

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

6.26.2022

Good morning baseball fans.

Have an extra coffee with brunch and enjoy Gammons on prep for the trade deadline, Posnanski on how well big contacts work out, Rosenthal on playoffs, Jayson Stark because he digs up the best stuff, miscellaneous fun facts and of course, trivia.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Skip the Ty Cobbs and Tris Speakers and Honus Wagners. Can you name the 12 of the top 20 career hit leaders who played in the last 50 years (since 1972)?

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

For **Mark Appel**, it has been the longest of waits. But a little more than nine years after the Astros made him the first overall pick in the 2013 MLB Draft, he finally made it. He is a big leaguer.

Appel will join the Phillies on Saturday at Petco Park. The Phillies called up Appel from Triple-A Lehigh Valley.

Appel was one of only three first-overall picks in baseball history not to make the big leagues (not including more recent picks who remain active Minor Leaguers).

Brien Taylor (Yankees, 1991) and **Steven Chilcott** (Mets, 1966) were the others.

Austin Hays of the Orioles hit for the cycle this week. Three batters after he completed it, in the 6th inning, the game was rained out. How many guys have ever hit for the cycle in a rain-shortened game (not just of six innings, but any number lower than nine). And that answer, according to STATS, is Exactly one ... Austin Hays. BTW—the night before Hays went 0-4 and struck out 4 times, first time ever a batter went 0-4 with 4 K's and hit for the cycle next day.

Zach Greinke earned his first win as a Royal since Sept. 30, 2010 -- 4,285 days ago with a win Friday over the A's. Greinke improved to 12-3 with a 2.70 ERA (40 earned runs in 133 1/3 innings) in 20 career starts against Oakland, holding the A's to two runs or fewer in 15 of those 20 starts.

Mike Trout continued his dominance over the Mariners by hitting five homers in five games against Seattle, including a go-ahead two-run shot to lead the Angels to a 4-0 win on Sunday at T-Mobile Park. He became the first player in AL/NL history to hit four game-winning home runs in a single series, according to Stats by STATS. It helped the Angels take four of the five games, including winning three in a row for the first time since May 21-24.

Meanwhile, teammate **Shohei Ohtani** can't stop making history. The two-way phenom tossed a career-high 13 strikeouts in the Angels' 5-0 win Wednesday night against the Royals — one day after racking up a career-high eight RBIs.

Ohtani gave up just two hits and one walk in eight shutout innings. He was also the DH, logging a hit, two walks and two strikeouts at the plate. Ohtani, who retired 23 of the last 24 batters he faced, became the first player in AL/NL history to have at least eight RBIs in a game and strike out at least 10 batters the next day.

Former Braves right-hander **Tony Cloninger** is the only other player with a 10-strikeout game as a pitcher and an eight-RBI game as a hitter in a career. Cloninger struck out 12 on Opening Day in 1966 and later had nine RBIs, including two grand slams as a pitcher on July 3, 1966, but Cloninger never struck out 13 batters. Ohtani also became just the 19th player in Angels history with 13 strikeouts in a game and the first since **Patrick Sandoval** last year on July 24 against the Twins.

Rough times for Pirates fans but here is a bright spot—Newly promoted **Oneil Cruz** drove in four runs and **Bligh Madris** got three hits in his major league debut, sparking the Pittsburgh Pirates to a 12-1 romp over the Chicago Cubs. Both rookies were called up from Triple-A Indianapolis earlier in the day and they delivered right away. Cruz, considered Pittsburgh's top prospect, was called up and came out hot against the Cubs. He hit a three-run double to deep center field that capped a four-run third inning to push the Pirates' lead to 7-0. He was playing in the third big league game of his career.

The 6-foot-7 Cruz also hit an RBI single in a five-run seventh as the Pirates set a season high for runs. He started the final two games of last season when he became the tallest shortstop in major league history.

Madris hit a two-run single in the second inning in his first at-bat the majors. The outfielder keyed a three-run inning that included the first of **Hoy Park's** two sacrifice flies. Madris became the first Pirates player to have a three-hit game in his debut since **Jason Kendall** in 1996.

Tony Gonsolin became the first pitcher in the majors to win nine games, **Freddie Freeman** drove in five runs, and the Dodgers beat the host Reds, 8-2 Tuesday.

Gonsolin (9-0) gave up two runs and three hits through five innings and 87 pitches, relying mostly on a four-seam fastball and mixing in a splitter and slider. The 28-year-old righty has a 1.58 ERA.

June 21, 1952: **Eleanor Engle** became the first woman to ink an affiliated baseball contract when she signed for the Class B Harrisburg Senators of the Interstate League on this date 70 years ago. Unfortunately, that's as far as she got in her Minor League career. Engle, who made a name for herself as a great softball player in Pennsylvania, took batting practice and participated in infield drills with the Senators the next day but was informed before the game that her contract had been reprehensibly voided by Minor League president **George Trautman** and Major League Commissioner **Ford Frick**. She eventually got a Topps card to mark the brief foray into pro ball, though it doesn't replace actual playing time. **Kelsie Whitmore** of the Staten Island FerryHawks became the first woman to play in a game for a Major League-affiliated club when she debuted in the Atlantic League this spring.

Aaron Judge has 27 HRs with 23 games to go until the All-Star game in Los Angeles. Here are the players who have hit more than 30 by the ASG.

- **Barry Bonds**, 2001 Giants, 39
- **Chris Davis**, 2013 Orioles, 37
- **Mark McGwire**, 1998 Cardinals, 37
- **Reggie Jackson**, 1969 Athletics, 37
- **Luis Gonzalez**, 2001 D-backs, 35
- **Ken Griffey Jr.**, 1998, Mariners, 35
- **Frank Howard**, 1969 Senators, 34
- **Shohei Ohtani**, 2021 Angels, 33
- **Sammy Sosa**, 1998 Cubs, 33
- **Ken Griffey Jr.**, 1994 Mariners, 33
- **Matt Williams**, 1994 Giants, 33
- **Mark McGwire**, 1987 Athletics, 33
- **Roger Maris**, 1961 Yankees, 33

- **Albert Pujols**, 2009 Cardinals, 32
- **Sammy Sosa**, 1999 Cubs, 32
- **Frank Thomas**, 1994 White Sox, 32
- **Christian Yelich**, 2019, Brewers, 31
- **Jose Bautista**, 2011 Blue Jays, 31
- **David Ortiz**, 2006 Red Sox, 31
- **Jose Canseco**, 1999 Devil Rays, 31
- **Mark McGwire**, 1997 Athletics, 31
- **Kevin Mitchell**, 1989 Giants, 31
- **Mike Schmidt**, 1979 Phillies, 31
- **Willie Mays**, 1954 Giants, 31
- **Pete Alonso**, 2019, Mets, 30
- **Cody Bellinger**, 2019, Dodgers, 30
- **Aaron Judge**, 2017 Yankees, 30
- **Miguel Cabrera**, 2013 Tigers, 30
- **Alex Rodriguez**, 2007 Yankees, 30
- **Jim Thome**, 2006 White Sox, 30
- **Barry Bonds**, 2003 Giants, 30
- **Mark McGwire**, 2000 Cardinals, 30
- **Greg Vaughn**, 1998 Padres, 30
- **Ken Griffey Jr.**, 1997 Mariners, 30
- **Brady Anderson**, 1996 Orioles, 30
- **Dave Kingman**, 1976 Mets, 30
- **Willie Stargell**, 1973 Pirates, 30
- **Willie Stargell**, 1971 Pirates, 30
- **Willie McCovey**, 1969 Giants, 30
- **Harmon Killebrew**, 1964 Twins, 30

With six multi-homer games already this season, Judge joins **Babe Ruth** (1928) as the only players in franchise history to achieve the feat within the Yankees' first 70 games, according to ESPN Stats & Info.

Judge has 22 multi-homer games as a Yankee, trailing Ruth (68), **Mickey Mantle** (46), **Lou Gehrig** (43), **Joe DiMaggio** (35) and **Alex Rodriguez** (29).

Judge hits the ball hard -- 11 of his 27 homers had exit velocities of at least 111 mph.

Speaking of multi-HR games, Pete Alonso handily leads the Majors in RBIs (68), and after Saturday's 2-for-4, two-homer affair against Miami, he is two RBIs shy of 70 in just 72 games. With his current pace, Alonso is set to break the Mets' record for most RBIs in the first half (74,

set by **David Wright** in 2006). He's already become the third player in team history to record 60-plus RBIs before the All-Star break in multiple seasons, joining **Carlos Beltrán** ('06, '08) and Wright ('06, '08 and '10).

