

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

7.17.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Lots of odd and random stuff, the future of the shift, Lefty Grove, trivia. Plus Peter Gammons picks his All Star team of players he has seen since he began writing. It is a fun exercise—who is on the team made up of the best players you have seen?

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Lou Gehrig's consecutive games streak ended in 1939 at 2130 games. Cal Ripken Jr. broke the record, his streak ended in 1998 at 2632 games.

You need to name the next three longest post-Gehrig streaks?

An NL righty hitter infielder 1975-1983, 1207 games (won an MVP, played in 4 World Series)

An AL righty hitter infielder 2000-2007, 1152 games (won an MVP)

Lefty hitting outfielder 1963-1970, 1117 games (won a rookie of the year, 1987 elected to HOF)
(answers below)

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Albert Pujols recorded the 112th game of his career with three or more hits and one or more home runs last Sunday.

The blast proved to be the 1,377th extra-base hit of Pujols' career, tying him with **Stan Musial** for third in MLB history.

Then on Monday he doubled down the right-field line to pass the most accomplished player in Cardinals history with the 1,378th extra-base hit of his career. Pujols' double allowed him to move into third place on the all-time list for extra-base hits -- one spot ahead of Musial, who Pujols had tied a day earlier with a home run.

Hank Aaron is all-time leader with 1477. **Barry Bonds** is second with 1440 extra base hits. The only other active players in the top 100 are **Miguel Cabrera** (17th at 1126) and **Robinson Cano** (57th at 939).

Pujols (684 HR through Monday) will set a new record for career home runs for a Home Run Derby participant. Whose record will he break? Barry Bonds (681 home runs when he participated in the 2004 Derby)

Mets slugger **Pete Alonso** will try to become the first player to win the All-Star Home Run Derby three consecutive times.

Alonso hit 74 total home runs in last year's derby at Denver's Coors Field and beat Baltimore's **Trey Mancini**, 23-22, in the final round. Alonso joined **Ken Griffey Jr.** (1998-99) and **Yoenis Céspedes** (2013-14) in winning consecutive titles. Griffey also won in 1994 and is the only three-time champion.

28 big leaguers hit at least 500 homers. Only three of them never struck out more than 85 times in a season. Incredibly, one of the three played more than 1,000 games in the 21st century. The three--**Mel Ott, Ted Williams, Gary Sheffield**.

Injured Royals infielder **Whit Merrifield** sat down this week, ending his consecutive games streak at a franchise-record 553; it dated to June 24, 2018, and was the longest active string in the majors. The longest active streak now belongs to Atlanta's **Matt Olson**, who played in his 222nd straight game Monday. He has a way to catch **Cal Ripken Jr.**, 2632 consecutive games.

Bobby Witt Jr. had a pretty good doubleheader against the Tigers this week. The 22-year-old phenom logged six hits across both games, including going 4-for-5 in Game 2 -- his first career four-hit game. He drove in three runs in Game 2 and stole three bases on the day. Witt became the first AL/NL player with 6-plus hits, 3-plus RBIs and 3-plus stolen bases in a doubleheader sweep (since RBI became an official stat in 1920).

The Guardians called up **Nolan Jones**. Good call. Jones proved again on Monday night that he feels right at home, going 2-for-3 with four RBIs in the Guardians' 8-4 victory over the White Sox at Progressive Field.

- Jones' eight RBIs in his first four career games are tied with **Roy Weatherly** (1936) for the most in that span in Cleveland history since RBIs became official in 1920.

- Jones became the 15th player in the Majors to have at least eight RBIs in his first four games since 1920.
- Jones is the eighth Cleveland player to record a four-RBI contest within his first four career games and the first since **Kevin Kouzmanoff** (2006).

Last MVP to also play for World Series winner the same year—**Mookie Betts**.

On **Keith Hernandez** day the Mets beat the Marlins on a walk off error. Last time the Mets won a game on a walk off error? Game 6 1986 World Series and some guys named **Mookie Wilson** and **Bill Buckner**.

The Orioles had won 8 straight as of Monday – their 26 man roster payroll is less than Max Scherzer's Mets salary. In fact 11 players are paid more than the O's entire payroll. Go back 17 seasons to 2005 and their \$32 million payroll would be second lowest in MLB. Their two highest paid guys combined make 2/3 of **Mike Trout's** salary.

Tuesday they ran it to a nine-game win streak is the first single-season win streak of nine or more games for the Orioles since they won 13 straight in 1999.

Wednesday--10-game win streak is the first double-digit win streak for the Orioles since 1999 when they won 13 straight. It also ended their 23-year drought without a double-digit winning streak, which was the second-longest among an active team -- only the Marlins have never had one.

The O's reached 45-44. Every team remains above .500 in the division at more than the halfway point, which hasn't happened in the AL East since July 1, 2013, when all five teams were at or above that mark, per the Elias Sports Bureau. The streak ended Friday night with a loss to the Rays.

And then there are the Mariners who have won 13 straight too. June 26 bench clearing brawl with the Angels. The Mariners are 16-2 since the brawl and they went 11-1 during the resulting player suspensions, which are now complete after **Julio Rodríguez** sat out Wednesday's opener. Seattle (50-42) has pulled ahead of the Blue Jays in the race for the sixth and final AL playoff spot.

It is the fourth streak of 10 straight wins or more in franchise history -- and the first since 2002, when the Mariners won a franchise-record 15 straight in May and June.

Speaking of the Orioles and the Mariners--the last time two winning streaks of 10+ games overlapped was in 2017. Which teams got hot together? Cleveland (22 straight from Aug. 24-Sept. 14) and Arizona (13 straight from Aug. 24-Sept. 6)

In case you missed it-- Yankees reliever **Clay Holmes**, did not allow a run in 29 consecutive appearances from April 9-June 18, surpassing Rivera's franchise-record streak of 28, from July 22-Oct. 2, 1999.

July 14, 2011. **Derek Jeter** and **Jorge Posada** both appeared in a 16-7 loss to the Blue Jays. It marked the duo's 1,660th regular season game together, the most for two players in franchise history. **Lou Gehrig** and **Tony Lazzeri** had set the previous team mark in 1937.

Aaron Judge and **Giancarlo Stanton** both chosen as All-Star starters. The last time two Yankees started in All-Star outfield was 1988. **Rickey Henderson** and **Dave Winfield** started together in the 1988 All-Star Game at Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium, with Henderson leading off and Winfield batting fifth for the AL. They each stroked hits in the AL's 2-1 win, with Winfield scoring the eventual deciding run on **Terry Steinbach**'s fourth-inning sacrifice fly.

The full list of Yankees' outfield starting duos in All-Star Games, which they will join:

1985-88: Rickey Henderson, Dave Winfield

1981: **Reggie Jackson**, Winfield

1960-62: **Mickey Mantle**, Roger Maris

1953-54: **Hank Bauer**, Mantle

1942: **Joe DiMaggio**, Tommy Henrich

1940: DiMaggio, **Charlie Keller**

1939: DiMaggio, **George Selkirk**

1933: **Ben Chapman**, Babe Ruth

The youngest player to win an MVP Award was Oakland A's pitcher **Vida Blue** (22 years, 64 days old on final day of 1971 season; Blue won AL MVP and Cy Young).

