home runs and knuckleballs.”

[Once More Around the Park \(1991\)](#)

“Mr. Angell makes baseball sound like an art form,” [The Times said](#). “He demonstrates that writing about it is an art form, too.”

A Pitcher's Story: Innings With David Cone (2001)

"Roger Angell surely had no intentions of writing an essay on defeat, humiliation or grace when he arranged to follow David Cone across the many innings of the 2000 baseball season," Pete Hamill [wrote in The Times's review](#).

Let Me Finish (2006)

"The 17 autobiographical chapters of 'Let Me Finish' reflect the welcoming sheen of The New Yorker, in whose pages most of them appeared during the past decade or so. It is the perfect book to read with one of Angell's vodka martinis," [The Times said](#).

Roger Angell, Who Wrote About Baseball With Passion, Dies at 101

In elegantly winding articles for The New Yorker loaded with inventive imagery, he wrote more like a fan than a sports journalist.

Dwight Garner, NYT

Roger Angell, the elegant and thoughtful baseball writer who was widely considered among the best America has produced, died on Friday at his home in Manhattan. He was 101.

The cause was congestive heart failure, his wife, Margaret Moorman, said.

Mr. Angell's voice was original because he wrote more like a fan than a sports journalist, loading his articles with inventive imagery.

The Boston Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk came out of his crouch, Mr. Angell wrote, like "an aluminum extension ladder stretching for the house eaves." The Baltimore Oriole relief pitcher Dick Hall pitched "with an awkward, sidewise motion that suggests a man feeling under his bed for a lost collar stud." Mr. Angell (pronounced angel) described Willie Mays chasing down a ball hit to deep center field as "running so hard and so far that the ball itself seems to stop in the air and wait for him."

The baseball season didn't seem complete until, as he did late each fall, Mr. Angell wrapped up its multiple meanings in a long New Yorker article. Many of his pieces were collected in books, among them "Late Innings" (1982) and "Once More Around the Park" (1991).

But he wrote not just about teams and the games they played. He also considered what it meant to be a fan.

“It is foolish and childish, on the face of it, to affiliate ourselves with anything so insignificant and patently contrived and commercially exploitative as a professional sports team,” he wrote in his book “Five Seasons” (1977). “What is left out of this calculation, it seems to me, is the business of caring — caring deeply and passionately, really *caring* — which is a capacity or an emotion that has almost gone out of our lives.”

For Mr. Angell, The New Yorker was, to some degree, the family shop. His mother, Katharine Sergeant Angell White, was among the magazine’s first editors hired by Harold Ross in 1925. His stepfather, the essayist E.B. White, was a frequent contributor. Mr. Angell published his first piece in the magazine, a short story, in 1944 and went to work there in 1956.

Like his mother, Mr. Angell became a New Yorker fiction editor, discovering and nurturing writers, including Ann Beattie, Bobbie Ann Mason and Garrison Keillor. For a while he occupied his mother’s old office — an experience, he told an interviewer, that was “the weirdest thing in the world.” He also worked closely with writers like Vladimir Nabokov, John Updike, Donald Barthelme, Ruth Jhabvala and V.S. Pritchett.

Mr. Angell was known, too, for his annual page-long holiday poem, titled “Greetings, Friends!” The poem, a New Yorker tradition, began in 1932 and was originally written by Frank Sullivan. Mr. Angell wrote “Greetings, Friends!” from 1976 until 1998, when it went on hiatus, and restarted it in 2008. In recent years, the poem has been written by Ian Frazier.

In his holiday poems, Mr. Angell mixed the boldface names, from high culture and low, that had filtered through that year. Here is a snippet from 1992:

*Here’s where hearts grow rife or rifer,
Near Donna Tartt and Michelle Pfeiffer,
With B.B. King and his Lucille,
And Dee Dee Myers and Brian Friel!*

Some of his rhymes could be read mischievously. “Yo! Santa man, grab some sky,” he wrote in 1992, “And drop a sock on Robert Bly.”

“I’m not sure there’s ever been a writer so strong, and an editor so important, all at once, at a magazine since the days of H.L. Mencken running The American Mercury,” David Remnick, The New Yorker’s editor, said in an interview for this obituary in 2012. “Roger was a vigorous editor, and an intellect with broad tastes.”

Mr. Angell became a baseball writer by accident. He was already a fan in 1962 when, he told an interviewer for Salon, he was asked by William Shawn, the magazine’s editor, to “go down to spring training and see what you find.”

It was an auspicious year to be a young baseball writer: the first season of the New York Mets. “They were these terrific losers that New York took to its heart,” Mr. Angell said.

The tone of his baseball writing, he once said, was inspired by a now canonical John Updike article, written in 1960, about Ted Williams's final game at Fenway Park in Boston. "My own baseball writing was still two years away when I first read 'Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu,'" Mr. Angell wrote, "and though it took me a while to become aware of it, John had already supplied my tone, while also seeming to invite me to try for a good sentence now and then, down the line."

Mr. Angell was sometimes referred to as baseball's poet laureate, a title he rejected. He called himself a reporter. "The only thing different in my writing," he said, "is that, almost from the beginning, I've been able to write about myself as well."

He disliked sentimentality about sports. "The stuff about the connection between baseball and American life, the 'Field of Dreams' thing, gives me a pain," he once said. "I hated that movie."

He was alert, however, to what he called the "substrata of nuance and lesson and accumulated experience" beneath baseball's surface. And his humor flashed above all this.

He once referred to Ron Darling as "the best right-handed part-Chinese Yale history major among the Mets starters." He wrote that Carl Yastrzemski, "like so many great hitters, has oddly protuberant eyes." And he noted, about a skinny Houston Astros team, that "they sometimes suggest a troupe of gazelles depicted by a Balkan corps de ballet."

He was born in Manhattan on Sept. 19, 1920. His father, Ernest Angell, was a graduate of Harvard Law School, a World War I veteran and a former semipro pitcher who in 1950 became the national chairman of the American Civil Liberties Union. After his parents were divorced, Mr. Angell continued to live in Manhattan with his father.

He graduated from Harvard in 1942 and then worked as a magazine editor for the Army Air Forces. After his discharge he was a writer for Holiday magazine and wrote frequently for The New Yorker before being hired.

Some at the magazine resisted his hiring. "The staff just felt they'd had enough of the Whites," he said. "But Shawn came to me and made me an offer."

Much of his early writing for the magazine was fiction. A collection of his short stories, "The Stone Arbor," was published in 1960.