Most multi-HR games all-time:

- **Babe Ruth: 70 two-HR games (72 multi-HR games) ...**
- **Barry Bonds: 67 (71) ...**
- **Sammy Sosa: 63 (69) ...**
- **Mark McGwire: 62 (67) ...**
- **Hank Aaron: 61 (62) ...**
- **Willie Mays: 60 (63) ...**
- **Alex Rodriguez: 57 (62) ...**
- **Albert Pujols: 55 (59)**
- **Frank Robinson: 53 (54)**
- **Ken Griffey Jr.: 53 (55)**
- **Jimmie Foxx: 53 (55)**

Cubs reliever **David Robertson** waited until the 696th game of his 14-season career for his first at bat. He struck out in the Cubs 15-4 win over the Pirates. Entering Wednesday, Robertson's 695 career games were fourth most of any player without a plate appearance, behind only **Buddy Groom** (786), **Joakim Soria** (773) and **Bryan Shaw** (722). The last time he'd made a plate appearance was high school.

Like the professional hitter he is, Robertson worked the count full off **Diego Castillo** after falling behind 1-2. But on a shoulder-high 50.7 mph fastball (?), Robertson took a mighty swing and came up empty. But he left the batter's box smiling, telling his dugout: "I wasn't not going to swing."

Madison Bumgarner. When he broke in the now 32-year-old left-hander could not imagine at that time where his career would take him -- three World Series trophies, one World Series MVP and the lowest World Series ERA (0.25) in the history of the game, ahead of names like **Babe Ruth**, **Sandy Koufax** and **Christy Mathewson**.

On Wednesday night at Petco Park, Bumgarner added another piece of history to his resume by picking up his 2,000th career strikeout. Bumgarner came into the game needing just four strikeouts to reach the 2,000 mark, and he fanned **Luke Voit** to get there in the 4th inning. He is the 87th pitcher to reach 2,000 strikeouts. He added one more when he struck out the next hitter, **Jorge Alfaro**.

The top ten:

Nolan Ryan	5714
Randy Johnson	4875
Roger Clemens	4672
Steve Carlton	4136
Bert Blyleven	3702
Tom Seaver	3640
Don Sutton	3574
Gaylord Perry	3534
Walter Johnson	3508
Greg Maddux	3371

Active leaders are:

Justin Verlander	3094	16 th
Max Scherzer	3079	19 th
Zack Greinke	2834	21 st
Clayton Kershaw	2710	28 th

Bumgarner's first career strikeout came on Sept. 8, 2009, while with the Giants, when he punched out San Diego's **Kevin Correia**. He recorded his 500th strikeout on April 19, 2013, getting the Padres' **Yonder Alonso**.

Bumgarner's season high in strikeouts was 251 in 2016, while he was pitching for the Giants.

The Red Sox — where have you gone, **Carl Yastrzemski**, **Jim Rice** and **Mookie Betts**? — rank 28th in the majors in outfield OPS.

Righthander **Jerad Eickhoff** allowed 10 earned runs over 3½ innings for the Mets last July 27 and didn't pitch in the majors the rest of the year. He signed with the Pirates prior to this season and made his season debut on Wednesday against the Cubs. This time, he allowed 10 earned runs over 4½ innings. Eickhoff is the first pitcher in history to allow at least 10 runs in consecutive outings over two separate seasons.

ASTROS NO NO YANKEES

Cristian Javier dominated for seven innings, and two relievers finished the job, handing the Yankees their seventh no-hit loss in franchise history.

It took three pitchers, 150 pitches and 15 strikeouts, but the Houston Astros combined for a no-hitter against the Yankees on Saturday at Yankee Stadium, beating the best team in baseball, 3-0.

Cristian Javier got things started for Houston, dominating the Yankees for seven innings. He struck out 13 batters and his only blemishes were a first-inning walk and a batter reaching first base on an error in the seventh. But with Javier at 115 pitches, Astros Manager **Dusty Baker** pulled his starter in favor of the right-hander **Héctor Neris**.

Neris and **Ryan Pressly** finished the job, tossing two more hitless innings while allowing two base runners on walks. The scene was reminiscent of the last no-hitter to be thrown against the Yankees, in which six Astros pitchers worked together to accomplish the feat on June 11, 2003. That game was also at Yankee Stadium.

The two combined no-hitters by the Astros — separated by slightly more than 19 years — are the only no-hitters against the Yankees since **Hoyt Wilhelm** threw one against them as a member of the Baltimore Orioles on Sept. 20, 1958. Overall, the Yankees have been no-hit only seven times in 120 seasons despite having played more than 18,500 games.

The Astros now have 14 no-hitters in their history, tying the Braves and Guardians for seventh most. No expansion franchise that joined MLB in 1961 or later has more no-hitters. The first of those came in their second year of existence in 1963. That's two more than any other team in that span, with the Dodgers having 12 since 1963.

The last time the Yankees were no-hit? June 11, 2003, also by the Astros, also a combined no-no and also in the Bronx. Houston used six pitchers in that 2003 no-hitter, the most in a combined no-hitter.

This is the third combined no-hitter in Astros history and MLB's 18th combo effort. The club also threw a combo no-no on Aug. 3, 2019, against the Mariners, with **Aaron Sanchez**, **Will**

Harris, Joe Biagini and Chris Devenski participating. The Astros are the first team with three combined no-hitters.

The Astros' 2003 no-hitter came at old Yankee Stadium. This was the first no-no thrown at the Yanks' new ballpark, which opened in 2009.

Javier threw 115 pitches, shattering his previous career high for a game. He threw 107 on April 27, 2021, marking the only other time he reached 100 pitches.

Javier recorded 13 strikeouts across seven innings against the Yankees, not only establishing a career high but also posting double-digit K's in an outing for the first time in his career.

Javier's 13 K's were the most by an Astros pitcher since **Gerrit Cole** struck out 15 in Game 2 of the 2019 ALDS against the Rays. Coincidentally, Cole was the opposing starter in this game, allowing one run over seven innings in a losing effort.

How untouchable was Javier? In addition to his 13 K's, the right-hander had eight batted balls that were tracked by Statcast. Only one had an expected batting average, based on exit velocity and launch angle, higher than .140 -- **Josh Donaldson** reached on an error in the bottom of the seventh inning after hitting a grounder to third base with an xBA of .340.

Martín Maldonado, the catcher for Saturday's no-hitter, was also behind the plate for Houston's combined no-no in 2019. He's the first backstop to catch multiple combined no-hitters.

The Yankees entered Saturday with a .732 winning percentage. That's the highest winning percentage for a team entering a game where they were no-hit at least 50 games into a season, according to STATS. In fact, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, no team had even been no-hit under those criteria with a winning percentage above .691.

But Yankee fans should not despair. 11 times a World Series winning team was victim of a no-hitter. That includes the 1969 Mets who were no-hit by **Bob Moose** of the Pirates—at age 13 I was there.

JOE POASNANSKI ON MIKE TROUT AND BIG CONTRACTS

(once again I recommend you subscribe to his newsletter and read his book "Baseball 100" on the best players of all time).

Bill James has written about this — in the 1985 playoffs against Toronto, Kansas City's **George Brett** had one of the greatest games a player has ever had. The Royals had lost the first two games of the series and so, obviously, needed to win Game 3 or make their winter vacation plans. Brett said to his teammates: "Jump on my back."

Then he delivered his game for the ages — 4-for-4, two homers, a double (that went off the top of the wall), directly responsible for five of the six runs the Royals scored (he scored four of them and drove in another), plus he made probably his greatest defensive play when he ranged far to his right, made a backhand stab and threw off-balance to the plate to get **Damáso García** and save a run.

I mean, you just can't do much more than that.

But, as Bill points out, the Royals STILL almost lost that game. They trailed 5-2 at one point (and were lucky it was that close — the Blue Jays left the bases loaded in the fifth inning), and didn't score the winning run until the bottom of the eighth. The point is that there's only so much one player can do — even a player having an all-time game like George Brett does not guarantee victory.

Such is the lot of **Mike Trout**. He has had the misfortune of spending his brilliant career playing for one of the oddest teams in baseball, a team that doesn't seem to know where they play (California Angels, Anaheim Angels, Los Angeles Angels ...), a team that has the longest non-playoff streak in baseball, and yet a team that will spend money in an effort to win.

But the WAY the Angels spend money is exactly what we're talking about here. I've been doing a little research about giant contracts lately. It's kind of interesting.

In all, there have been 112 nine-figure contracts in baseball history.