Blue was also the 5th youngest pitcher to start an All-Star game. He was age 21 years 350 days in 1971.

Mark Fidrych	1976	21 years 334 days
Dwight Gooden	1986	21 years 224 days
Fernando Valenzuela	1981	20 years 281 days
Jerry Walker	1959	20 years 172 days

The top ten also includes **Bob Feller, Don Drysdale, Dean Chance, Denny McLain.**

Who was Jerry Walker, the youngest pitcher to start an All-Star game? He pitched 8 seasons for the Orioles, A's and Indians from 1957 to 1964. .37-44 record. In 1959 he went 11-10 for Baltimore. A member of the Orioles' fabled "Kiddie Corps" of young pitchers signed in the late 1950s (others included **Milt Pappas, Steve Barber and Chuck Estrada**), Walker never played in the minors. He pitched the first 3 innings of the second All-Star game in 1959 (back then there were two All-Star games each year. Walker went three innings and allowed one run on two hits and one base on balls, and was credited with the win in a 5-3 AL victory at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

The 1998 Yankees won 114 games. **David Cone** led the team in wins that year with 20.

There's been no stopping two-way superstar **Shohei Ohtani** over the last month.

Ohtani, who was selected as an All-Star as both a hitter and a pitcher for the second straight season, has been absolutely unbelievable both on the mound and at the plate, and he continued it with another incredible showing in a 7-1 win over the Astros on Wednesday night at Angel Stadium. Ohtani struck out 12 over six innings and he also helped himself at the plate by going 2-for-4 with a two-run triple in the second inning.

His run of dominance on the hill began on June 9, and he improved to 6-0 with a miniscule 0.45 ERA over his last six starts. He's racked up 58 strikeouts in 39 2/3 innings over that span.

Ohtani became just the second Angels pitcher to register at least 10 strikeouts in four straight starts, joining Hall of Famer **Nolan Ryan**. Coincidentally, Ohtani became the first Angels starter to hit a triple since Ryan on June 27, 1972, at Minnesota.

Ohtani, the reigning AL MVP, has struck out 46 over his last four starts and has allowed just one earned run over that span. He's just the sixth player since earned runs became official in 1913

to strike out at least 45 over a four-game span while allowing one earned run or fewer, joining **Clayton Kershaw, Jacob deGrom, Pedro Martinez, Randy Johnson and Chris Sale.**

Ohtani improved to 9-4 with a 2.38 ERA in 15 starts this season. He's struck out 123 in 87 innings and again joined Ryan as the only Angels pitcher with at least 120 strikeouts through the first 15 starts of a campaign, as Ryan accomplished that feat in 1977.

A comparison that jumped out at me:

In his career, **Nellie Fox** had 10,351 plate appearances. Last season, **Joey Gallo** had 615 plate appearances.

Strikeouts

Fox (career): 216 strikeouts

Gallo (2021): 213 strikeouts

And another:

most triples for players since the start of World War II:

1. **Stan Musial**, 177
2. **Roberto Clemente**, 166
3. **Willie Wilson**, 147
4. **Lou Brock and Willie Mays**, 141

Today the Orioles make the No. 1 overall pick, and clubs still aren't sure what to make of the pitching crop or which arms will go where in the first round. It's possible that teams pop hitters with each of the first 10 selections, something that hasn't happened since the Draft began in 1965. It's a good bet that at least 20 of the 30 first-round choices will be spent on position players.

Injuries have taken a toll on the 2022 pitching class. Alabama left-hander **Connor Prielipp** was a potential No. 1 overall pick until he had Tommy John surgery in May 2021. Possible first-rounders **Reggie Crawford** (Connecticut), **Peyton Pallette** (Arkansas) and **Henry Williams** (Duke) had their elbows reconstructed during the offseason.

Two more likely college first-rounders, **Hunter Barco** (Florida) and **Landon Sims** (Mississippi State), met the same fate after getting hurt this season. Buford (Ga.) HS right-hander **Dylan Lesko**, who looked like a lock to be the first pitcher selected, and Boerne (Texas) HS righty **Cole**

Phillips, who hit 100 mph with his fastball early in the year, both had Tommy John surgery in April.

Cade Horton and **Kumar Rocker** also add to the uncertainty. Horton was spectacular in the college postseason and led Oklahoma to the College World Series finals after having had his elbow reconstructed in February 2021. Rocker, who went 10th overall to the Mets a year ago only to see a \$6 million bonus agreement blow up after his post-Draft physical, showcased premium stuff in the independent Frontier League. He also released medical records to teams that revealed he had shoulder surgery last September.

A name to keep in mind down the road: **Elly de la Cruz, SS/3B, Reds**: He just homered from both sides of the plate in the same game twice in three days, and he already has 20 homers and 28 steals in 72 High-A games.

Joe Sewell. If there's one thing you know, it's that Sewell is going to put the ball in play. Sewell played 14 seasons for the Yankees and Indians 1920-1933. He struck out 114 times in his entire career. One of my favorite seasons was Joe Sewell in 1932. In his first 67 games, he hit .287/.370/.432 with nine home runs — the home runs were a big deal because he'd never hit more than 7 home runs in an entire season.

In those 67 games, he did not strike out a single time. His first strikeout came on July 28, when **Wes Ferrell** got him. And this isn't even CLOSE to the longest no-strikeout streak of Sewell's career. In 1929 he went 115 games without a strikeout.

Kevin Brown was known as a jerk—to the press, fans, teammates. But at his peak he was also a very good pitcher — let's say from 1996 to 2001 — he had to be one of the least fun pitchers to face in the history of baseball. He got that sinking fastball going, and it was like hitters had NO shot. In those six years I mentioned, yes, he played for three different teams, but he went 92-45 with a 2.53 ERA, a 4-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio and he almost never gave up a homer. He led two different teams to the World Series.

A subscriber asked me if I knew the all-time leaders in games played without playing in the post-season. He was all over **Ernie Banks** but asked about others at the top of the list.

Top ten

Ernie Banks	2528 games
Luke Appling	2422
Mickey Vernon	2409
Buddy Bell	2404
Ron Santo	2243
Joe Torre	2209
Toby Harrah	2155
Harry Heilmann	2147
Eddie Yost	2109
Roy McMillan	2093

Names of note outside the top 10

Don Kessinger	2078
George Sisler	2055
Adam Dunn	2001
Jim Fregosi	1902
Johnny Callison	1886
Rocky Colavito	1841
Frank Thomas	1766

When **Zack Greinke** hurled a 90 mph fastball to **Steven Kwan** with two strikes and one out in the third inning Sunday afternoon, the 38-year-old didn't know that pitch was the one that meant history.

He looked at it as just another pitch in one of his starts, happy to see center fielder **Kyle Isbel** catch it for the second out of what would be a perfect inning.

But it also was Greinke's 50,000th pitch of his career, logged in the Royals' 5-1 win over the Guardians on Sunday at Kauffman Stadium. Greinke became the 17th pitcher since 1988 (when data is available) to reach that mark and joins **Justin Verlander** (50,341) as the only two active pitchers on the list, which is led by **Tom Glavine** (68,226).