In The Atlantic Monthly in 1997, Mr. Keillor noted that Mr. Angell was an "old-fashioned seigneur of an editor," the sort "who was terribly generous with his praise and apologetic for his criticism and who, if a month passed without submissions from me, would write the most wonderful encouraging letters."

Ben Yagoda's history of The New Yorker, "About Town" (2000), reprinted an extended series of rejection letters from Mr. Angell to Ms. Beattie over 22 months in the early 1970s. He turned

down story after story, with advice and encouragement, until she submitted one titled “A Platonic Relationship” in 1974. Mr. Angell responded by writing, “Oh joy.”

Mr. Angell had his critics, some of whom felt that The New Yorker’s fiction under his watch was insular. [Reviewing Mr. Angell’s memoir](#) “Let Me Finish” in The New York Times Book Review in 2006, the British critic James Campbell wrote: “There is no ethnic friction in Angell’s America (which the outsider might imagine ranging from the Upper East Side to the Hamptons), no poverty, no crime and next to no politics. But there is wit and charm and sometimes wisdom.”

Like his stepfather, E.B. White, Mr. Angell spent a good deal of time in coastal Maine, where he owned a home on Eggemoggin Reach in Brooklin. Also like his stepfather, Mr. Angell was an enthusiastic consumer of martinis. He composed an essay, [“Dry Martini,”](#) that some consider the best on the subject. In it, he admitted that he ultimately moved to vodka from gin because vodka was “less argumentative.”

He loved smooth fox terriers and owned several over the years. One of his great pleasures was to walk his dog around the Madison Avenue neighborhood where he lived on the Upper East Side.

He wrote well into his 90s. In 2014 he was awarded the J.G. Taylor Spink Award, the Baseball Hall of Fame’s honor for writers. In 2015, when he was 94, he published a collection of essays, holiday poems and other writings entitled “This Old Man.”

“I’ve endured a few knocks but missed worse,” he wrote in that book. “I know how lucky I am, and secretly rap wood, greet the day, and grab a sneaky pleasure from my survival at long odds. The pains and insults are bearable.”

Until his final years, Mr. Angell attended as many as 40 baseball games a year, rooting for the Mets, the Giants, the Red Sox, the A’s and even sometimes the Yankees.

Remembering Roger Angell, Hall of Famer

In the course of a well-lived century, he established himself as the most exacting of editors, the most agile of stylists, a mentor to generations of writers, and baseball’s finest, fondest chronicler.

David Remnick, The New Yorker

In recent years, as his odometer headed toward triple digits, Roger Angell became known around our office for the way his cheerful longevity complemented his talent. He was not only the greatest of baseball writers; he had also lived long enough to see Babe Ruth, of the

Yankees, at one end of his life and Shohei Ohtani, of the Angels, at the other. Age conferred authority. When Roger covered the Yanks in their late-nineties heyday, Joe Torre, the team's heavy-lidded chief, would sometimes interrupt one of his avuncular soliloquies to a clutch of young reporters and look to him for affirmation: "Roger, am I getting that right?" Sitting in his office, Roger, much like Torre, held court, telling stories about playing Ping-Pong with James Thurber, editing William Trevor and Donald Barthelme, and watching ballgames with the Romanian-born artist Saul Steinberg, who would put on a flannel Milwaukee Braves uniform before sitting down in front of the TV. I once came to him complaining about how hard it was to find writing that was truly funny, and Roger, as if recalling a recent Tuesday, replied, "Harold Ross said the same thing."

And yet Roger was hardly stuck in the past. When the Internet came along and climbing stadium steps no longer held much allure, he watched games late into the night and filed twenty-four-karat blog posts. Although he was insistently modern, he knew what some were thinking when they dropped by his office to see him, natty as always in crisp khakis, a blue Oxford shirt, and a Paul Stuart blazer: Holy shit—he's still vertical! When at ninety-five he published a collection of personal essays and other writing for this magazine, he gave it a characteristically wry and self-knowing title, "[This Old Man: All in Pieces.](#)"

No one lives forever, but you'd be forgiven for thinking that Roger had a good shot at it. Like the rest of us, he suffered pain and loss and doubt, but he usually kept the blues at bay, always looking forward; he kept writing, reading, memorizing new poems, forming new relationships. When another versatile, sports-minded writer, Budd Schulberg, reached his nineties, he gave away his star-studded address book to a younger writer. He had no use for it: "Everyone in it is dead!" Roger kept replenishing his address book, and his life, with new and younger friends. He went to spring training in Arizona and Florida, full of hope, always on the trail of new prospects. His thirst for the sensation of being alive survived the worst. Roger was married for forty-eight years to Carol Rogge Angell, but when she was dying she told him, "If you haven't found someone else by a year after I'm gone I'll come back and haunt you." After Carol died, Roger followed her instructions, and his heart. He began a long and wonderful love affair with Peggy Moorman, whom he married in 2014, and who was by his side until the end.

"Getting old is the second-biggest surprise of my life, but the first, by a mile, is our unceasing need for deep attachment and intimate love," he wrote in "This Old Man." "I believe that everyone in the world wants to be with someone else tonight, together in the dark, with the sweet warmth of a hip or a foot or a bare expanse of shoulder within reach."

Roger died on Friday. He was a hundred and one. But longevity was actually quite low on his list of accomplishments. He did as much to distinguish *The New Yorker* as anyone in the magazine's nearly century-long history. His prose and his editorial judgment left an imprint that's hard to overstate. Like Ruth and Ohtani, he was a freakishly talented double threat, a superb writer and an invaluable counsel to countless masters of the short story. He won a place in both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and in the Baseball Hall of Fame—a unique distinction. The crowd of friends from the magazine who drove four hours north to watch him receive the J.

G. Taylor Spink Award at Doubleday Field, in Cooperstown, wore custom jerseys declaring themselves Roger's "Angells."

Roger was born to a very particular sliver of twentieth-century American society. His father, Ernest Angell, was a Harvard-trained lawyer who went on to lead the American Civil Liberties Union. His mother, born Katharine Sergeant, was educated at Bryn Mawr and became this magazine's first fiction editor, a close editorial partner to Harold Ross. After divorcing Ernest Angell, she married another founding eminence at the magazine, E. B. White. Mrs. White, as she was known at the office, neglected to tell Roger the news of her wedding; Roger, who was nine at the time, heard about it only a couple of days later, through a relative who had read about it in Walter Winchell's newspaper column. In a marvellous portrait of Mrs. White by Nancy Franklin, called "[Lady with a Pencil](#)," Roger made it plain that, though both mother and son felt the pain and the disruption of the divorce, he relished the hours he spent listening to her talk about the office in midtown and witnessing her limitless devotion to language and to her writers: "It was the main event of her life—*The New Yorker*, and *New Yorker* writers, and what was in the magazine. It wasn't a matter of power. It was about what was on the page or what could be on the page if something worked out." Roger followed suit. As a kid, he read endlessly and developed a mean party trick, memorizing the caption of every cartoon published in the history of the magazine.