Those 112 contracts have been given to 102 players. That's because there are 10 players who have received two nine-figure contracts in their careers. They are:

1. **Albert Pujols** (Cardinals in 2004, Angels in 2012)
2. **Alex Rodriguez** (Rangers in 2001, Yankees in 2008)
3. **CC Sabathia** (Yankees in 2009, Yankees again after opt-out in 2012)
4. **Freddie Freeman** (Braves in 2014, Dodgers in 2022)

5. **Justin Upton*** (Tigers in 2016, Angels in 2018)
6. **Max Scherzer** (Nationals in 2015, Mets in 2022)
7. **Miguel Cabrera** (Tigers in 2008, Tigers again in 2016)
8. Mike Trout (Angels in 2015, Angels again in 2019)
9. **Stephen Strasburg** (Nationals in 2017, Nationals again after opt-out in 2020)
10. **Zack Greinke** (Dodgers in 2013, Diamondbacks after opt-out in 2016)

**The asterisk next to Upton is just a reminder to come back to him shortly.*

A few fun facts before we come back to the Angels — there are four teams that have never given out a nine-figure contract. You could probably name three of them without any trouble at all: Kansas City, Pittsburgh and Oakland.

The fourth, though, is a bit of a shocker: The Chicago White Sox. It's interesting, the White Sox handed out the richest deal in baseball history back in 1996, when for some reason they gave **Albert Belle** \$55 million over five years. But that was more than a quarter-century ago, when the idea of a nine-figure contract was still years off.*

The first nine-figure contract in baseball history was given in 1999 — by the Los Angeles Dodgers to **Kevin Brown. That one, like most of them, did not work out too well.*

The White Sox have not only never given out a \$100 million deal, they've never really come all that close. The biggest contract in White Sox history belongs to **Yasmani Grandal**: a four-year, \$73 million deal that began in 2020.

The team that has given out the MOST \$100 million contracts is ... right, the Yankees. The Yankees have signed NINE nine-figure deals (counting Sabathia twice) and I'm sad to say that most of them turned out OK. The **Derek Jeter** deal was a steal. Sabathia and **Mark Teixeira** won them a World Series. Sure, the **Jacoby Ellsbury** deal was terrible and the A-Rod deal ended very badly and **Masahiro Tanaka** probably wasn't quite as good as they had hoped (though he was quite good).

Compare that to, say, the Red Sox, who have had eight nine-figure contracts that include several bad deals, such as full-blown disasters with **Carl Crawford** and **Adrian Gonzalez**. Or compare that to the Dodgers, who have had seven monster contracts, including two of the

worst deals ever: the aforementioned Kevin Brown contract and the astonishingly terrible and easily avoidable **Trevor Bauer** contract.

Anyway, the Angels have not been shy about entering \$100 million territory. Other than Trout, they have handed out four big deals. So there's been some effort to build a team of superstars around Trout. The four contracts are:

— A 10-year, \$240 million deal to Albert Pujols. He posted 12.8 WAR for the Angels. That's \$18.75 million per win.

— A five-year, \$125 million deal for **Josh Hamilton**. He posted 2.7 WAR for the Angels. That's \$46.3 million per win.

— A five-year, \$106 million deal for Justin Upton. He posted 2.1 WAR for the Angels before being released. That's about \$50 million per win.

— A seven-year, \$245 million deal for **Anthony Rendon**. This deal is through 2026, so you can't say for sure how it will turn out ... but the signs aren't good. He has only posted 3.1 WAR in his first two-plus seasons, and now he's out for the year with a wrist injury.

It's probably fair to say that all of these ended up (or will end up) being baseball catastrophes. And I would argue that none of them were just bad luck. Pujols was 32 years old and showing clear signs of decline. Hamilton was 32 years old and had a troubled history. Upton was 30 years old with a lot of mileage on his tires. Rendon was 30 years old and had been hampered by nagging injuries for years.

But even if they had turned out, I don't know that the Angels' fate would have been much different. Sure, you need stars to win in baseball. But stars alone won't get it done. Baseball is not like the NBA. It takes a village.

Look at the one year in the Trout era that the Angels made the playoffs. It wasn't because Trout had some sort of magical year — all things considered, it was probably no better than his sixth- or seventh-best season. It wasn't because high-priced Pujols and Hamilton delivered. No, that team had NINE above-average hitters in their lineup and so led the league in runs. They also had three above-average starters and a solid bullpen. That's how you win games.

And even that team was swept by a Kansas City Royals team that did not have any high-priced stars.

I bring this up now because over the weekend, Mike Trout WAS a one-man show. The Angels played the Mariners in a rare five-game series, and Trout hit five home runs in the series. But it was more than that.

— On Thursday, he hit two two-run homers to account for all four runs in a 4-1 victory.

— On Saturday, in the first game of the doubleheader, he homered in the 10th to give the Angels a 4-2 victory.

— On Saturday, in the second game of the doubleheader, he homered in the third inning to give the Angels a 1-0 lead they would never relinquish (they eventually won 3-0).

— On Sunday, he hit another home run — a two-run homer this time — and the Angels won 4-0.

It is worth noting that on Friday, Trout went 0-for-3 and the Angels lost 8-1.

This sort of breathtaking run gives the illusion that maybe a player of Trout's caliber CAN carry a team. Isn't it pretty to think so? All Trout has to do is hit a home run every day.

But that's the trap: Even if Trout COULD somehow hit a home run every day — and who would ever bet against Mike Trout? — the Angels would still need a lot of help to become a real contender. See, that's the lesson that the Angels have never learned. Sure, what Trout did was unprecedented (first player in MLB history to hit four game-winning homers in a single series).

But now, look at the scores: 4-1. 4-2. 3-0. 4-0. The Mariners scored THREE runs in those four games. That's why the Angels won. Trout's homers mattered, of course they did, but if the Angels could just hold opponents to two runs or less every game — with a smattering of shutouts — they would win almost all of their games, and that's with or without Mike Trout's brilliance.

I love Mike Trout and that's why I think it's important to say: There are no One-Man Shows in MLB. Get our man some help there in Anaheim.

ROY FACE AND THE 1959 PIRATES

(1959 was a little before I became a fan but I have been aware of Face's 18-1 season and wondered not only how did he rack up such a great record, but why just one year? Then a subscriber sent along this piece.)

Roy Face in 1959 went 18-1 as a reliever – **the best single-season W-L% of all time for a pitcher with more than 12 decisions**. Moreover, he did this for a mediocre Pirates team that went 78-76. How in the world did this happen?

First off, let's give the man some credit – he pitched well. He had a 2.70 ERA and a 142 ERA+. But in 1962, he had a 1.88 ERA and went 8-7. In 1960 he had a 2.90 ERA and went 10-8. In 1967 he had a 2.42 ERA and went 7-5. So obviously the stars aligned somehow in 1959.

For a moment, it's worth reminding ourselves how relievers get decisions. A reliever who enters a game with his team ahead or behind usually does not get a decision. Most of the time, he gets a decision only if the lead changes while he is in the game (or as a result of runners he is responsible for after leaving the game) and that lead is not relinquished. For a modern closer who enters the game only in a save situation, a decision is possible only if he blows the save. For a reliever who comes into a game trailing, a decision is possible only if his offense comes back and ties the game, regardless of how well he pitches.

The situation where a reliever has a good chance of getting a decision is a tie game. In a tie game, any run makes the current pitchers the pitchers of record. So the way for a reliever to pile up decisions is to enter lots of tie games.

Now, to come back to Roy Face in 1959. Looking at his game log, it really comes down to three things:

1. He entered a lot of tie games and pitched extremely well in those games.
2. He blew a lot of saves, creating a lot of W/L opportunities for himself.
3. He was the beneficiary of incredible, dramatic run support from his offense.

Tie Games

Face entered 12 tie games. In 2 of those games, he inherited runners who later scored, and Face did not get a decision. In the other 10 games, he entered with nobody on base. ***In those games, he went 10-0. Think about that. Ten times, Roy Face came into a tie ballgame with nobody on base. All ten times, Roy Face got the win.*** In seven of the ten, he did not give up a run, and just kept pitching until the Pirates scored. In the other 3 games, Face gave up one run

and the lead, and would have gotten a loss had the Pirates not scored. All 3 times, the Pirates scored 2 runs in the bottom of the inning to walk it off and give Face the win.