Rob Thomson became the first Canadian-born manager to manage in Canada when the Phillies played in Toronto this past week.

June 13, 2018. That was the last time **Robbie Grossman** committed an error.

In the 440 games since, the Tigers' outfielder has been a testament to perfection on defense, going errorless longer than any position player in the history of Major League Baseball.

But all good things must come to an end, and Grossman's historic streak snapped at an incredibly inopportune time for Detroit.

The 32-year-old misplayed a high fly in the eighth inning, appearing to lose it in the sun before it bounced off his glove for the first error charged to him in more than four years. The gaffe was all the fuel the White Sox needed to rally for a 4-2 win on Sunday at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Nick Markakis, who held the previous record for longest streak without an error (398 games).

Clayton Kershaw got within 6 outs of a perfect game this week against the Angels. He had been perfect for 7 innings against the Twins in his first start of the season. Kershaw became the only pitcher in the last 40 years to have a perfect game through at least seven innings twice in the same season.

Red Sox chairman **Tom Werner** is a member of the 11-person committee tasked with deciding which new rules will be implemented in the coming seasons.

There are four players, one umpire, and six team executives in the group. That tilts the balance in favor of what MLB and commissioner **Rob Manfred** want to do in terms of a pitch clock, controlling shifts, the automated strike zone, and other proposals.

Werner deferred comment to committee chairman **John Stanton**, the majority owner of the Mariners.

Werner unsuccessfully ran for commissioner against Manfred in 2014. Part of his platform at the time was making baseball more appealing for younger fans, something the new rules are aimed at.

Red Sox radio voice **Joe Castiglione** has the fifth-longest current tenure with one team.

Castiglione has been with the Sox since 1983. The only broadcasters with longer runs are **Jaime Jarrín** (Dodgers Spanish radio), **Denny Matthews** (Royals radio), **Bob Uecker** (Brewers radio), and **Eric Nadel** (Rangers radio).

Castiglione is tied for fifth with **Dick Bremmer**, who calls Twins games on television.

Jarrín, Nadel, Matthews, and Uecker are all past winners of the Ford Frick Award given by the Hall of Fame for broadcasting excellence.

PETER GAMMONS PICKS HIS 50 YEAR ALL STAR TEAM

From The Athletic

The All-Star Game started in Chicago, and on a recent night sitting behind home plate at Wrigley watching the Reds' **Luis Castillo** I got to thinking about Castillo pitching in this year's game, not to mention an October Game 6. Which led me here: my first full year on the beat covering the Red Sox and Major League Baseball was 1972. I missed the 2006 ASG because of a health issue suffered that June 25. So I decided to think out my All-Star Game teams for the 50 years I've been covering baseball, allowing, for instance, for the fact that **Johnny Bench** had but three years in the big leagues on Opening Day in 1972, while **Joe Morgan** had already been in the league 10 years; hence the bulk of Bench's career counted in my 50 years, while Morgan's did not, despite the fact that they are two of the greatest players I ever saw.

This runs from Opening Day, 1972, which was delayed by the first labor strike, to June 30, 2022. Here are my starting lineups and bench players for the National League and American League.

Gammons All-Star Position Players

NL ROLE AL

Johnny Bench	C	Ivan Rodriguez
Albert Pujols	1B	Miguel Cabrera
Chase Utley	2B	Roberto Alomar
Mike Schmidt	3B	Alex Rodriguez
Barry Larkin	SS	Cal Ripken
Barry Bonds	LF	Rickey Henderson
Andruw Jones	CF	Ken Griffey Jr.
Tony Gwonn	RF	Manny Ramirez
Mark McGwire	DH	Edgar Martinez
Gary Carter	BN	Carlton Fisk
Ted Simmons	BN	Frank Thomas
Jeff Bagwell	BN	Lou Whitaker
Chipper Jones	BN	George Brett
Jeff Kent	BN	Wade Boggs
Ozzie Smith	BN	Derek Jeter
Tim Lincecum	BN	Alan Trammell
Jim Edmonds	BN	Dave Winfield
Larry Walker	BN	Mike Trout
Joey Votto	BN	Reggie Jackson
Mookie Betts	BN	David Ortiz
Vladimir Guerrero Sr.	BN	Ichiro Suzuki
Craig Biggio	BN	Robin Yount
Lance Berkman	BN	Paul Molitor

Tough choices abound, particularly in who would start and who would sit. The mass of A-Rod's numbers overwhelm Brett's, in some ways, but I know this: in the last 50 years the player I'd most want up with the World Series on the line would have been Brett. He lived in the moment, didn't strike out, feared nothing, had more extra-base hits than strikeouts, more walks than strikeouts. Hitters with more extra-base hits and walks than strikeouts? Boggs, Brett, Bill Buckner, Mark Grace, Tony Gwynn.

The top six in wRC+ over those 50 years: Barry Bonds, with 173; **Mark McGwire** with 157; **Frank Thomas** with 154; Manny Ramirez with 153; Jeff Bagwell with 149; and then Joey Votto, Edgar Martinez, and Mike Schmidt at 147. Lance Berkman is 10th in both OPS+ and wRC+.

The pitchers were almost as difficult, especially when it came to the edges. Luis Tiant's pitcher WAR was 65.6, Roy Halladay's 65.4, CC Sabathia's 61.8. And every pitcher listed here would want to start the game, perhaps even the relievers.

Gammons All-Star Pitching Staffs

<u>NL</u>	<u>ROLE</u>	<u>AL</u>
Tom Seaver	SP	Roger Clemens
Greg Maddux	SP	Bert Blyleven
Clayton Kershaw	SP	Pedro Martinez
Randy Johnson	SP	Mike Mussina
Gaylord Perry	SP	Justin Verlander
Steve Carlton	SP	Jim Palmer
Bob Gibson	SP	Max Scherzer
Curt Schilling	SP	Luis Tiant
Tom Glavine	SP	Roy Halladay
Nolan Ryan	SP	CC Sabathia
John Smoltz	RP	Mariano Rivera
Trevor Hoffman	RP	Dennis Eckersley
Billy Wagner	RP	Rollie Fingers
Lee Smith	RP	Goose Gossage

Bruce Bochy would manage the National League, **Joe Torre** the American League.

W.P. Kinsella, Tom Seaver and Pedro Martinez are walking in from the bullpens. Let the game begin.

SAY IT AIN'T SO

Joe Posnanski

1911. **Shoeless Joe Jackson** hits .408 for Cleveland. He doesn't win the batting title because AL MVP **Ty Cobb** batted .419.

Jackson played 13 seasons for the A's, Indians and White Sox. In 1332 games he had 1772 hits, batted .356, he led the majors in hits twice.

"He hit .375 against the Reds in the 1919 World Series and played errorless ball. Twelve hits in an eight-game series.

Here's the thing: Joe Jackson admitted taking money from gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series. He got \$5,000 and on more than one occasion lamented not getting the other \$15,000 that was promised to him. He would later claim that he did not do anything at all to throw the Series, which is certainly possible but not entirely plausible. He did put up pretty good-looking numbers overall, but looking at each game individually, it's foggier than a simple look at his batting average or errors:

Game 1: He went 0-for-4 but reached on an error and scored a run. The White Sox lost 9-1.