After graduating from Harvard, Roger served in the Army Air Corps. He spent much of the Second World War stationed in the Central Pacific, where he was the managing editor of a G.I. magazine. He also found time to write fiction. In March, 1944, *The New Yorker* published a very short story called "[Three Ladies in the Morning](#)." The author's byline, which came at the end of the piece, was "Cpl. Roger Angell." After returning home, he spent a long apprenticeship at *Holiday*, a distinguished travel magazine of the mid-century, and finally came to *The New Yorker* as an editor in 1956, after the Whites had moved to Maine. Eventually, Roger led the fiction department; he was, as he often said, "doing my mother's job in my mother's office." Some of the writers Mrs. White had brought to the magazine—Thurber, Nabokov, Updike—eventually became her son's

writers. Roger, who may have carried on one of the longest engagements with psychotherapists in the city's history, once said that a shrink told him his inheritance was "the greatest piece of active sublimation in my experience."

As an editor, Roger was devoted, open-minded, and sometimes hard-knuckled. He did not just ladle out the superlatives. His proofs were littered with ziggy cross-outs, querulous question marks, aggressive arrows, and the occasional hard-won "Yes!" As a writer he was a "taker-outer," not a "keeper-inner," as he said, and that urge carried over to his editing. Clarity above all. Nothing thrilled him more than to bring in someone fresh and promising. In the early seventies, he knew to be patient when the work of a young graduate student named Ann Beattie was plucked from the "slush pile." Even as he rejected story after story over nearly two years, he kept writing her encouraging, sometimes instructive, letters. He kept Beattie in the game. Then came this:

Oh, joy . . . Yes, we are taking “A Platonic Relationship,” and I think this is just about the best news of the year. Maybe it isn’t the best news for you, but there is nothing that gives me more pleasure (well, *almost* nothing) than at last sending an enthusiastic yes to a writer who has persisted through as many rejections and rebuffs as you have. It’s a fine story, I think—original, strong, and true.

Angell was also writing for the magazine: humor pieces, Talk of the Town stories, and the annual holiday poem, “Greetings, Friends!” In 1962, he and the magazine’s editor, William Shawn, discussed the idea of his writing about baseball. Mr. Shawn was no baseball maven, but he was always curious. When Roger described to him the intricacies of the double play, his cheeks, Roger recalled, “grew pink with delight.” Thus encouraged, Roger set off to Florida for spring training, and began writing the pieces that would form his first baseball book, “[The Summer Game](#).”

In the office and elsewhere, Roger was a complex character. The weather of his moods varied. He was funny, encouraging, vulnerable, but he was not without pride or temper. In his prime, he walked the halls jingling the change in his pockets like Molly Bloom’s lover, Blazes Boylan. Was he steamed or jolly? Not always easy to know. Put it this way: you didn’t want to disappoint him. He always had our affection *and* our respect.

On the page, Roger created—he *threw*—a voice that was utterly joyful, as buoyant as a lottery winner. He hated the poetical and the hard-bitten. The Roger Angell of the baseball pieces was a man at liberty, delighted to be in the stands on a long-shadowed afternoon, part of a vast community of fans. The sentences were ebullient but never decorous. An ur-Wasp, he was tickled to learn the Yiddish word for “over the top”: *ungapatchka*. He took it as an immense compliment when a friend told him that he admired the “un-*ungapatchka*-ness” of his work. Roger’s best baseball prose—his early piece on the struggles of the fledgling Mets, “[The Old Folks Behind Home](#)”; his profiles of the fearsome [Bob Gibson](#), the vanquished [Steve Blass](#), the submariner [Dan Quisenberry](#); his chronicle of the epochal Boston-Cincinnati World Series of 1975, “[Agincourt and After](#)”—radiated a sense of wonder at the complexities of the game and those who play it. His enthusiasm for baseball was so immense that it could not be confined to a singular loyalty. In a given season, he was capable of giving his heart to anyone. He was a Mets fan, a Yankees fan, *and* a Red Sox fan. In anyone else, this would have been unforgivable.

I had the privilege of witnessing Roger’s joy in the game more than once, but never more so than in October, 2000, when we went together to Shea Stadium to watch the fifth and final game of the World Series, a Subway Series dominated by Torre’s Yankees. Sitting in the left-field stands, Roger held forth on everything from Torre’s understated generalship to the “premature decrepitude” of Shea to the best kind of notebook. (Mead notebooks: “They take ink perfectly.”) He recited a Homeric catalogue of his favorite baseball names: Hack Wilson, Napoleon Lajoie, Mookie Wilson. They spanned the age—the age of Angell. I could have sat in the stands listening to Roger (and, incidentally, watching the Yanks and the Mets) forever. But there would be no extra innings that night. Mike Piazza’s towering attempt to tie things in the ninth fell short and into the glove of Bernie Williams.

“That’s it,” Roger said, and led the way to the Yankees clubhouse. The Bombers were winners again. Roger entered the room under great arcs of foamy champagne. Happily soaked, he made his way to Torre, and listened in on yet another soliloquy to the young scribes. On some point of historical interest, Torre paused, and looked Roger’s way for confirmation. Roger, sagely, nodded assent.

After a while, Roger said, “We should check in on the losers. The story’s in there, too.” We hustled over to the home-team clubhouse, where the Mets picked gloomily at a sad array of snacks and made the customary remarks about next year. Roger wrote that down, as well.

His Mead notebook now sufficiently inked, he led the way past the revellers and the mourners along the ramps and made it out to the parking lot. We found his Volvo station wagon and climbed in. Another gaudy night in Queens. Roger got behind the wheel and, driving alarmingly fast on the Grand Central Parkway, he talked about next year. Spring training was four months off.

Gammons: Marking baseball wordsmith Roger Angell’s century of influence

(reprinted from 9/17/2020)

The day Roger Angell was born in New York on Sept. 19, 1920, the influenza pandemic had abated nearly five months before; **Warren G. Harding** was six weeks from election; and, up the coast at Fenway Park, Indians outfielder **Smokey Joe Wood** had the day off. It was 23 days before Cleveland won the World Series, and 61 years before Wood sat beside Angell as they watched **Ron Darling and Frank Viola** pitch one of the greatest games in college baseball history.