Save Situations

Roy Face blew 9 saves in 19 opportunities in 1959 – a terrible percentage. In fact, this is one of only 19 seasons in MLB history in which a reliever has had a save percentage less than 53% with at least 18 opportunities. His ERA in his 19 save opportunities was 5.56. And somehow, in those 9 blown save games, he escaped with a 4-1 record. Here's a rundown:

- **April 24** – entered bottom of 7th with a one-run lead. Gave up 2 runs in the 8th and was in line for a loss. Pirates scored 4 in the 9th to win the game. Face gets the win.
- **May 12** – entered bottom of 8th with a one-run lead. Allowed an inherited runner to score and tie the game. No decision.
- **May 14** – entered bottom of 8th with a three run lead and 2 runners on. Allowed those 2 runs to score, plus one of his own, tie game. **Dick Stuart** homered in the 9th to win the game for the Pirates. Face gets the win.
- **June 11** – entered top of 8th with a two run lead and 2 runners on. Allowed those 2 runs to score, plus one of his own and was in line for a loss. Pirates put up 5 in the bottom of the 8th. Face gets the win.
- **July 12 (game 1)** – entered top of 8th with a one run lead and 2 runners on. Got out of that jam, but allowed the tying run to score in the 9th. Pirates won in the bottom of the 10th. Face gets the win.
- **July 12 (game 2)** – entered top of 9th with a one run lead and 1 runner on. Allowed that run to score, plus one of his own, was removed from the game, was in line for a loss. Pirates tied it in the 9th, taking Face off the hook. No decision.
- **July 30** – entered bottom of 7th with a one run lead and nobody on. Gave up the tying run in the 8th. Pirates eventually won in 12. No decision.
- **August 1** – entered bottom of 7th with a one run lead and two on. Allowed both runs to score, plus 3 of his own. Got a no decision because the inherited runners were the responsibility of the prior reliever.
- **September 11 (game 1)** – entered bottom of 8th with a one run lead and one on. Got out of that, but his luck finally ran out in the bottom of the 9th. Gave up 2 runs, the Dodgers walked it off, and Face, who had been 17-0, got his first and only L of the season.

Other Wins

Face won 3 games where he came into a game the Pirates were trailing:

- **May 13** – entered bottom of 7th, Pirates down one. Pirates scored 3 in the 8th to win.
- **August 9** – entered bottom of 8th, Pirates down one. Gave up an unearned run in the 8th. Pirates scored 2 in the 9th to tie, and 2 more in the 10th to win.
- **August 23 (game 2)** – entered top of 9th, Pirates down one. Pirates scored one in the 9th to tie, one in the 10th to win.

The only win we haven't covered is from May 31 (game 2). Face was awarded the win under rule 9.17(b) – he was the most effective reliever in a game in which the starter did not go 5 innings.

What Does All This Tell Us About The 1959 Pirates?

The 1959 Pirates were an unremarkable team in most respects. They finished 4th out of 8 NL teams, 10 games behind the pennant-winning Dodgers. They scored 651 runs and allowed 680 on the season. They had a poor offense overall; their total of 651 runs was 6th in the NL. *But they were quite possibly the greatest clutch hitting team the game has ever seen.* Here are some of their records:

All-Time Single Season Walk-Off Wins, Team:

- 1 (tie): 1959 Pirates – 17 (out of 78 total wins)
- 1 (tie): 1977 Pirates – 17

Keep in mind that the 1977 Pirates played 162 games and they were actually good (96-66).

All-Time Single Season Extra Inning Wins, Team:

- 1: 1959 Pirates – 19
- 2(tie): 1988 Expos – 18
- 2(tie): 1949 Indians – 18

All-Time Single Season Winning Percentage in Extra-Inning Games, Team (min. 16 games):

1. 1949 Indians, 18-1, .947
2. 1959 Pirates, 19-2, .905

1959 Pirates Team OPS, by Inning:

- Innings 1-3: .679
- Innings 4-6: .659
- Innings 7-9: .755

- Extra Innings: 1.008 (The '59 Pirates and the '49 Indians are the only 2 teams in history with >1.000 OPS in extra innings, min. 180 PA)

Some Individual Slash Lines for '59 Pirates in Extra Innings:

- Mazeroski: .529 BA/.556 OBP/.647 SLG (19 PA)
- Stuart: .636/.667/1.182 (12 PA)
- Groat: .625/.647/1.335 (16 PA)
- Virdon: .556/.667/.667 (16 PA)
- Clemente: .455/.500/.455 (12 PA)
- Mejias: .625/.700/1.000 (10 PA)

Best Single Season W-L%, Blown Save Games (min. 5 decisions)

- 5-1 Record: **Dick Radatz** 1964, **Tyler Thornburg** 2016
- 4-1 Record: **Roy Face** 1959, **Dale Murray** 1975, **Ron Davis** 1979, **Jim Mecir** 2000, **LaTroy Hawkins** 2004, **Junior Guerra** 2019

Conclusion

We all know about the 1960 Pirates. That team was essentially the same as the 1959 team, plus **Vinegar Bend Mizell**. I wonder if, somehow, their performance in tight games in 1959 was a predictor of clutch performances to come? Or if it in some way sparked that special 1960 season? It seems like there is a good book in there somewhere – or at least some good interviews. It's still possible; at least 8 guys from the '59 team are still living:

- **Bill Mazeroski**, age 84
- **Dick Schofield**, age 85
- **Bennie Daniels**, age 88
- **Bob Skinner**, age 89
- **Bill Virdon**, age 89
- **Dick Groat**, age 90
- **Vern Law**, age 90
- **Roy Face**, age 92

Somebody get their stories before it's too late.

<https://mudvilleanalytics.com/baseball/roy-face-and-the-1959-pirates/>

ABOUT THOSE BASEBALLS

Boston Globe

Major League Baseball is standardizing procedures for rubbing baseballs and their removal from humidors in an effort to establish more consistency amid complaints about slickness that followed last summer's crackdown on sticky substances.

MLB has been working on standards over the course of the season in response to feedback from players and sent a memorandum outlining the changes on Tuesday to general managers, assistant GMs and clubhouse managers. Titled "Updates to Baseball Storage & Handling," a copy of the memo was obtained by The Associated Press.

Scrutiny of baseball preparation — a minimum 13 dozen are readied for each game — has increased in recent years. Use of a humidor, began by Colorado in 2002, expanded to Arizona in 2019, three additional teams (including the Red Sox) in 2020, then a total of 10 last year and all 30 this season.

MLB is mandating a ball be stored in a humidor for at least 14 days before game use, and ball storage must be recorded by the home team's gameday compliance monitor and then certified in a signed form by the clubhouse manager.

"All baseballs projected to be used in a specific game must be mudded within three hours of all other baseballs being used in that game, and must be mudded on the same day that they are going to be used," the memo states. "Baseballs should not be out of the humidor for more than two hours at any point prior to first pitch, and if it will take club staff longer than two hours, the baseballs should be pulled out of the humidor in smaller batches."

The memo followed review of video of each team's rubbing procedures, and stressed "the process should apply mud in a uniform manner, ensuring the same mud-to-water ratio is applied to each ball. Rubbing mud should be applied to each baseball for at least 30 seconds, ensuring that mud is rubbed thoroughly and consistently into the entire leather surface of the ball."

Following a crackdown on use of sticky substances as grip aides last June 21, New York Mets pitcher **Chris Bassitt** complained about the baseballs in April and Los Angeles Angels pitcher **Michael Lorenzen** last weekend after a pitch he threw hit Seattle's **Justin Upton** in the head. Yet overall, hit batters are averaging 0.40 per team per game, down from 0.43 last year and 0.46 during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, which was the most since a record high 0.47 in 1899.

PETER GAMMONS: YANKEES, DODGERS ET. AL. ARE OBVIOUS BUYERS, BUT MID-TIER SELLERS HAVE DECISIONS TO MAKE.

With the trade deadline on the horizon, how do the Dodgers know exactly what they need to do? They don't know if they'll have **Walker Buehler or Dustin May** at even 80 percent on Labor Day. Or what condition the injured **Mookie Betts** will be in, or if, as expected, **Cody Bellinger, Justin Turner and Max Muncy** are hitting to their career norms.

How do the Red Sox know if they still need a couple of right-handed relievers? Because there's no way of knowing how far and well **Tommy John** recoverees **Chris Sale and James Paxton**, injured first-time starter **Garrett Whitlock** (hip) and ace **Nathan Eovaldi** (back) will have bounced back, not to mention how **Tanner Houck** has adjusted to a late-inning role even after successfully converting saves in his first four tries. When Houck closed out the Cardinals series on June 19, the Red Sox were 9-1-2 in their last 12 series, but had gone to the bullpen 245 times, second only to the 259 relief appearances by the beleaguered Nationals pen.

How convicted are the Mets about the status of **Max Scherzer, Jacob deGrom and Tylor Megill**? Same goes for the Brewers on **Brandon Woodruff and Freddy Peralta**.