Game 2: He did go 3-for-4, but he did not score or drive in a run. What does this mean? Who can say? The White Sox lost 4-2.

Game 3: He went 2-for-3 and scored a run in the White Sox' 3-0 victory, but when he came up with a runner in scoring position, he did something he almost never did — he struck out. Jackson would later admit: "The eight of us did our best to kick it, and little Dickie Kerr won the game by his pitching. Because he won it, those gamblers double-crossed us because we double-crossed them."

Game 4: He got one hit, a double to lead off the second, but did not come around to score, and later he struck out again (he had struck out only 10 times all season) and the White Sox lost 2-0.

Game 5: Jackson went 0-for-4 and the White Sox lost 5-0.

Up to this point, Jackson had hit .316, which sounds pretty good, but it was an empty .316 — he had zero RBIs and two runs scored. And after Game 5, the White Sox realized that the gamblers

were not going to pay them, and they tried to turn the Series around. Jackson was a leader in the effort to turn things around: He went 6-for-13 in the last three games with a double, the Series' only home run, three runs scored and six RBIs.

ALL STAR BROTHERS, YOUNGSTERS AND OLDSTERS

Sarah Langs, mlb.com

William Contreras of the Braves joins his brother, Cubs catcher **Willson Contreras**, on the NL All-Star roster. They're the first brothers to make the All-Star Game in the same season since **Aaron and Bret Boone** in 2003. They're the first to be on the same roster together since **Sandy Jr. and Roberto Alomar** in 1998 for the AL.

Overall, the Contrerases will be the fifth set of brothers to start the All-Star Game for the same league in the same year, joining the Alomars (1991-92 AL), **Joe and Dom DiMaggio** (1949 AL), **Dixie and Harry Walker** (1947 NL) and **Mort and Walker Cooper** (1942-43 NL).

The Mariners' **Julio Rodríguez** is the lone rookie on All-Star rosters this year. He's the sixth Mariners rookie to be an All-Star, joining **Michael Pineda** (2011), **Ichiro Suzuki** (2001), **Alvin Davis** (1984), **Matt Young** (1983) and **Ruppert Jones** (1977). He's one of three players in Mariners history to be an All-Star at age 21 or younger, joining **Alex Rodriguez and Ken Griffey Jr.**, who were each All-Stars at 20 and 21 years old.

If Rodríguez notches a base hit, he'd be the youngest player with a hit in an All-Star Game since 20-year-old **Mike Trout** in 2012. Only eight players have gotten a hit in the Midsummer Classic at 21 years, 202 days old or younger, Rodríguez's age next Tuesday: Trout, **Garry Templeton** (1977), **Butch Wynegar** ('77), **Claudell Washington** ('75), **César Cedeño** ('72), **Henry Aaron** ('55), **Al Kaline** ('55) and **Richie Ashburn** ('48).

Rodríguez is part of a group of 30 All-Stars on the roster for the first time. This is the fourth consecutive All-Star Game with at least 30 players making their debut on an All-Star roster. In addition, at least 30 players have now been first-time All-Stars in eight of the last nine games, and 10 of the last 12 installments.

On the opposite end of the age spectrum, there's special selection **Albert Pujols**, who's 42. If he gets in the game, he will be the seventh player to get an All-Star Game plate appearance at age 42 or older, joining 2007 **Barry Bonds**, 1991 **Carlton Fisk**, 1985 **Pete Rose**, 1982-83 **Carl Yastrzemski**, 1973 **Willie Mays** and 1963 **Stan Musial**.

The only player to get a hit in the All-Star Game at age 42 or older was Fisk, at 43 in 1991.

- This is **Clayton Kershaw**'s ninth All-Star selection, second-most in Dodgers history, behind **Pee Wee Reese** (10). He broke a tie at eight with **Steve Garvey, Don Drysdale, Roy Campanella and Gil Hodges**.

Mike Trout is a starter. It's his 10th All-Star selection overall, and he's just 30 years old. He's one of nine players to make at least 10 All-Star teams by his age-30 season, joining **Ken Griffey Jr. (11), Johnny Bench (11), Al Kaline (11), Mickey Mantle (11), Rodriguez (10), Iván Rodríguez (10), Rod Carew (10) and Henry Aaron (10)**.

Those starters include three individuals who will have now started for both leagues in the All-Star Game. **Manny Machado** will be the second player to start at least one All-Star Game at third for both leagues, joining **Graig Nettles**, who also completed the set as a Padres starter, in 1985 (started '75 & '80 with NYY).

Mookie Betts and Giancarlo Stanton will be the sixth and seventh players to start an All-Star Game in the outfield for both leagues in their careers, joining **Vladimir Guerrero Sr., Ken Griffey Jr., Dave Winfield, Jason Bay and Frank Robinson**.

At 23 years & 255 days old on the day of the All-Star Game, **Alejandro Kirk** will be the youngest starting catcher since a 23-year-old **Iván Rodríguez** in 1995. Pudge started three All-Star Games before turning 24. The only other catchers to start at 23 or younger are **Johnny Bench** (three times) and **Joe Torre**.

LEFTY GROVE GOAT?

Joe Posnanski is a sports writer whose opinion I have great respect for. When he suggested in a piece this week that Left Grove should be in the discussion for greatest pitcher ever, I was surprised. So a little digging.

17 seasons from 1925 to for Boston Red Sox and Philadelphia A's.

300 wins, 141 losses

1931 MVP with 31-4 record with 2.06 ERA, 27 complete games, 4 shutouts. He won 16 straight decisions and 24 of 25.

He led the AL in strikeouts 7 years in a row.

He led the AL in wins 4 times, in ERA 9 times.

He led the AL in complete games 3 times, in shutouts 3 times.

Grove was 4-2 in three World Series with a 1.75 ERA and added 2 saves.

2266 career strikeouts, 298 complete games, 35 shutouts

From 1929 to 1931, he twice won the pitcher's Triple Crown, leading the league in wins, strikeouts, and ERA, while amassing a 79–15 record and leading the Athletics to three straight AL championships.

His .680 lifetime winning percentage is eighth all-time; however, none of the seven men ahead of him won more than 236 games.

His lifetime ERA of 3.06, when normalized to overall league ERA and adjusted for the parks in which Grove played during his career, is fifth all-time among pitchers with at least 1,000 innings pitched (behind **Mariano Rivera**, **Clayton Kershaw**, **Jim Devlin**, and **Pedro Martínez**) at 48 percent better than average.

1947 Hall of Fame inductee.



Mike Brito, influential Dodgers' scout in Mexico, dies at 87

Mike Brito, an influential Cuban-born Los Angeles Dodgers scout who in Mexico discovered pitcher **Fernando Valenzuela**, whose sensational 1981 season uncorked the delirious fan reaction known as "Fernandomania," died Thursday in Los Angeles. He was 87.

His death, at a hospital, was announced by the Dodgers.