A century later, two people whose lives have been enriched by knowing this great man whose metronome has never wavered — Darling and this ink-stained wretch — agreed that when Sports Illustrated names a Sportsperson of the Year for 2020, it should be Angell. Darling thinks being with Roger “makes you know you’re at the feet of a god.” I feel no one has better defined what sports should be: Not numbers or a kind of slot machine, but a daily theater to be enjoyed for its actors and artists and writers. “He is always focused on his subject,” says Darling, “and in the process draws us into his soul. He begins every interview with a blank slate.”

Angell will celebrate the occasion of his 100th birthday at the home of his wife, writer Margaret Moorman, in upstate New York. I wish John McPhee and the late John Updike were there, both of whom he edited, and who each wrote brilliantly about athletes (Bill Bradley, “A Sense of Where You Are” and **Ted Williams**, “Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu”). I wish **Tom Seaver**, whose distinguished soul was similar, could have been as well. Or anyone Angell ever interviewed, engaged in conversation or shared his laugh.

Before the third game of the 1989 American League Championship Series, Roger lunched with then Blue Jays pitcher **Mike Flanagan** and me at an outdoor café in Toronto. Mike told the story of how his grandfather Big Ed Flanagan and my uncle, Everett Gammons, pitched on teams from Manchester, N.H., and Cohasset, Mass., in the 1920s that toured towns around New England, playing doubleheaders and passing hats around to pay for their gas. Everett usually pitched the first game, then Abe Enos — whose son Bill scouted for more than 50 years — would pitch the second. Big Ed would pitch one game righthanded, the second game lefthanded.

“Having spent so much of my life in New England,” Angell said, “this wonderful story reinforces that it seems everyone in New England is related.”

Later, in SkyDome, Flanagan said, “When we were telling our story, I looked at Roger and he was so genuinely *interested*. I was struck by how he took it in. He really *cared*.” It was a defining Angell characteristic, one Darling and I agree upon: authenticity. Roger Angell is one of the most authentic human beings I ever had the honor and pleasure to know.

One time he invited me to dinner at his place on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and opened a box and showed me the personal letters his stepfather E.B. White had written his mother Katharine — letters that were private to family, never published. Roger was, as ever, like a kid proud of his show-and-tell.

In June 1977, when Mets chairman **M. Donald Grant** traded Tom Seaver to the Reds, Angell wrote, “One of the images I have before me now is of Tom Seaver pitching; the motionless assessing pause on the hill as the sign is delivered, the easy, rocking shift of weight to his back leg, the upraised arms, then the left shoulder coming forward as the whole body drives forward and drops downward — down so low that the right knee scrapes the sloping dirt of the mound — in an immense thrusting stride, and the right arm coming over blurrily and still flailing even as the ball, the famous fastball, flashes across the plate, chest high on the batter past his low, late swing.”

Eight years later, in Sarasota, Fla., I sat on a bench in a bullpen outside the White Sox clubhouse as Seaver was making his first throwing session of the spring. He had a ball in his right hand, but while he continually went through his delivery and flashed his arm forward, he never actually threw the ball. He was working on all the mechanics that went into the drop-and-drive delivery, so that two days later, when he went to throw, every body part was in sync and, as he told me, “there was no strain on his shoulder.” I sat and watched, yes, like a kid, remembering that description and realizing that not only was it a perfect oil painting of the motion, but it was an oil painting I could never have created, much less recreated.

Roger Angell loved baseball, watching baseball, talking to baseball people whom his authenticity drew into his soul. I once saw **Steve Blass**, whom I had watched win Game 7 of the 1971 World Series, throw a pitch in Winter Haven, Fla., that hit the low wall between the third base dugout and home plate on the fly. Later, when Angell wrote about Blass’s career and how

a World Series hero could have a baseball “disease” named after him, I appreciated the human condition, and there was nothing funny about it. When working at ESPN, I regrettably got angry with well-meaning young production assistants who cut highlights showing and reshowing meltdowns by **Mark Wohlers** and **Rick Ankiel**. The power of Roger’s empathetic prose changed the way I looked at such scenes, forever.

He lived for the first box score of spring, and heard **Gene Mauch** explain how he’d look at one and knew who made the final out.” The encompassing neatness,” he wrote of box scores, “permits the baseball fan, aided by experience and memory, to extract from a box score the same joy, the hallucinatory reality that prickles the scalp of a musician when he glances at the score on ‘Don Giovanni’ and actually hears bassos and sopranos, woodwinds and violins.”

I have sensed, for the near half-century I have known him, that Roger Angell knows too much to argue or to judge, and only focuses on things that make his and our days more joyous. It could have been **Luis Tiant**’s delivery, a Tom Seaver changeup thrown into the face of fire, a grand old game historical moment shared by **Kirk Gibson** and **Dennis Eckersley** that decades later defines their immense characters.

A dozen years ago, Angell, Updike and I did a program at Harvard’s Sanders Theatre, which could have been subtitled “Mays, Williams and Ryan Flaherty.” Angell was Updike’s editor at The New Yorker; an actor read the modest Updike’s classic “Hub Fans Bids Kid Adieu,” Angell read from his “Agincourt and After,” and as the 10th inning pinch runner for the event, I was intimidated by genius I could never hope to equal. Angell once said “writing is like flying a plane without instruments,” experiences newspaper deadlines allowed me, but reading and re-reading him (“the Sox in late innings reminded me of Wile E. Coyote running off the rim of a mesa”) reminded me that great writing, like great art, is fulfilled in human detail. And that, for goodness sake, sport is entertainment, and that what evolved from his eyes to print was a Bach Fugue.

I covered Tiant from the time he joined the Red Sox in 1971 until his final game in that uniform, when he shut out Toronto on the final scheduled day of the 1978 season and forced the famous **Bucky Dent** playoff game, which columnist Tom Boswell called “the greatest game ever played.” I believe Tiant was the player with the most soul of anyone I ever covered in Boston. Angell’s six-part description of Tiant’s delivery:

1. *Call the osteopath*
2. *Out of the woodshed*
3. *The runaway taxi*
4. *Falling off the fence*
5. *The slipper kick*
6. *The low-flying plane*

Angell visited **Bob Gibson**, by reputation unapproachable, and unwrapped the soul of 45. The result was perfect; I know, because I worked with Gibson on “Baseball Tonight” at ESPN, an

unforgettable experience with someone whose fiery pride was exceeded only by his own heart, so giving that he still regularly texts back and forth with current Cardinal **Jack Flaherty**. Gibson is 83, Flaherty 24, and when I mentioned to Flaherty that he had an 0.90 earned run average the second half of last season, he replied, “it’s not 1.12 over a full season.”