In Oakland, **Billy Beane and David Forst** may as well wait and not worry about **Frankie Montas and Paul Blackburn** getting hurt, when the owner orders the billboards located on Coliseum Way and Hegenberger Road advertising his yard sale; they're going to do Amazon Business, as long as they stick to the commands they received on March 10 when the lockout ended and take back nothing more expensive than minimum salaries.

Think back to the end of that lockout and the scramble to have a truncated spring training to satisfy both sides' priority of a 162-game season. Then think about the possibility of having at least 1,000 pitchers on the injured list by the completion of those 2,430 games, and how neither side considered or seemingly cared about the damage done to so many pitchers' careers; owners may think about it in September when they tally up all the dollars paid to players on the IL.

On June 20, the Yankees were on a pace for 122 wins. Four of the teams on pace to lose 100 games were scouting the Yankee organization. Why not? They know that while Yankees starting pitchers led the American League in earned run average and WAR, **Brian Cashman** is going to make a run at **Luis Castillo and Frankie Montas**.

Teams like the Reds, Athletics, Rangers and Cubs know Cashman will give up actual prospects to get what he wants, like **Ezequiel Durán** to Texas in the **Joey Gallo** deal or **Roansy Contreras** to Pittsburgh in the **Jameson Taillon** trade. The Yankees have talked Castillo, as will a number of contenders from the Dodgers to the Blue Jays, but the Yankees' track record of scouting and developing pitchers — like **Clay Holmes and Michael King** — has become equal to that of the Dodgers and Rays.

Look at **Will Warren**, which the Reds have done. At this time last year, he was a small right-handed pitcher from Southeast Louisiana University waiting to see if he got drafted. Because of the work of area scouts **Nick Leuzinger and Mitch Coloran**, the Yankees took Warren in the eighth round. The organization put him on a training program to build 20 pounds. They worked on maximum usage of his body. They fine-tuned his slider into another whirlybird. And this spring, in his first full pro season, he's shot up to hitting 98 miles an hour, his slider has gone to a seam-shifted weapon, and he's already at Double-A Somerset and opening eyes. Another Yankee pitching prospect on ask lists? **Luis Gil**, acquired for **Jake Cave** because the Yankees have pro scouts whose jobs are specifically to roam the minors in search of pitchers.

"The Dodgers are still the best at using their scouts with analytics to recognize pitchers with pitches they think they can improve," says one National League West general manager. "But the Yankees are right there with them. It's obvious what the Rays have done in this scouting, recognition and developmental department, and what Boston has done with **Nick Pivetta, Garrett Whitlock, Austin Davis and John Schreiber** — for whom they gave up nothing — indicates where they are going." In that final June 19 game with St. Louis, Schreiber pitched the eighth inning, striking out the side, with **Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan Arenado** the final two hitters. He even runs the team's postgame win celebrations.

The Dodgers have used **Mitch White and Ryan Pepiot** to eat starter innings, **Bobby Miller** will get starts, and **Tony Gonsolin and Tyler Anderson** have been phenomenal, but the club will still be in on Montas and Castillo, as will the Blue Jays, White Sox, Mets, Astros and Giants. The Marlins may consider **Pablo López** for the right young center fielder or a corner outfield bat with two-way skills. The deadline is six weeks away; a lot more elbow, forearm, lat and oblique injuries are ahead when it's 90 degrees the two weeks leading up to the Aug. 2 deadline. The season was generally at the 40 percent mark on Father's Day, and **Sandy Alcántara** was leading the majors with 99 2/3 innings. Seattle's second-year lefty **Logan Gilbert** was fourth, and Seattle's marquee signing, **Robbie Ray**, third; fortunately the Mariners play home games in a temperate summer climate, which is not the case for playoff contenders like the Cardinals, Braves or Phillies.

What complicates this trading period is that, yes, pitching is the focus for every contender, but in the cases of Montas, Castillo, and **David Bednar** as the best closer potentially out there — they don't *have* to be traded.

- Montas makes \$5 million, isn't a free agent until 2024, and while Beane and Forst don't want to trade him, if that's ownership's call. Between the number of good, large-market teams shopping, they can trade for what they want, not focus on what the owner wants. Now, that may include taking the remainder of Elvis Andrus' \$13 million contract, but Montas is a multi-prospect deal.
- Castillo isn't a free agent until 2024 as well, makes \$7.35 million and while Cincinnati may be a small market, Reds fans aren't used to bottom-feeding and they aren't over some ill-timed comments by ownership. They have **Hunter Greene, Nick Lodolo, Alexis Diaz and Chase Petty** for big, young arms, plus shortstop **Elly de la Cruz**. Castillo is

tempting enough for a rich team to take a contract and forget the tax threshold. For Castillo to partner with **Chris Bassitt**, Scherzer and deGrom in New York, the **Steve Cohen Tax** is a parking ticket. He has assistants to take care of those.

- Bednar has a 12.3-2.1 strikeout-walk ratio, and an earned run average below 1.50. He also makes the minimum and isn't arbitration-eligible until 2024. They brought their franchise's top prospect, **Oneil Cruz**, up on June 20, They may have second baseman **Nick Gonzales** and catcher **Henry Davis** up next season with **Ke'Bryan Hayes** and young pitchers like Contreras, **Mike Burrows** and **Carmen Mlodzinski**. Without a young power outfielder and another impact arm, is it worth dealing a minimum salary closer who prevents discouraging a young, talented team by blowing games they deserved to win?

In the first 10 days of June, I had a longtime baseball coach and organizational instructor now working in the Pittsburgh organization say the Pirates "will win it all in the next five years. Their talent base from Double-A up is championship quality. Oneil Cruz may be one of the most talented players I've ever seen. They have a ton of young pitching. The people running the organization are the most thoughtful, the most creative and the best people I've ever been around. Cruz needs time to develop polish and learn the everyday game, but it's unbelievable how hard he hits the ball, how well he throws."

When Neal Huntington was the general manager, his work ethic was never adequately portrayed; he put his soul into the job, but suffered incalculable bad breaks — some, like having to trade **Gerrit Cole**, before the final **Chris Archer**/Tampa Bay deal that turned into a nightmare — and when **Ben Cherington** was hired, he helped him as best he could. Cherington hired his own people to bring to Pittsburgh, and his years in player development in three previous organizations have helped him build an organization that is distinctly his.

We're all aware that other than making the postseason from 2013-15 — in which time they won three games, all in 2013 — they hadn't played a postseason game since 1992, when **Barry Bonds** played won his second MVP award, **Ted Simmons** was the general manager, **Jim Leyland** manager and **Tim Wakefield** was 8-1 with a 2.15 ERA.

They need to get back over .500, win another postseason game — which requires a closer — and win fans back to one of the best ballparks in the sport. But right now there is no timeline. Cherington's mission is to build something that lasts, which is why he went over slot on high-ceiling draft choices with left-handed pitcher **Anthony Solometo** and pitcher **Bubba Chandler** last year.

There are many reasons, shifting factors, but in the 22 seasons in the century, only once (2003) have they been out of the bottom third among franchises in payroll. According to Cot's Baseball contracts, the highest Pirate season-end payroll was 2016, at the end of their postseason run — \$99,866,170, the eighth-lowest among the 30 teams. They had the first pick in the 2021 draft, selected by the person, position and talent, and chose Louisville catcher **Henry Davis**, paying him \$6.5 million, the fifth-highest bonus. In his first professional season, he is in Double-A. The other two instances when they had the first pick, they took Cole in 2011 and **Bryan Bullington**

in 2002; Bullington was picked rather than Justin Upton for cost, and his major-league record was 1-9, 5.62.

In Arizona, **Mike Hazen** has said he is a buyer, not a seller, and is not looking to feed his farm system. Now, if he could get returns for **Christian Walker or Mark Melancon**, he might move either, but he wants the Diamondbacks to start winning in the second half and have it carry over into 2023 and beyond.

It's been different for the Diamondbacks than the Pirates. After Hazen's initial season and the playoff run, their season-end payroll topped \$131 million, 17th among the 30 teams. Last season, they were only 10th lowest. Each team has to be realistic when it comes to the free-agent market. They're not going to be in the bidding for **Carlos Correa, Trea Turner or Xander Bogaerts** this fall. The largest free-agent contract the Pirates have ever signed is the three-year, \$37 million deal they gave Francisco Liriano for 2015-17. Ke'Bryan Hayes' eight-year, \$70 million deal that began this season is the largest in their history. Arizona signed **Zack Greinke** for six years and \$206.5 million for 2016-21. When it comes to re-signing their own players, the five-year, \$76 million deal that begins in 2023 for **Ketel Marte** is the largest.