Although his scouting trips were out of sight of fans, Mr. Brito was probably baseball's most visible scout. For many years, when he was in town, he would station himself behind home plate at Dodger Stadium in full view of the center field camera, wearing a Panama hat, smoking a cigar and holding a radar gun to measure the speed of incoming pitches.

Mr. Brito, who began working for the Dodgers in 1978, signed more than 30 players, mostly from Mexico, who reached the major leagues. He was a pioneer in opening the door to Mexican players, who had not been much of a focus of Major League Baseball. He was known for setting up tryouts in Mexico to find and evaluate talent.

In 1978 Brito signed Fernando Valenzuela. In 1981 Valenzuela won the National League Cy Young and Rookie of the Year awards.

Dodgers starter **Julio Urias**, who won 20 games in 2021; mercurial outfielder **Yasiel Puig**, who is Cuban; pitchers **Ismael Valdez**, **Joakim Soria**, **Antonio Osuna**, **Victor Gonzalez**, and **Dennys Reyes**; shortstop **Juan Castro**; and outfielder **Karim Garcia**. Another of his finds, **Bobby Castillo**, a converted third baseman known as Babo, taught Valenzuela how to throw a screwball.

Mike Brito was born Aug. 21, 1934, in Cuba and was a catcher who, starting in 1955, played three seasons in the lower tiers of the Washington Senators' minor league system, then several seasons in the Mexican League.

The Umpire Strikes Back

Robots can call balls and strikes, but only humans can make sense of baseball's rules.

Fay Vincent contributing to the Wall Steer Journal

Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred aroused my Luddite inclinations recently when he announced he supports using robots to call balls and strikes beginning with the 2024 season. He cited the need to speed up the game. League data suggest that the change could shorten games by nine minutes.

I'm in my 80s. I see all change as a threat. The job of us old-timers is to urge caution to those who believe they have a clear view of the future. Baseball is timelessly interesting because it mostly remains the same game it was 100 years ago. It is like an old pair of slippers. It's also still the most difficult game to play because it is a game of failure.

Those who change this grand old game take brave risks because only the fans can decide whether the changes will stick. Videotaped reviews of close calls by umpires have been

successful, and perhaps robots will be too. Players and umpires have come to accept the review process because it eliminates heated disputes and delays over close calls. Replay resolves things and allows the game to move on. Robots calling balls and strikes could get similar fan approval. Much will depend on the precision of the technology and the support of players, managers and umpires.

Some will see this change as an implied criticism of umpires, and there is merit in that view, though the umpires are limited by their humanity. They can't be perfect, while a robot will perfectly apply its instructions. But machines can break down. The power goes out. Wires get snarled. Patience might be an odd requirement of trying to speed up games.

I suggest baseball use this change in the role of umpires to reaffirm their essential value, which is to impose law and order on the field while ensuring the game is played according to the rules. And the rules of baseball are complex. Who but an umpire can explain the difference between "obstruction" and "interference"? What happens when a player throws his glove and hits a ball in play? The answer: All base runners move up three bases. I bet you didn't know that.

Few managers and even fewer players are experts on the rules. Umpires provide assurances of rule knowledge, interpretation and application in the most intense competitive moments. Their role is taken for granted, and it is rarely celebrated or rewarded publicly.

Baseball is a symbiotic enterprise in which fans, players, managers, coaches and umpires are joined. Major-league authorities must take time to explain the details of this new procedure that has yet to be finally adopted. As usual, details will matter, and fans will need to be prepared for the switch.

Baseball is often dinged for being too slow. Young people, especially, say this. The league is responding to that concern while trying to protect its essential elements. When the Yankees come to Boston, as they did this past weekend, the games captivate huge crowds in Fenway Park, which opened in 1912. The game goes on and on.

Mr. Vincent was commissioner of Major League Baseball, 1989-92.

JOE SHEEHAN ON DECLINING OFFENSE

You've heard me talk up Joe Posnanski's baseball newsletter which is the source of some content here almost every week. I just subscribed to the Joe Sheehan baseball newsletter. Sheehan was a writer for Baseball Prospectus and Sports Illustrated before going out on his own. From my first issue:

As you know, offensive levels are down relative to recent seasons owing to MLB putting a ball in play that doesn't fly as well as the ones used previously. In doing so, they're punishing hitters for how those hitters adapted to modern pitching. Rules changes -- the stupid runner in extra

innings, the elimination of pitcher batting -- have served to make the degree of dropoff in offense less clear. If you tease those things out, looking only at position player batting in the first nine innings, you get these April through July batting lines.

	AVG	OBP	SLG
2022	.242	.311	.395
2021	.245	.320	.413
2019	.257	.326	.443
2018	.252	.323	.418

We know that the league had multiple balls in play last year, both the new low-fly ball and the previous live ball. So you have to go back to 2019 to get a sense of just how much offense -- 15 points of batting average and OBP, nearly 50 points of slugging -- has been lost to the new baseball. I think MLB was aiming for something like 2018's level of offense, but it's rolled things back to 2014 (.251/.314/.386), and with all the strikeout and gameplay issues of 2020s baseball.

When the league wasn't scoring at all in April, we heard a lot about how the use of humidors in all 30 parks was to blame. "Just wait," went the line, "when the weather warms up, the ball will fly better and offense will be normal." As you can see by the numbers above, that hasn't really happened. May and June were better offensive months than April was, but hardly good ones. Isolating just those two months using the same splits above:

	AVG	OBP	SLG
2022	.246	.313	.404
2021	.246	.321	.414
2019	.258	.326	.444
2018	.251	.320	.418

2022 was down from 2021 and 2018, if less spectacularly so. A .246/.313/.404 line isn't good, historically speaking, but it's less noticeable than some of the other splits we've thrown around. If offensive levels had continued to rise in July, it's possible the better-weather argument would have held up. We're still in a bit of a deadball year, literally and figuratively, but strong July offense would have at least been a data point in the argument that the problem was the humidors and not the baseball itself.

So this is a bit weird.

	AVG	OBP	SLG
April	.231	.306	.369
May	.245	.312	.397

June .247 .314 .410
July .243 .312 .402

Offensive levels in July have dropped from June, and in fact, been almost identical to those of May. Now, that can happen, but it's most often a function of post-All Star play. The All-Star break allows teams to rest their bullpens and reset their rotations, usually skipping their worst starters in the process. For offense to fall off in the first two weeks of July is unusual. It certainly hasn't been the weather, and it's not some Coors Field thing warping the numbers -- the Rockies have been home for about half the month so far. Offense is just down.

The drop is small enough, over just 11 days, to be variance. It could be nothing. Still, if the idea is that warmer weather is going to save the game, this casts doubt on that whole notion.

I want to take a second to again point out that any serious analysis has to restrict the data set to just position players and just the first nine innings. Pitchers, in their final year of batting, hit .110 with a 44% strikeout rate. Taking them out of the pool and replacing them with even mediocre position players provides a big bounce. Extra innings baseball is a farce, producing a batting line of .276/.379/.437 (against the .242/.311/.395 mark in the first nine innings) and 21.6 runs per nine innings (against 8.6 per nine innings otherwise). It may also be time to tease out position player pitching from the data, given how frequently managers are using hitters to pitch and how much scoring is done against them.