There are so many Angellisms so many of us carry:

- “Baseball’s absolute unpredictability makes amateurs of us all.”
- On the joy of a Maderoski, Fisk or Gibson homer: “Dancing and shouting with joy in the middle of the night over the haphazardous flight of a distant ball.”
- “The best defense against partisanship is expertise.”

I think back over the many times I was able to share Roger Angell’s joy. Dinners my wife Gloria and I shared with his late wife Carol in Arizona, Florida, Boston, San Francisco. Drinks with the great Sports Illustrated writer Ron Fimrite. The dinner Fimrite put together at the Washington Square Bar & Grill in San Francisco for Sports Illustrated writers and friends, including **Bill Rigney** and Roger, the Monday night between Games 2 and 3 of the 1989 World Series. The weather had been unusually hot, and Rigney told Gloria and Roger, “my grandmother always warned us as kids that when it gets this warm in October it’s earthquake weather.” About 21 hours later, the earthquake struck.

Do yourself a favor, purchase “Late Innings” or “Season Ticket” or whatever you choose from Angell’s library, and experience literacy. Do yourself another favor, go online to the SI Vault and [find Tom Verducci’s July 22, 2014, piece on Angell](#).

In the book cabinet in my office overlooking Buzzards Bay on Cape Cod is the hardcover copy of “Season Ticket.” He inscribed it to me, but do not pull out the book and try reading that inscription. It is personal. I prefer not to share.

One of the things I miss most in this season of resilience – in a time of fire, plague and aversion – is being on the field at two in the afternoon as players, coaches, grounds crews and television camera operators filter out in preparation for the night’s event. It is a time to watch and learn how each player prepares, who they are, as well as hearing what they think, and believe.

A couple of years ago, **J.D. Martinez** said, “you sure watch everything and listen to everyone.”

I told him, “I try. I come to the park every day hoping I learn two things I didn’t know before.”

That hope came from being at Chain O’ Lakes Park, Yankee Stadium, Candlestick and Fenway with Roger Angell for instances of his century.

The Passion of Roger Angell: The best baseball writer in America is also a fan

Roger Angell, who will be inducted into the Hall of Fame this weekend, is the best baseball writer in America, and for 50 years he's written from a single vantage point: that of a fan who cares deeply about the game.

TOM VERDUCCI

JUL 22, 2014

Consider the writer. Stooped, thought-burdened, wrinkled, he wears his press pass on a lanyard around his neck like a yoke as he moves slowly to his workplace. Into the hollow of the X-ray machine he pushes his small canvas bag, the one with the notebook that catches ink as surely as an ice dancer does his partner, and then he walks through the metal detector. There is a problem. The Yankee Stadium security guard, his countenance grim with boredom, asks the writer to flip over his pass so that he can reconcile the picture with the face. They do not match. The face photographed decades ago is full and fleshy. The writer's face has grown as lean and angular as one painted by Giotto. The guard, still bored, waves him on. The writer laughs, not at the guard but at his old self.

Writing well is hard. It requires constant thinking. The gears, flywheels and levers of the mind click and clatter nonstop. Writing is flying an airplane without instruments, almost always through the dark storms of doubt. It is new every time.

There's an added difficulty with writing about baseball: The writer ages but the players do not. They are perpetually young, replaced almost imperceptibly by younger versions of themselves. Every season is like a summer-stock version of *Bye Bye Birdie*. Then one day a ballplayer with \$100 million banked calls you "sir," and you realize the chasm has grown Olduvai Gorge-wide.

Over the last half-century nobody has written baseball better than Roger Angell of *The New Yorker*. What he does with words, even today at 93, is what Mays did in centerfield and what Koufax did on the mound. His superior elegance and skill are obvious even to the untrained eye.

Did I say Mays? Suddenly Angell leaves the colossal ballpark in the Bronx for the Polo Grounds of upper Manhattan. It's Aug. 15, 1951. The long, late afternoon shadows of the big horseshoe fill the field. This is the first summer of Mays. Watching Willie arrive is like hearing Charlie Parker for the first time. Angell is in the stands, probably wearing a fedora like the rest of the men. He is there as a fan, a role he proudly will retain as a baseball writer.

Tie game, eighth inning. **Carl Furillo** of the Dodgers, a righthanded pull hitter batting with **Billy Cox** on third, confounds the Giants with a screamer to the rightfield gap. Mays, positioned for Furillo's pull power, sprints leeward. He makes the catch and, while still running away from the plate, slings a sortie of a throw to the catcher. Cox is out too. "I can still see the Dodgers players on the field and the Giants players in the dugout," Angell says. "What? What was that? Get used to it, guys. I bring this up whenever I see **Willie Mays**. He never remembers me, which is O.K. But he's impressed: 'You were there? You tell them. Nobody believes me!'"

In long pieces published a few times a year, Angell has turned Bob Gibson as soft as a stick of butter under the noonday sun; sequenced like a geneticist the original Steve Blass disease; and, drawing on his first writing gig—when he tap-tap-tapped on a typewriter for a GI newsletter as a soldier stationed in the Central Pacific during World War II—chronicled the winning maneuvers and statesmanship of **Joe Torre and Derek Jeter**.

A lifetime of exquisite work—much of it anthologized in books such as *The Summer Game* and *Once More Around the Park*—will be honored on July 26 at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., where Angell will receive the **J.G. Taylor Spink** Award, the highest honor given by the Baseball Writers Association of America. Angell is the 64th writer to win the annual award but the first never to have been a member of the BBWAA. (*The New Yorker* does not cover baseball as a beat.)

"He is the best baseball writer in terms of talent, insights, the turning of a phrase, everything," said Susan Slusser, the A's beat writer at the *San Francisco Chronicle* who nominated Angell for the award. "I felt very strongly that there should not even be a writers' exhibit in the Hall without Roger Angell."

Now all he has to do is make it to Cooperstown. At the moment I have my doubts. We are in his weathered but game Volvo wagon, careening down Naskeag Point Road in Brooklin, Maine. Angell is behind the wheel; in fact, just about all of Angell is behind the wheel. Barely visible above its curved horizon are his blue cap, eyeglasses, white straw push broom of a mustache and both hands—set as hard as Quikrete at 10 and 2 o'clock. I am in the passenger seat, remembering that last month he told me his eyes were failing. In the map pocket in the door next to me are some Angell staples: a paperback Chekhov novel and two CDs, one by Roy Orbison and one titled *Martin Scorsese Presents: The Best of Blues*. The backseat is covered in enough hair from Andy, Angell's beloved fox terrier, to knit a sweater. The asphalt rolls more than it climbs and falls, yet the Volvo groans and complains, sighs and exhales. It veers intermittently into the sand and gravel of the shoulder.