So neither Hazen or Cherington can win a Greinke-esque free-agent bidding war for tickets, or even make the kind of Scherzer/Justin Verlander acquisitions that have such an impact on their teams. They have to draft, trade, evaluate, scout, develop. We're past the first Billy Beane pole — take the first two months to see what you have, take the next two months to get what you need, then play the last two to either make it into October or take a significant step towards next season and beyond.

The Pirates have been able to go into Los Angeles and sweep the Dodgers this season. The Diamondbacks won consecutive series against the Dodgers, Cardinals, Marlins, Rockies and Marlins (again). There are many executives from several teams who look at the young talent the Pirates and Diamondbacks are gradually unfurling, and believe they are edging towards a point where they have a core of young players that can inspire, where one will go to games and see a Pirates fan has his kid in a Cruz jersey, or a Diamondbacks fan's children decked out in **Corbin Carroll and Alek Thomas** shirts as he's wearing his **Zac Gallen** pullover.

Hazen and Cherington both came out of an organizational culture, first in Cleveland, later in Boston, that eschews promises; when **John Hart and Dan O'Dowd** hired the base of what became **Mark Shapiro's** organization, those who rose up and out of it — **Chris Antonetti, Mike Chernoff, Cherington, Hazen, Ross Atkins, Carter Hawkins, Derek Falvey, David Stearns** — all modestly have development and collaboration on page 3 of their business plans, with the hope of finding a Gallen who becomes a **Cliff Lee**, or unearthing a Contreras who becomes a **Corey Kluber**.

Cherington's intent centers on building a scouting, talent and development system from Bradenton to Three Rivers. The Bucs now have second baseman **Tucupita Marcano** to add to **Bryan Reynolds, Jack Suwinski and Michael Chavis**, acquired in deals, getting extended playing

time, with Reynolds an established premier major leaguer. Hayes and Cal Mitchell came from their drafts. Cruz is garnering Rookie of the Year hype already. By mid-season, 2023, they may have **Liover Peguero, Davis and Nick Gonzales** in the starting lineup, with **Quinn Priester, Burrows and Mlodzinski** pushing for starting roles alongside Contreras. Their young international players as well as complex kids drew considerable interest and praise this spring. Cherington and **Steve Sanders** have painstakingly structured every aspect of Baseball Operations.

“It is about long-term consistency,” says Cherington. Be they the Pirates, Royals, Athletics, Marlins, Diamondbacks, Indians or Reds, one \$200 million signing and a winter’s splash in the deep end of the pool can take an organization off the tracks for years. Look at the Marlins: they made a couple of deals based on youthful enthusiasm and attraction to tools and wasted those trades, then had to downsize and reorganize, and now have enough high-ceiling young pitching and a host of power bullpen arms coming that in the next nine months they can acquire some skilled position talent to be legitimate NL East factors next year.

The Diamondbacks now have worked **Carson Kelly, Thomas, Jake McCarthy Josh Rojas, Geraldo Perdomo, Daulton Varsho, and Pavin Smith** in with Marte. With Gallen and **Luke Weaver**, there are a number of interesting arms, like **Corbin Martin and J.B. Buskauskus** coming off injuries, **Blake Walson, Drey Jameson, Ryne Nelson, Bryce Jarvis** and others.

Jerar Encarnación’s Sunday grand slam walk-off gave the Marlins a glimpse of the big-time power they need and that he possesses, if he can hit consistently. If Miami’s **Kim Ng** were to market **Pablo López**, she might be able to acquire a center fielder and an additional bat, which they need. With potential power arms like **Eury Perez** throughout the organization, **Mel Stottlemire** can keep the pitching growing. They have not produced position players.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing relievers in this summer’s market is **Daniel Bard**, 37 years old this week and now in his third year in Colorado coming off six years out of the major leagues with control issues. As of last weekend, his velocity was at 98.3 mph — in case you’re wondering, when he was arguably the best setup reliever in the game in Boston a decade ago, the best season velo he ever posted was 97.9 mph. Add that opponents have hit .094 off his sweeping slider and the fact that in the last two years, after all he endured to make it back to the majors, he learned how his body works, and with an ERA around 2.00 and 11.5 strikeouts per nine innings and a \$4.4 million salary he is very appealing. The Red Sox, who are shopping for two right-handed relievers, likely will be in, which would make his parents — Massachusetts natives — happy; his father Paul was a Dodgers draft choice in 1980 out of Tufts, called by **Tommy Lasorda** “the best throwing catcher I ever saw.”

Bard’s younger brother Luke has made a comeback of his own at 31, with the Rays. The onetime first-round pick of the Twins missed last season with a hip issue. He had a partial hip replacement, making him the first big-league pitcher to come back from that operation since **Colby Lewis**, and last Friday night was clocked at 96.4 with what one National League scout

called “really heavy sink.” As someone who saw Paul catch for those aforementioned Tufts Jumbos, these good things couldn’t happen to a better family.

All July, there will be facts and fictions, tips and mistips, smoke screens and fogs. For instance, over the weekend of June 17-19, there was talk among club officials that **Chaim Bloom** of the Red Sox was undecided on buying or selling, and may move J.D. Martinez. If he did, and the Red Sox did not make the postseason, he would get harsh treatment from a fan base that after a passionate 2021 postseason has seen a reduction in interest, especially as the Celtics ran to the sixth game of the NBA finals.

From June 2022 until March 2023, Bloom is faced with signing Bogaerts, Rafael Devers and Eovaldi. Not signing Bogaerts and Devers will have a serious impact on season tickets, the NESN viewing base and ownership, which expects to win and has had four Chief of Baseball Operations in 12 years. Reality: Bloom may be under as much pressure in the next nine months as any executive in the game.

KEN ROSENTHAL: MLB’S EXPANDED PLAYOFFS NOT YET BOOSTING COMPETITION

From The Athletic

One of Major League Baseball’s great promises in pushing for an expanded postseason was increased competition. A team on the fringes of contention might push for one of the additional wild-card spots, producing better pennant races.

Nearly halfway through the season, the competition is not looking so hot. Through Wednesday, 17 teams — 10 in the American League, seven in the National — were 10 or more games out of first place. Though the season started a week later, that total was the largest on that date in the wild-card era, which began in 1995. And the Yankees’ ridiculous 120-win pace, which had three teams with winning records 12 or more games out of first place in the AL East, was only partly responsible.

The incentives provided by the expansion of the postseason from 10 to 12 teams only go so far in a league in which some teams are mismanaged and others have tanked for too long. The recently concluded collective-bargaining agreement addressed the issue of tanking in only one respect, by introducing a draft lottery that will take effect in 2023.

The lottery should help, making the 18 teams that do not qualify for the postseason eligible for the first six picks, with odds assigned in reverse order of winning percentage. The agreement, however, does not include other elements, some sought by the players, that might have helped more — draft-pick incentives for small-market teams, penalties for clubs that dropped their payrolls below a certain minimum, requirements for revenue-sharing recipients to spend a certain percentage of their money on major-league payroll. So at least for now, the league

remains littered with too many rebuilding teams — and some that actually intended to compete — stinking up the sport.

Six clubs — in order of ineptitude, the Athletics, Reds, Nationals, Royals, Cubs and Tigers — currently are on pace to lose 100 or more games. That number would be the highest since the league expanded to 30 clubs in 1998; the previous high was four, in 2002 and the two most recent full seasons, 2019 and 2021.

It's not terribly likely that some of those teams will improve, not when all are virtually certain to part with some of their better players at the trade deadline. And if, say, the Cubs get hot — stop laughing — it might come partly at the expense of a division rival such as the Pirates, who are on a 94-loss pace.

Once upon a time, before the A's stopped trying, they would bank on other teams deconstructing, and exploit it to their advantage. In 2018 and 2019, they went a combined 88-47 after the All-Star break, a .651 winning percentage. Both years, under the old format, they qualified for a wild-card berth.

This year, both the A's and Reds never had a chance, thanks to payroll cuts mandated by their respective owners. Certain teams facing large deficits in division races likely will keep pushing. The Rangers, Angels and Mariners, all of whom entered the season with higher payrolls and/or increased expectations, all should crave a wild-card berth even if they cannot catch the Astros in the AL West. But in the NL, eight teams essentially are competing for six spots. Not good enough.

Yes, these things are cyclical. And yes, the new postseason format provides incentives for qualifiers at every level. The top two teams in each league will receive byes into the Division Series. The third division winner and the top wild card will host every potential game in a best-of-three series. But some clubs on the fringes of contention — the Rays, for example — might refrain from adding at the deadline when their most realistic goal is a fifth or sixth seed with no home games in the first round.