I am in the same place with this I have always been: MLB looked at the nastiest pitchers in baseball history and decided the problem was they didn't have enough advantages. The hitters, when they do make contact, are hitting the ball hard enough to keep the league out of the abyss, but the game itself is suffering because an already unbalanced relationship between pitching and hitting has been tilted even more towards the pitchers. Hitters may be scratching out a .240 BA, but strikeouts are still more common than hits, singles are still going extinct, and now well-hit fly balls are landing in the gloves of outfielders rather than fans.

It's the baseball. It's not the humidors, it's not the weather, it's not the mud. It's the baseball.

Bonus Fun!

One of the very first things statheads did, a long time ago, was preach the value of not making outs. As Baseball Prospectus founder Gary Huckabay often said, "OBP is Life. Life is OBP." The movie "Moneyball" includes a fun scene in which Brad Pitt's **Billy Beane** keeps going back to Jonah Hill's Peter Brand to get him to say of a player, "he gets on base." The A's, under Beane and Sandy Alderson, were among the first teams to value OBP over batting average.

So this comes as a bit of a shock.

"They Don't Get on Base" (lowest team OBPs, first half, 1901-2022)

Senators 1905 .263
Dodgers* 1908 .272
Athletics 2022 .272
Cardinals 1908 .272
Padres 2014 .273

*the Superbas, back then

This is a bad list. The A's OBP is 15 points lower than the second-worst team this year, the Tigers. The list of the lowest team OBPs ever is populated by teams from one of the two deadball eras; no team in the 21st century has had a full-season OBP of lower than .292 (those Padres above and the 2011 Mariners). The last team to have an OBP under .290 was the 1972 Padres. Just nine teams have ever had an OBP below .280 -- eight teams from Deadball I and the 1965 Mets.

The A's have a .272 OBP through a little more than half their season, so to reach .280, they'll have to have about a .290 OBP the rest of the way. Looking at their lineup, that's going to be a tall task. The A's are making history, just not the good kind.

JAYSON STARK ON ANOTHER WEEK OF WEIRD STUFF

Nolan Arenado hit for the cycle despite the slight technicality that *he was never on first base*. ... And **Miguel Cabrera** flashed his greatest **Rickey Henderson** imitation ever. ... And the White Sox won a game they probably shouldn't have, considering *they trailed in it five different times*.

But there's only one place to begin the Weirdness and Wildness this week. And if you didn't guess that place was Baltimore, you definitely have not eaten enough crab cake sandwiches in your lifetime.

1. Baltimore — or less

O, no. O, yes. O my goodness. What the heck happened to the Orioles?

Some streaks in baseball, you can see coming from a continent away. And then there is this one. The Baltimore Orioles have won 10 games in a row. In real life. And after spending way too many hours digging way too deeply into it, I think that, historically speaking, it's safe to say this:

We're watching the most unlikely double-digit winning streak ever.

Now why would all of us at Weird and Wild World HQ come to that shocking conclusion? Here's why.

2018-21 didn't go so hot! OK, you probably noticed those 2018-21 Orioles didn't win a whole lot. But did you notice they were historically skillful at not winning a whole lot?

(We're going to throw out the 60-game 2020 season because it's an apples-and-oranges outlier in every possible way. But just so you know we didn't do that merely to pick on the Orioles, we also tossed out the dramatically strike-shortened seasons of 1981 and '94. So now that we have that out of the way ...)

- The Orioles were *180 games under .500* (153-333) over the previous three full seasons. According to our friends from STATS Perform, they're one of only six teams in history that were that far below sea level over any three consecutive full seasons. But only one of the previous five — **Casey Stengel's** fabled 1962-64 Mets — played in the last 80 years. And those Mets had an excellent excuse for being that horrendous: It was their first three seasons on Earth.
- Nevertheless, you won't be surprised to learn that none of those other five teams ripped off any double-digit winning streaks the next year, according to STATS. So these Orioles have not only set a record for worst three-season stretch to precede a double-digit winning streak ... they also broke the old record *by nearly 50 games*.

Worst 3-year record to precede 10-game winning streak

Team	Previous 3 Years	Streak
2018-2021 Orioles	153-33 (-180)	10, in 2022
2012-2014 Astros	176-310 (-134)	10, in 2015
2001-2003 Devil Rays	180-305 (-125)	12, in 2004

They had a 19-game losing streak last year! This might come as a shock to Adley Rutschman, who is nine games over .500 in his glorious Orioles career. But just last August the Orioles ripped off 19 losses in a row. And now, less than a year later, they've turned around and fired off 10 wins in a row?

That seems hard. Well, maybe that's because these O's are the first team to have a losing streak that long one year, followed by a winning streak this long the next year since ...

Farmer Weaver's 1889-90 Louisville Colonels! That team lost *26 in a row* in 1889, then fired off three winning streaks of 10 or more the next season. Amazing.

They went 52-110 last year! Teams that lose 110 games one year do not normally spin the Earth in reverse the next year and knock off a double-digit winning streak. In fact, only one previous team had ever done that, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. And that team was ...

Yep, those Louisville Colonels again. Went 27-111 in 1889. Had winning streaks of 10, 11 and 12 the next year. And they weren't even promoted from Colonels to Generals!

They have the No. 1 pick in the draft! As you know, it takes a certain knack for losing many, many games to be "rewarded" with the No. 1 pick in any draft. The Orioles displayed that knack pretty much daily last year. So now, this team holds the first pick in this MLB Draft and has also won 10 games in a row — *in the same week*.

So has that ever happened? Baseball-Reference's fabulous Katie Sharp took a look and found ...

Only one other team has ever had a winning streak of 10 games or more in the same season it picked first in the draft. And that was **Denny Neagle's** 1996 Pirates, who drafted **Kris Benson** No. 1 and later won 11 in a row in September. But did they do that in the same week? Nope! So again, these Orioles are having quite a week.

They were nine games under .500 when the streak started! Our next question for Sharp: How many teams have ever been as far below .500 as these Orioles and then had a winning streak this long to surge over .500?

That answer: Just five other teams since 1901 have been at least nine games under .500 this deep into a season and then pulled that off. It's a fun list.

TEAM	Games Under .500	Streak
1979 Indians	9	10
1978 Pirates	9	10
1959 A's	10	11
1922 Indians	10	12
1916 Browns	12	14

And *ohbytheway*, it's July 15. The latest date the Orioles were at .500 in any of the previous three full seasons was ... April 10! That was in 2021 (4-4). That point arrived on April 8 in 2019 (5-5) and March 31 in 2018 (1-1). Their record after those dates in those three years: 143-323!

And one more *ohbytheway*. I thought you'd find this noteworthy. I did.

Record of the 2022 Orioles after 89 games: 45-44

Record of the 2021 Braves after 89 games: 44-45

One of those teams went on to win the World Series. Just sayin'.

They hadn't won 10 in a row in 23 years! This is where we mention that it wasn't only 2018-21 when the Orioles weren't quite the kings of the long winning streak. It was pretty much any time in the last two decades. The last time they'd won at least 10 games in a row in a single season was September 1999 (13 straight). So how long ago was that? O boy.