Oh, this is it. I know how this is going to end. We are headed straight to the graveyard, as sure as pocket Chekhov and lonely Orbison. It occurs to me that this is not a bad way to go. Brooklin, like Cooperstown, is near nothing and has changed hardly at all over the years. It might as well be the 1930s, when young Roger learned how to sail on wooden Beetle Cats at Center Harbor

Yacht Club (established 1912; annual 2014 dues, \$400) and wrote state officials in Augusta, “I am 15 years old. Please send my driver’s license.” As was the custom, they did.

Gone are his mother, Katharine Sergeant Angell White, the first fiction editor of *The New Yorker*; his father, Ernest, a lawyer; and his stepfather, E.B. White, an iconic figure in American literature. From a street-facing first-floor office in his house in North Brooklin, White wrote the children’s classics *Charlotte’s Web* and *Stuart Little*. He also revised and enlarged the bible of good writing, *The Elements of Style*.

I suspect we are about to join them in eternity. In the near distance the waters of Eggemoggin Reach glisten in the late afternoon sun, as if winking slyly that the extravagant beauty of this place is to be kept secret. The sea off the fancy filigree that is the Maine coastline is speckled with little islands that suggest confetti in an enormous puddle of spring rain. Awaiting us is a narrow gate, not of pearl but of simple steel, topped by a graceful metal arch. It has the simplicity of the entrance to an old-time amusement ride. Angell points the nose of the Volvo toward the gate, and we are through to the other side.

Quiet falls.

I am reading the dates on the stones of the dearly departed, some of them sea captains lost to the ocean when it did more than just wink at them: 1901, 1848, 1853. . . .

Angell guides the Volvo as if paddling a wooden canoe. It undulates over the parallel tracks of sand and gravel in the grass, toward a majestic oak tree. We get out, the swinging doors giving a wheeze of either complaint or relief. Under the oak are three gray slate headstones with sloping shoulders and names inscribed in Centaur font. Here lie Katharine and E.B. and their son, Joel. At the foot of each plot is a headstone of spectacularly white Vermont marble with the same sloping shoulders and with a name in the same font. Here lie Callie, Roger’s daughter; Carol, his wife. . . . “And this is me right there,” he says, pointing.

Roger’s stone needs only a year of death after “1920—” and his body underneath. It occurs to me that this is the first time in my life I have stood next to a man standing on his own grave.

“Carol and I bought the plot about 20 years ago, next to the Whites,” Roger says. “The [graveyard keeper] said it was \$120. I said, ‘Per year?’ And he said, ‘Nope, that’s it.’ For eternity. One hundred dollars for eternity.”

And then he laughs long and hard. ^[P]_[SEP]

To go back to the beginning, you have to go back to 1962, when *New Yorker* editor William Shawn, who wanted more sports in the magazine and wanted his writers to write about what interested them, approached Angell with a question: “You know about baseball?”

“A little bit,” Angell replied.

“Why don’t you give it a try? We don’t want it to be sentimental, and we don’t want it to be tough.”

Angell was 41. He was a *New Yorker* editor who had written a few baseball pieces for *Holiday* magazine. He decamped to spring training in Florida, where his natural shyness and his uncertainty around the clubby world of baseball—including the hothouse of cynicism known as the press box—prompted him to come back with a story that quoted not a single player or manager. “The Old Folks Behind Home,” in which he gave voice to the senior citizens enjoying the rites of spring, barely dipped a toe into the pool of baseball reportage, but it was Angellic nonetheless.

Casey Stengel, the ancient manager of the just-birthered Mets, was “a walking pantheon of evocations,” Angell wrote. **Early Wynn**, then 42, “pitched carefully, slowly wheeling his heavy body on the windup and glowering down on the batters between pitches, his big Indian-like face almost hidden under his cap.” Angell noticed Whitey Ford pitching for the Yankees while **Warren Spahn** threw in the Milwaukee Braves’ bullpen—two of the best lefthanders in history in the same line of sight, as if one were the thrown shadow of the other. “It excited me to a ridiculous extent,” Angell wrote. “I couldn’t get over it.”

“It was fun! Wow!” he recalls of the assignment. “I liked it, and people seemed to like it. The main thing is, I had all the space to write.”

We are seated in the front row of the press box at Yankee Stadium in June, with a dull home team challenging a first-place but unconvincing Blue Jays squad. Baseball never has been more incidental to people at stadiums than it is now, the actual game made smaller by too-loud music, inescapable commercials, mobile technology and myriad food and retail options. “They line up to go eat in the middle of the game, which amazes me,” Angell says.

The press box is no different. Heads are down, buried in laptops, tablets and smartphones. Angell, device-free, sees only the game, and he captures its most interesting elements with doodles and notes in a Mead three-subject notebook with the slightly rough paper he cherishes. Because those notebooks are extinct, Angell resuscitates his retired ones that still have blank pages. This one is from September 2005. It includes a doodle of Yankees outfielder **Hideki Matsui**; the drawing helped Angell remember the thickness of Matsui’s chest and the width of his face.

“The replay amble,” Angell says as Toronto manager **John Gibbons** takes the now familiar stroll on the field while his dugout lieutenants decide whether to challenge a close play at second base. Angell is such a keen observer that his old friend **Bill Rigney** liked to say he would have made a good scout. He knows swings the way he knows writing styles. **Joe DiMaggio**’s, he says, “had tremendous torque, with wide feet. It was a line-drive swing.”

Brian McCann, New York's kindly bear of a catcher, is at the plate and keeps fouling off pitches, seeming to bend the pitcher's spirit with each one. "That's a nice swing," Angell says. "It's got a little Will Clark in it." McCann rips the next pitch into the rightfield seats for a two-run homer.

Space and time are the rare earth metals of writing, and Angell has enjoyed mother lodes of both. Moreover, as a writer and fiction editor at a literary magazine, he began unshackled by J-school and newspaper-reporting conventions, in which the writer must leave himself and his rooting interests out of the copy. As a young man Angell admired the work of Red Smith, the literate newspaper columnist "who was funny and lighthearted and never sentimental," he says. "He put himself into his writing without effort. I remember his best last line ever. It was after the near no-hitter- by **[Bill] Bevens** in '47, when **Cookie Lavagetto** got the winning hit. 'The unhappiest man in Brooklyn is sitting up here now in the far end of the press box. The v on his typewriter is broken. He can't write either Lavagetto or Bevens.'