Maybe the new CBA will make a difference; it's still too soon to judge. But Bud Selig, the league's previous commissioner, talked often about the importance of giving fans of every club "hope and faith." In too many major-league cities, fans are getting incompetence or indifference instead.

JAYSON STARK'S WILD AND WEIRD STUFF THIS WEEK

From The Athletic

There's no business like Shoh Business

It's that time again. That time where we ask the question that never gets old: *This **Shohei Ohtani** guy — are we sure he's a real person, a member of the same species as us, a human from the same planet we live on?*

Can we be sure of that — any of that? Really? I don't know anymore, because Ohtani had another one of those weeks for the Angels that has never been witnessed in our world:

Tuesday — Ohtani the hitter erupts for two homers and eight RBIs.

Wednesday — Alternate-universe pitching Ohtani spins off eight shutout innings with 13 strikeouts.

So ... how even? Can't answer that. But let's try to make sense of it anyway.

Eight-RBI game/13-K game on back-to-back days? *Of course* that's never been done. Not in any week, month, season or career. By anybody. The only player/pitcher/human who even came close was one-time Braves pitcher **Tony Cloninger**. He had a 12-whiff game on the mound on April 12, 1966. Then, three months later, he had an epic two-grand-slam, nine-RBI game while pitching on July 3. I bet that seemed pretty superhuman at the time, too.

Anyone else had a 2-HR, 8-RBI game and ever started *any* games as a pitcher? I ran that question past my friends at STATS Perform. It's a short list! There's Ohtani ... and Cloninger ... and (lest we forget) Hall of Fame slugger **Jimmie Foxx**, who started two games on the bump for **Connie Mack's** 1945 Philadelphia A's — and struck out a *total* of six in two starts.

Never drove in 8-plus runs in a game: Oh, nobody you've ever heard of is on this list. Except ... **Babe Ruth, Henry Aaron, Barry Bonds, Big Papi, Albert Pujols, Chipper Jones, George Brett, Stan Musial** and some Angel named **Mike Trout** (among many others).

Never struck out 13-plus in a game: Again, not that you'd be familiar with anyone on this list. Except possibly ... **Babe Ruth the pitcher, Lefty Grove, Don Sutton, Dave Stieb, Tom Glavine** and thousands more.

Wait. Not even Ruth had a week like this? It's tricky because Babe the pitcher worked his hurling magic in Boston before RBIs became an official stat. But I looked anyway.

- Babe's career strikeout high was 11, on June 17, 1915. That was five years before RBIs officially came into existence. But Baseball-Reference lists him with three unofficial RBIs that day. So that's as close as he ever came in any 24-hour Ohtani-esque period.
- Babe's career high in RBIs was seven, set four times, but none of them were in seasons in which he also pitched. Nevertheless, if we check out his strikeout totals in the next game he did

pitch after those seven-RBI games (no matter how many years later), his most whiffs in any game was three. So obviously, he was no Ohtani!

Somehow, the Angels lost Ohtani's 2-HR, 8-RBI game! Finally, ever seen this headline: *Angels Waste Historic Effort by Ohtani?* Heck yeah, you have. Way too many times.

TROUT-LESS IN SEATTLE – Well, that's what the Mariners *wish* happened every time the Angels came to Seattle. Instead, in a five-game series last weekend, Mike Trout merely *hit four game-winning home runs* (home runs that put his team ahead to stay) in one series.

Go-ahead HR last Thursday

Go-ahead HR in each game of a doubleheader last Saturday

Go-ahead HR Sunday

Un-be-friggin-lievable. And how many other players have ever hit four game-winning home runs in one series — that's any series, in any park? That would be none, says STATS Perform. So I thought I'd look at assorted Mariners icons.

Most game-winning HR in a series by ...

Ken Griffey Jr. — 2 (several times)

Alex Rodriguez — 3 (twice, both on the road)

Edgar Martinez — 2 (but did hit three in a row on one road trip)

OK then. But also, in related Mr. Trout Comes to Seattle news ...

TWO TROTS ARE BETTER THAN ONE — Trout also had his *sixth* career multi-homer game last weekend at the Park Formerly Known as Safeco. Which is amazing, but especially because ...

Nobody who played for the Mariners has ever hit six!

Most multi-homer games by a Mariner: five, by **Mike Zunino**.

Freddie Freeman:

Bases-loaded triples in 12 seasons with the Braves: 0

Bases-loaded triples in 11 weeks with the Dodgers: 1

CRUZ CONTROL — Like many of you, I've been waiting all season for the debut of Pirates mega-prospect Oneil Cruz, all 6-foot-7 of him. Why? Because he's got Useless Info pouring out of him pretty much round the clock.

He's a 6-foot-7 shortstop! And despite what you may have heard, it isn't quite accurate to say he's the first 6-7 shortstop in history, since equally humongous **Joel Guzman** did drop by shortstop three times for the 2007 Devil Rays. But it *is* accurate to report that Cruz is the tallest human to *start* a big-league game at short.

He drove in four runs in his first game! Not to say it had been a while. To find the last four-RBI game by a Pirates shortstop, you only had to go back to the first week of the 2021 season, when **Erik González** had one. The Pirates then ran 10 different starting shortstops out there for the next 250 games, without any of them driving in four in a game, until Cruz showed up.

He's an RBI machine! Counting the two games Cruz played for the Pirates last Oct. 2 and 3, he's driven in a run in each of the first six games of his career. No shortstop has ever done that! Here's a complete list of all the players at any position who have done it since RBI became an official stat in 1920 (courtesy of STATS):

Dale Alexander, 1929 Tigers
George Shuba, 1948 Dodgers
Oneil Cruz, 2021-22 Pirates

Can't beat those Dale Alexander/George Shuba sightings!

RHYSED LIGHTNING — Phillies first baseman **Rhys Hoskins** has already had quite a productive career, but he never had a week like this:

June 13 — First career walk-off hit in 9th
June 14 — Tie-breaking HR in 8th
June 18 — Game-winning hit in 10th

OK, that's how I wound up slinking down another Baseball Reference/Stathead rabbit hole, just so I could produce this list of ...

Phillies with go-ahead hits in three games in five days, eighth inning or later*:

Ryan Howard, Aug. 5-10, 2014
Von Hayes, Aug. 26-Sept. 1, 1986
Don Demeter, Aug. 29-31, 1962

(*-since 1915)

Somehow this list did *not* include **Mike Schmidt**, **Dick Allen**, **Chase Utley**, **Jimmy Rollins**, **Greg Luzinski** or the great **John Callison**. Because baseball is weird. And also wild.

AIR FORCE — Yordan Alvarez, secret superstar. I've written that before. Is it still true? Whatever. Pay attention, because Air Yordan is a Weird and Wild note waiting to happen every time he takes a swing. Ready for another incredible tidbit?

Through Wednesday, 63.0 percent of the baseballs Alvarez has hit this year were considered by Statcast to be "hard hit." And what's so Weird and Wild about that? Oh, only that it would be *the highest hard-hit percentage by any hitter (minimum 150 batted balls) in Statcast history (since 2015).*

OK, granted, that's only eight seasons. But here's that distinguished leaderboard:

Yordan Alvarez	2022	63.0%
Fernando Tatis Jr.	2020	62.2%
Aaron Judge	2022	61.3%
Aaron Judge	2021	58.4%
Aaron Judge	2019	58.4%

(SOURCE: Baseball Savant)

THE THOUSANDAIRE CLUB — You know how challenging it is to get 1,000 hits in any ballpark? **Ken Griffey Jr.** never did that at the Kingdome. **Utey and Rollins** never got there at Citizens Bank Park. **Rickey Henderson** didn't get 1,000 at the Coliseum in Oakland. **Don Mattingly** didn't reach 1,000 at Yankee Stadium. But on Tuesday night in Cincinnati, **Joey Votto** delivered.

Only other active player with 1,000 at any park? Miguel Cabrera, with 1,136 at Comerica.

Next up? Yadier Molina has 997 at Busch Stadium.

Only other guys we'd bet on to get there? Jose Altuve, with 891 at Minute Maid Park, and **Mike Trout**, with 718 at Angels Stadium.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK — No little-town blues will be part of this note. They've all melted away, as we report ...

N.Y./N.Y. Home Run Kings? Your AL home run leader is **Aaron Judge**. Your NL home run leader is **Pete Alonso** (tied with **Kyle Schwarber**). Hey, whaddaya know. Judge and Alonso are both New Yorkers.