- In the 23 years since the Orioles' last double-digit winning streak (within a single season), the other 29 MLB teams have had *84 of those streaks* (or 85 if you count the Mariners, who reached 10 in a row Wednesday a few hours before the Orioles got there).
- Since the Orioles' last double-digit winning streak, they've had *eight* double-digit losing streaks (plus eight more nine-game losing streaks)!
- In all those years when the Orioles were spinning off no double-figure winning streaks, the Astros had eight of them, the A's and Cleveland had six, and the Red Sox, Dodgers and Yankees had five apiece.
- And one more thing: The Orioles' last double-digit winning streak was so long ago that **Jesse Orosco** pitched during it. *And he's now 65 years old.*

Lossless in Seattle

But of course, it hasn't just been those Orioles who decided to stop losing. My office is many time zones away from Seattle, but I can hear you all screaming from 3,000 miles away, something to the effect of: *Hey, you knucklehead. What about the Mariners! They've now won 11 straight!*

Yeah, well, I've noticed them, too. It's hard not to, considering the Mariners had gone 20 years between 10-game winning streaks. And, like the Orioles, they had a losing record (37-42) when their streak began. So since there are so many similarities, how about this:

It's a town full of losers. They're pulling out of here to win: Pardon the Springsteen reference. Here's the deal with this note: The Mariners were five games below .500 when they turned unbeatable. The Orioles, as we've noted, were nine games under. Then the two of them set off on simultaneous double-digit winning streaks.

So we know that's rare. I just didn't know how rare until I spent way too much time Thursday morning digging through Baseball-Reference and Stathead. And it turned out ...

Other than the first week of the season, this is the first time in the modern era (1901-present) that any two teams had losing records, *then ran off double-digit winning streaks at the same time*. To qualify, both streaks had to have reached 10 in a row or more on the same day.

If we make an exception for really, really early in the season, then there was one asterisk occurrence. That was in April 1982, when the Cardinals (after a 1-3 start) and Padres (1-4) then

embarked on winning streaks of 12 and 11 games, respectively. But can we agree that's a lot different than being sub-.500 after 80 games like these two teams were? I think we can.

In other words, this had never happened in 121 seasons ... until it happened twice *just this week*, when the Mariners and Orioles both got tired of losing simultaneously. Speaking of which ...

Their highway's jammed with broken heroes: But here's their other common thread: It's the Mariners' first double-figure winning streak since 2002. It's the Orioles' first since 1999. And then they both busted those droughts together? Weird.

So that inspired one more Thursday morning research expedition: Have two teams ever gone 20-years plus with no 10-game winning streaks and then won at least 10 in a row or more *at the same time* (same rules as above apply)? And that answer is ...

No, sir. This is the 12th time since 1901 that two teams have been working on double-digit win streaks simultaneously — but the first time it involved two teams that had waited as long as these two. In fact, there were only two other instances when the two clubs involved even had a decade between streaks, let alone two.

Both of those happened in April 1982: There were the Braves (12 years) and Cardinals (19 years) — soon to be joined by the Padres (no previous 10-game winning streaks in any of their first 13 seasons).

So think about this. We have two teams working on streaks that are ridiculously rare in their own right. But to see them both break out in the same Weird and Wild moment in time? There's only one explanation for that:

Baseball!

Caution: Beware of zombies!

We're now three seasons into the Zombie Runner era. And here at Weird and Wild, we're grateful for the existence of those Zombie Runners on at least one level, by which we mean: They sure do make our lives easier when it comes time to write these columns.

But over the last week or so, those Zombie Runners have out-Zombined themselves. Here come three totally bonkers adventures in extra-inning Zombie Runner Weirdness and Wildness:

ZOMBIE CLASSIC NO. 1: DON'T DO THE MATH! Might as well start with an Orioles game because it's O's week here at Weird and Wild. I understand that when you win 10 games in a row, some of those wins are going to be more unlikely than others. But on the Fourth of July, the Orioles won an extra-inning game against the Rangers that was basically mathematically impossible.

As the Orioles' tremendous play-by-play announcer on MASN, Kevin Brown, made sure I noticed, the bottom of this 10th inning was absurd:

Four base runners.

Three batters.

Only two pitches!

Uh, what was that again? This feels like it could only happen when the Zombies are unleashed. But it happened by virtue of: Zombie Runner on second (Austin Hays) ... bunt single on the first pitch (first and third) ... intentional walk (now pitch-free) ... and a plunk-off hit by pitch!

So I know what you're thinking, because it's what I was thinking: This has to be the first two-pitch, three-batter extra inning ever, right? Wrong! My friends from STATS found one other time this happened in the pitch-count era (1988-2022) — and astonishingly, it was *before* those Zombies began to roam the Baseball Earth:

May 15, 2019, Rockies at Red Sox. Where the bottom of the 10th went: First-pitch double (by **Xander Bogaerts**), zero-pitch intentional walk, first-pitch walk-off single (by **Michael Chavis**).

But hold on. This gets even more bonkers. Because of ...

THE HEIM CATCH-BUT-NO-CATCH INNOVATION — Turns out it wasn't only the Orioles' broadcast crew that was fascinated by the sheer impossibility of that 10th inning. It was also the Rangers' broadcasters. So TV analyst C.J. Nitkowski checked in, too, to ask about Rangers catcher **Jonah Heim**'s contribution to Weirdness and Wildness.

Which was: He pinch hit in the 10th. ... Stayed in the game to catch But then the Rangers lost the game *without him ever catching a pitch!*

So we both wondered: Could that ever have happened?

STATS took that one on, too — and did find three other extra-inning games in the pitch-count era in which a player pinch hit, stayed in to catch and saw the game end before he'd caught a pitch. But ... *not like this!* Those were all walk-off homers.

So Heim made Weird and Wild history, all right. Three batters. No pitches caught. Game over. Thanks for playing!

ZOMBIE CLASSIC NO. 2: PINDER'S GRAND ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE! Then there was **Chad Pinder**'s special moment in Zombie Runner history, Tuesday in Texas. Here's how his wacky little 12th inning went:

Started the inning as the Zombie Runner. ... Scored the go-ahead run. ... The A's then batted around ... which allowed our special Zombie Runner guest star to bat *and hit a grand slam*, to

cap off an eight-run Zombified 12th inning. Which gave Pinder two awesome claims to fame, according to STATS:

He's the first player since at least 1974 to score two runs in an extra inning *but have only one plate appearance*. And ...

- He's the first Zombie Runner in Zombie history to hit a slam — or any other kind of homer — in the same inning he was allowed to rove around the planet as a Zombie. So Chad Pinder is definitely the king of the Zombies.

ZOMBIE CLASSIC NO. 3: LEAVE YOUR BAT IN THE RACK! Finally, there was this strange moment in Zombie history last Sunday in New York. **Billy Hamilton** entered in the 10th as the pinch Zombie Runner for the Marlins. Then this goofy thing happens.

That prompted a fun little debate down I-95 in the Nationals' radio booth, where they watched this game, then asked a fascinating question: Was this the first time in history a runner had scored in any inning *before there was a plate appearance in that inning*? They eventually dragged me into that one, naturally. Whereupon I got the STATS crew involved. And...