"It had broken off his typewriter and it went like this," Angell says, pantomiming a flying key. He laughs long and loud.

There was another formative influence. Seventeen months before Angell went to Florida on his first baseball assignment for *The New Yorker*, the magazine published the most famous baseball essay in history, "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu," by John Updike, in which the author observed **Ted Williams** entirely from a seat in the Fenway Park stands. Angell, as the magazine's fiction editor, edited Updike for years. They became so close that Updike would read two versions of the same sentence aloud to Angell and ask, "Which one sounds better?"

"That piece and my writing are very much alike in that he wrote about himself writing about Ted Williams, which I always have done," Angell says. "I have always put myself in my pieces, almost always as a fan."

A bit of quintessential Angell and a last line that belongs with Red's: It is the summer of 1969, and Angell tries to decide which baseball he likes best, having sampled the Miracle Mets at Shea Stadium, the fledgling Montreal Expos in the country-fair setting of Jarry Park and the bat-banging percussive might of the Red Sox and the Orioles at the Fens. "Then I remembered that I didn't have to choose, for all these are parts of the feast that the old game can still bring us," he wrote. "I felt what I almost always feel when I am watching a ball game: Just for those two or three hours, there is really no place I would rather be."

By then Angell, more comfortable in the baseball cocoon, was adding expert reportage to his observational skills. He sought out the good talkers and had the manners and skill to elicit their most honest thoughts. Blass, a righthander who suddenly lost his ability to throw strikes, opened up to him as he had to no other writer. The Red Sox legend Smoky Joe Wood sat with Angell at a Yale-St. John's game that turned out to be a classic duel between future big leaguers Ron Darling and Frank Viola. Pitcher David Cone, in his first three hours with Angell on a book collaboration, told such deep, moving stories about his childhood and his alcoholic father that Cone's wife, Lynn, said in amazement, "I've never heard any of this!"

And then there was Gibson, the notoriously stern Cardinals ace who regarded reporters as he did poison sumac. “I never worked harder to set it up,” Angell says of the interview. “I was terrified. Gibby brings me to his house and he gives me a swimsuit, and we’re sitting by the side of his pool, and for three or four days I’m with him all the time. And he’s telling me every single thing I want to know. When the piece was finished, he sent me a picture of himself and wrote, ‘The world needs more people like you.’”

Angell is remarkably fit and sharp at 93. He blogs occasionally and goes to *The New Yorker’s* office for an hour or two each workday, often reading fiction submissions. He is a repository of so much baseball and U.S. history—from **Babe Ruth** to the Pacific Theater to **Jackie Robinson**—that conversing with him is like thumbing through an encyclopedia; half the fun is not knowing where you will wind up next.

Ruth? As a kid Angell used to see him walking around Manhattan, “always in a camel hair coat.” **Lou Gehrig**? Angell remembers being at the ballpark on April 29, 1933, when Senators catcher **Luke Sewell** tagged out two runners—Gehrig and **Dixie Walker**—at the plate on the same play. It was a strange play that involved four Hall of Famers: Gehrig and Walker were on base; **Tony Lazzeri** hit the ball to right center-field, where it was fielded by **Goose Goslin**, who threw to **Joe Cronin**, who threw to Sewell, who tagged out Gehrig and Walker as if they had just been flung from the same revolving door. (Only Sewell and Walker aren’t in Cooperstown.)

The fan in Angell is malleable. He grew up in Manhattan so attached to the Giants and **Carl Hubbell**, the great screwball pitcher, that as a teenager he would walk with his pitching arm cocked with the palm out, the way Hubbell’s weary left arm hung—until Katharine told him to knock it off. He became a fan of the A’s when he got to know owner Walter Haas; a fan of the Mets when they owned New York’s attention in the 1980s; and a regular fan of the Red Sox because of his summer roots in Maine. But he holds a soft spot for the Yankees, largely because of Torre, the former manager who will be inducted into the Hall of Fame the day after Angell is honored.

“Joe Torre is the No 1 New York public figure of our time,” Angell says. “He never embarrasses himself, and he does it without effort. Just astonishing. He has immense natural grace and decency.”

When Torre is told what Angell said of him, he replies, “I’m getting goose bumps just listening to that. I’ve known Roger since my playing days. What caught my eye from the beginning was the way he went about his job. He was not doing it to get attention. He’s an artist. I’ll be honest: I thought he was already in the Hall of Fame.”

Down below, the Yankees and the Blue Jays are dragging their heels. “It’s ridiculous,” Angell says about the pace of play. “There’s no reason why they can’t speed it up. I blame the commissioner and the umpires.” And something else is happening to baseball. The emotional connection between the fan and the game has lessened. “They’re not paying attention in the same way,” he says. “Nobody’s keeping score.” Nothing, he says, has changed baseball more

than TV. Replay has become our external hard drive, rendering nearly moot the idea of carefully cataloging something in memory.

“I can still see in the mind’s eye plays that happened generations ago,” he says. “And I do care. It’s going to be a bit harder for us to care because we have access to great moments and players every night over and over. Replay is fabulous, but it takes away the feeling. I asked **Carlton Fisk** about his memory of the 12th-inning home run in 1975. He said, ‘I leave the room whenever it’s coming up [on TV]. I’m trying to keep something private, just in my head.’

“If you’re going to see something once, you are going to put it away. If you see it time and time again, it doesn’t mean as much. It sounds like I’m heartbroken, but I’m O.K. It’s just different.”

Angell’s greatest contribution to the game is that in his writing he has preserved the great people and moments with such grace and care. He is the curator of our baseball souls. Reading Angell on Fisk’s home run is as different from seeing the highlight as falling deeply in love is from speed dating. The beauty of these words, in “Agincourt and After” (1975), is the amber to preserve our emotional connection to the game:

It is foolish and childish, on the face of it, to affiliate ourselves with anything so insignificant and patently contrived and commercially exploitative as a professional sports team, and the amused superiority and icy scorn that the non-fan directs at the sports nut (I know this look—I know it by heart) is understandable and almost unanswerable. Almost. What is left out of this calculation, it seems to me, is the business of caring—caring deeply and passionately, really caring—which is a capacity or an emotion that has almost gone out of our lives. And so it seems possible that we have come to a time when it no longer matters so much what the caring is about, how frail or foolish is the object of that concern, as long as the feeling itself can be saved. Naïveté—the infantile and ignoble joy that sends a grown man or woman to dancing and shouting with joy in the middle of the night over the haphazardous flight of a distant ball—seems a small price to pay for such a gift.