So yessir, I'm ready with all the times that guys from any New York team led each league in long balls in the last 90 years:

1956: Mickey Mantle, Duke Snider

1955: Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays

1948: Joe DiMaggio, Johnny Mize*

1937: Joe DiMaggio, Mel Ott*

1936: Lou Gehrig, Mel Ott

1934: Lou Gehrig, Mel Ott*

*(*tied for lead)*

What a lineup! But in other N.Y./N.Y. news ...

N.Y./N.Y. SLAMMERS: This happened last Friday: Alonso pounded a grand slam for the Mets; **Anthony Rizzo** whopped a slam for the Yankees. And that was the sixth time a Met and a Yankee had gone grand-slamming on the same day. But ...

Here's your bigger question: Have *first basemen* ever hit a slam on the same day for two different New York teams? ... I checked them all. From **Tino Martinez/John Olerud ... to Don Mattingly/Keith Hernandez ... from Gil Hodges/Johnny Mize ... to Gehrig/Bill Terry.**

Just so you know, *that took a while!* But the answer is: It's the first time in the modern era two New York first basemen have ever slam-danced on the same day. You're welcome!

SLAM-BAM INNING OF THE WEEK — But you should also know that N.Y./N.Y. grand-slam note almost didn't happen ... because consider what had to go down for Rizzo to hit his slam.

He had to *lead off* the inning (the fifth) in which he launched that slam. So that wasn't conducive to any slamming. ... And he got hit by a pitch to lead off that inning. ... And then he came around to score on a **Giancarlo Stanton** home run ... But he still got to hit again because the Yankees basically refused to make outs ... and he then pounded a slam off **Trevor Richards**.

So ... how Weird and Wild is it to get hit by a pitch *and* hit a slam in the same inning? According to Sharp, only two players in the Baseball-Reference database have ever done it: **Damian Miller** (Aug. 26, 1999) and **Kevin Plawecki** (Aug. 15, 2018), which is pretty much the ultimate list of players you would never expect to do anything historic together. But then again, it's ... baseball!

This week in Strange But Trueness

STRANGE BUT TRUE INNING OF THE CENTURY — There will always be a zero in the box score in the top of the seventh inning for the game in Washington last Friday afternoon. But the Nationals and Phillies took such a bizarre journey to that zero, I need to share it.

The Phillies were hitting, with a 5-3 lead, when this madness busted out:

Four-pitch walk
Wild pitch
Four-pitch walk
Wild pitch

(Pitching change)

Four-pitch walk
Strikeout looking
Strikeout looking
Strikeout looking

So that's 26 pitches, none put in play, three four-pitch walks, two wild pitches, three outs that involved no swings, *and no runs*. What the heck!

Pretty much everyone in attendance then sought me out to ask if there had ever been a scoreless inning like that before. I probably should have asked **Mitch "Wild Thing" Williams**. But instead, I directed that fascinating question to my friends at STATS.

It took them a long time to look into it. I appreciate that. And the answer is ... Nope! Never! Not in the pitch-count era (1988-2022) anyway.

In those 35 seasons, STATS found only one other inning with three walks, three strikeouts and zero runs. That was the ninth inning of a Mariners-Brewers game on June 15, 1988 that was pretty wacky in its own right. But ...

That one went: Walk, walk, strikeout looking, strikeout swinging, walk, strikeout swinging, with the legendary **Dan Plesac** marching in to preserve order in the end. Very zany. However ...

I'm deducting points from that game for those swinging strikeouts. And for sheer Strange But Trueness, you can't possibly beat: Walk-walk-walk, K-K-K (all backwards). So we have a winner. Or whatever that was. Somewhere, **Carlos Marmol** is wondering why he never had an inning like that.

TAKE THAT, MR. HUMIDOR — And now for something completely different. Instead of gushing about one of those 498-foot third-deck home runs that leave the bat at like 438.7 mph exit velocity, let's take a look at ...

The softest-hit home run ever.

All right, so that's not technically true, because again, Statcast has tracked this sort of thing since only 2015. But that aside, on Monday at funky Tropicana Field, the Rays' **Harold Ramírez** did something that had never occurred in the Statcast era.

It would be way too simple to report that batted baseballs with an exit velocity of 85.4 mph and 33-degree launch angle don't normally leave any park. So I enlisted the help of Statcast wizard Jason Bernard to look into what usually happens to balls hit like that:

AVG: .016

SLUG: .036

Expected SLUG: .038

Batted balls: 710

Hits: 10

But Harold Ramírez hit a baseball just like that — and got to make a home run trot ... because the Trop and the baseball gods conspired to create the Strange But True homer of the year.

STRANGE BUT TRUE BOX-SCORE LINE DEPT. — More strangeness came spinning out of the box scores this week. We were all over it.

THE 10-10 CLUB: Jerad Eickhoff made his Pirates debut, against the Cubs, Wednesday night. That went smoothly.

4.1 IP, 10 H, 10 R, 10 ER, 1 BB, 4 K, 2 HR

What's so Strange But True about that? If that line looked vaguely familiar, it's because Eickhoff's previous big-league appearance — last July 27 for the Mets — bore a certain similarity: 3.1-7-10-10-5-4. So that's back-to-back double-digit starts, for different teams? Yikes.

According to Doug (Kernels) Kern and the @MLBWhoSharted Twitter account, which tracks non-quality starts, that made Eickhoff ... A) the first pitcher to allow at least 10 *earned runs* in back-to-back starts since the immortal **Chubby Dean** in September, 1940 and B) the first pitcher in the modern era to do that for two different teams — in two different seasons!

DEJA WHEW: On the opposite end of the Strange But True box-score spectrum, there's Dylan Cease, of the White Sox, who spun off this spectacular start Tuesday:

6 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 2 BB, 11 K

What's so Strange But True about that? As NBC Sports Chicago's ingenious Chris Kamka reported, that's a line that has been seen only twice in modern history (and almost certainly any kind of history): By **Dylan Cease** (Tuesday) and ...

Dylan Cease!

(Previous 6-1-0-0-2-11: last Aug. 3) What a niche!

AGAINST ALL ODDS — Every week, somewhere in this column, I feel a need to remind you that the greatest thing about baseball is ... (you can all sing along out there) ... *it makes no sense*. So check out these Strange But True games from the past week:

Blue Jays 10, Yankees 9 (Sunday): So what's so Strange But True about that? Oh, only that ... the Yankees had won their last 36 games in a row when scoring nine runs or more ... and were 74-1 in those games in their previous 75 games ... and *it was the only game all season in which they'd allowed 10 runs*.

Giants 12, Braves 10 (Tuesday): So what's so Strange But True about that? Oh, possibly that ... the Braves were 71-1 in their previous 72 home games when they scored in double figures ... and also, *they'd never lost a game like that at Truist Park (22-0)*.

Royals 12, Angels 11 (Tuesday): And what's Strange But True about this one? Oh, man. Well, besides the fact that Shohei Ohtani had a two-homer, eight-RBI game *and the Angels still never led, let alone won*, there's the part in which ... the Angel were 80-1 in their previous 81 games when putting up 11-plus runs at the Big A ... but also, the Royals *had lost 81 games in a row* — and had gone 18 years without a win when they allowed at least 11 runs in a road game.

But then all that happened, in a little over 48 hours, in this amazing sport.

EXTRA STRANGE BUT EXTRA TRUE — Those extra-inning Zombie Runners were up to their old Zombie Runner tricks again Tuesday in Chicago. Of course they were! See anything particularly Strange But True about the White Sox half of this line score?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	R	H	E
 <u>Toronto Blue Jays</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	1	1	0	6	8	1
 <u>Chicago White Sox</u>	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	7	15	1

If you answered, *Whoa! The White Sox scored in the ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th innings*, you win! But now it's time for the Strange But True part.

Katie Sharp poured over the exhaustive Baseball-Reference database and found just three other games in which any team scored in the ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th innings of a game:

Phillies (vs. Marlins), on July 24, 1998
Padres (vs. Astros), on May 29, 2021*
White Sox (vs. Cubs), on May 29, 2022

*(*Padres also scored in the eighth)*

So ... get the picture? In the last 107 years, this had happened in two games. But then ...

The White Sox did it twice in 23 days.

Because ...

Baseball!

But also ...

Zombies!

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Skip the Ty Cobbs and Tris Speakers and Honus Wagners. Can you name the 12 of the top 20 career hit leaders who played in the last 50 years (since 1972)?

Pete Rose	4256
Hank Aaron	3771
Derek Jeter	3465
Carl Yastrzemski	3419
Albert Pujols	3323
Paul Molitor	3319
Willie Mays	3293
Eddie Murray	3255
Cal Ripken Jr	3184
Andre Beltre	3166
George Brett	3154
Robin Yount	3142

HOUSEKEEPING

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