Begging your pardon, an amendment: The beginning was not 1962 in New York City. It was here, in Maine. Summers here the young Roger learned not only how to sail and how to drive but also how to be a writer. Every Monday, E.B. White, known as Andy to friends and family, would cordon himself in his North Brooklin office and suffer through all the whirring and clicking of the gears, flywheels and levers of focused thought. He would emerge briefly for a wordless lunch and then retreat again. Hours later he would reappear, this time with his weekly “Comment” piece for *The New Yorker* ready to be mailed off, and harrumph, “It’s not any good.” (I ask Roger if he is similarly demanding of himself, and he says, “Yes. Aren’t we [writers] all?”) Days later Roger would read his stepfather’s work and be amazed that such suffering produced something “so lighthearted and with such easy flow.”

In 1961, at a spring training B game in Orlando, catcher **Norm Sherry** told Koufax, who had nearly quit after the previous season because of chronic wildness, to take a little off his fastball to find the strike zone. It worked. Koufax threw seven no-hit innings. It was the beginning of his

march to pitching immortality. Koufax would later explain his apotheosis as “taking the grunt out of my fastball.” What Angell understood and mastered was taking the grunt out of writing. White showed him the way.

“Be clear,” Angell says. “You can write long, but be clear. And remember, you are speaking to the reader. It’s a letter to the reader.

“I used to have a terribly hard time starting, because when I wrote I didn’t do first drafts. I wrote the whole piece on typewriters and would x out and use Scotch tape. I think I began to realize that leads weren’t a big problem. You can start anywhere.”

Angell openers: “Baseball has begun” (1968); “I first heard about the death of baseball one night last December” (1969); “Sports are too much with us” (1971); “Consider the catcher” (1984).

“Don’t look at my clothes.” That is not an Angell lead. It is a request he makes as we ascend the staircase in his Brooklin house toward the closet in his bedroom. Angell’s home is a little wooden envelope of good cheer, the timber warm and light-hued. He bought the place in 1975.

He says, “I want you to ask yourself an important question that can be answered yes or no, O.K.?” We are standing in his all-wood closet. In front of us are a framed picture of Carol and also an unframed 8-by-10 of Roger in his Army Air Force uniform, typing away for *Brief*, a cigarette dangling from his lips and a bramble of hair on his head. What he points to is something next to his photo. It’s a pushpin with a hairpin tacked beneath it. On the wall in ink Angell has written LITTLE JIFFY DECISION MAKER. In a circle around the pin, like numbers on a clock face, are words such as *sure*, *absolutely* and *of course*. On the bottom, where the 6 would be on a clock, is *no*. He says, “Are you ready?”

Angell gives the hairpin a spin. Of course, by the laws of gravity, there is only one place for the Jiffy Decision Maker to stop. He is beside himself with giggles.

“Would you like to see the town?” he says. Our first stop is the yacht club. Angell points to the Beetle Cats, the Haven 12 1/2s, the Herreshoff 12 1/2s and one red Herreshoff Fisher’s Island 21, which was built in 1930 and is one of only “about 20 in existence,” he says. “That’s the Greta Garbo of our fleet.”

We press on in the utilitarian Volvo, our anti-Garbo. “I’m going to show you the boatyard,” he says. “Andy’s son, Joel White, my late brother—this was his yard. It wasn’t nearly this big then.”

We pass the post office, the general store and the library and head down Neskeag Point Road. Roger drove here with his new license in 1936, the year a kid named DiMaggio, just six years his senior, broke in with the Yankees. “This is where my [three] children and my grandchildren learned how to drive. Every one of them! Ha, ha, ha!”

We swing past another harbor, this one belonging more to fishing boats and lobster boats. There are harbors and coves and inlets at almost every turn. Maine, the sea air, the memories, the deep comfort of one of the last unchanged corners of the world—the whole of Brooklin fills Angell with energy and light. In order to keep his mind sharp for writing, he has been memorizing poems. Ogden Nash's *A Drink With Something in It*, a humorous ode to the martini, is his latest mental calisthenic. "Would you like to hear that?"

"Of course."

Angell nails every word of the nine-line poem, and once again the Volvo fills with laughter. I think about something he told me back at Yankee Stadium. "What's so interesting to me in writing about baseball," he said, "is the number of people I talked to who really gave their lives to me. Bob Gibson. This woman named Linda Kittell. She married a semipro pitcher. I spent a week with them in Vermont. She just died this past winter. She was a professor. She said, 'We're giving you our lives.'"

I never understood that responsibility as profoundly as I do now, in such a private, happy space of someone with such an epic life—especially now that we have passed under the metal arc of the Brooklin town cemetery. This is where the journey ends: under the big oak tree, the one Andy planted when Katharine died in 1977. The Angells' headstones are designed to match the Whites' in everything but the stone. Roger consulted an art director at *Newsweek* to get the font just right. Carol and Roger had a discussion before settling on the white marble.

"It's still pretty white, but it will get grayer," he says. "I thought it was ostentatious, but there's a lot of white stones back there, so it will be O.K. in time."

The arc at the top of Carol's headstone is decorated with a line of neatly spaced sea glass, a custom Roger maintains. There is a supply of sea glass in a bowl in one of his upstairs bedrooms. Much of it washed up out of Eggemoggin Reach onto the rocky shore of their property.

"Carol loved sea glass and had a collection," he says. He picks up a weathered peppermint-green shard. "This is the kind she loved most. From an old bottle. Sea glass is getting rarer. People aren't allowed to throw [bottles] into the water."

It is time to go. We fold ourselves back into the Volvo. "I really like that it's a town cemetery," Angell says. "I really like that."

His headstone faces the gate. As you look through the gate and across the street, you see the First Baptist Church, built in 1853, a handsome white clapboard building that has a classic New England steeple toppled with a weather vane. "I like the top of this old church," Angell says, and then, in an apparent appraisal of the view for eternity, he adds, "That's not bad."

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Only five players have hit 100 or more homers for three different teams. Two of them are Hall of Famers **Reggie Jackson and Jim Thome**. The others are: **Adrián Beltré, Darrell Evans and Alex Rodriguez**.

To win this week's trivia challenge, name the three teams each of the five hit more than 100 HRs for.

Jackson	A's, Yankees, Angels
Thome	Indians, Phillies, White Sox
Beltre	Rangers, Dodgers, Mariners
Evans	Braves, Giants, Tigers
ARod	Mariners, Rangers, Yankees

HOUSEKEEPING

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