Of course it is! Never before, in any game, had a team scored a run in any inning without an actual plate appearance (at least not yet). Because ... (you know) ...

Zombies!

4. This week in useless info

BEST IN SHOH — This column should just be sponsored by **Shohei Ohtani**. He's a walking Weird and Wild note waiting to happen every night of every week. So here's what we'll do this week, after he just became the first American League pitcher to hit a triple, in the midst of striking out 12, since **Denny McLain** did that (*and also won his 29th game of the season*) on Sept. 10, 1968.

Here's how the poor dudes who have to face Shohei the pitcher compare with Shohei the hitter since June 9:

STAT	Against Pitcher Ohtani	Ohtani the Hitter
PA	150	124
HR	0	8
XBH	4	14
AVG	.146	.291
OBP	.207	.395

SLUG	.175	.602
OPS	.382	.997

So if Ohtani kicked off his next start by allowing home runs to the first 17 hitters he faced, *they still wouldn't have as good a slugging percentage as he does in this span!*

HONEY, I GOT PINCH HIT FOR BY THE KIDS — I was watching the Cardinals play the Braves on July 6, when **Albert Pujols** (proud owner of 683 career homers at the time) got pinch hit for by **Nolan Gorman** (who had 676 fewer than that). And it made me wonder: Has any member of the 600-Homer Club ever been pinch hit for by a rookie more than Pujols?

I enlisted Katie Sharp's invaluable assistance. But we weren't ready for what she found.

- Pujols has been pinch hit for by rookies *seven* times this season — five by Gorman, twice by **Brendan Donovan**. The old record, for any other member of the 600-Homer Club, was *two*. In 1975, a fellow named **Henry Aaron** was pinch hit for by **Tommy Bianco** and **Sixto Lezcano**. But also ...

- No rookie had ever pinch hit for any 600-homer guy more than once *in a career*. And now Gorman and Donovan have each done it multiple times just this year.

ALBERT LOVES L.A. — Then came this cool Albert moment, Tuesday night against the Dodgers.

That was Pujols' 685th homer. And it sent me down a fun Baseball-Reference rabbit hole in search of: Other guys who hit their 685th home run (or higher) against the Dodgers. Here's the company he's keeping:

Babe Ruth: Hit No. 710 off Ray Benge on April 21, 1935.

Henry Aaron: Hit the famed No. 715 off **Al Downing** on April 8, 1974, but also hit Nos. 693, 716 and 726 against the Dodgers.

Barry Bonds: Launched No. 741 versus **Randy Wolf** on July 25, 2007, but also hit Nos. 702, 703, 704, 705 and 720 against L.A.

Willie Mays: Just missed (since he never did get to 685)! His last homer against L.A.: No. 655, also off Downing, on June 9, 1973.

GROSS MISCONDUCT — I'm thinking Tigers outfielder **Robbie Grossman** would love a chance sometime to play America's favorite game, Hit or Error — especially after what happened to him in Chicago last Sunday.

He battled sun. He battled wind. And he wound up with his first error since June 13, 2018 — ending a 480-game error-free streak that's the longest in history by any player at any position. Well, if it alleviates any of the pain, he should know that ...

While he was committing zero errors, **Rafael Devers** made 80 of them! And if we're dealing with outfielders only, **Hunter Renfroe** got charged with 23 of them!

BOHMS AWAY — Phillies third baseman **Alec Bohm** did something last weekend you don't see much. In back-to-back games against the Cardinals, all the runs scored *by both teams* were driven in by (yep) Bohm: Two solo homers in a 2-0 win last Friday. Then a sac fly in a 1-0 win Saturday.

Baseball-Reference's Kenny Jackelen was cool enough to dig up every instance of this happening in the modern era (17 other times). And just so Bohm knows, the names he joined on this list include a few guys he might have heard of, such as: **Honus Wagner**, **Yogi Berra**, **Roger Maris** and the only other Phillie to do it since 1908 — a guy named **Jimmy Rollins**.

NAME OF THE GAME — Our Name Game Department was pressed into action twice last week. And as we present this important info, just remember, it's all in the name of glove.

Maxxed Out — It was Monday in Atlanta, and there were many reasons to get stoked by the spectacle of **Max Scherzer** versus **Max Fried**. But not the least of them was: Max vs. Max!

The official Name Game guru of Weird and Wild, David Benjamin Firstman, reports it was just the ninth Max versus Max "max-up" of all time. And if these two Maxes want to duel it up nine more times themselves, we are all there for that.

Turning Gray — But these Name Game matchups don't get more colorful than last Friday in Minneapolis: **Gray (Jon)** versus **Gray (Sonny)**. Luckily, Rangers broadcaster Dave (Hue) Raymond was as excited as we were.

Other than a previous battle between these two guys in 2019, this was only the second time in modern history that we'd seen two color-coded pitchers face each other with the same color in their last name. And the last one before the Grays was: **Lloyd Brown** versus **Jumbo Brown** on July 26, 1933. Should have played that game in Browntown!

THE NUMBERS GAME — But it's not only the names that make baseball the spectacularly fun sport it is. It's the numbers. Just usually, not the kind of numbers the Mariners stirred up Wednesday in Washington.

As the Mariners began launching long balls in Game 1 of a doubleheader, their baseball info whiz, Alex Mayer, noticed something. **Adam Frazier** (No. 26 in your program) homered. ... So did **Jesse Winker** (No. 27). ... So did **Eugenio Suárez** (No. 28). ... Then the fourth homer of the day was smoked by — who else — **Cal Raleigh** (No. 29).

Within about three seconds of Alex tweeting this, America decided there was pretty much nothing more important than alerting the Weird and Wild Department. Thanks to all who checked in. Fortunately, Jackelen was also all-in. America thanks him for looking up every known instance of four consecutive numbers homering for any team.

Coolest foursome: Joe DiMaggio (5), Joe Gordon (6), Tommy Henrich (7) and Bill Dickey (8) for both the 1939 and 1941 Yankees.

Four lowest numbers (tie): Charlie Gehringer (2), Mickey Cochrane (3), Goose Goslin (4) and Hank Greenberg (5) for the 1934 Tigers, and **Zoilo Versalles (2), Harmon Killebrew (3), Bob Allison (4) and Don Mincher (5)** for the 1964 Twins.

Four highest numbers (tie): The 2022 Mariners! Also **Ted Uhlaender (26), Roy Foster (27), Vada Pinson (28) and John Lowenstein (29)** for Cleveland in 1970.

And yes, you've just read a note connecting Joe DiMaggio, Harmon Killebrew, John Lowenstein and Cal Raleigh, because ...

Baseball! It's awesome.

We'll see you tomorrow night! Just a few days earlier, on July 6, the White Sox won a 9-8 classic against the Twins that will go down as one of the wildest (and also weirdest) games of the year. And why is that? Because the White Sox trailed in this game *five different times* — but *still won*.

Let's just say that doesn't happen much. Matter of fact, it hadn't happened in any game, regular season or postseason, since another Game 6. I guarantee David Freese will never forget it.

5. This week in Strange But Trueness

IT'S ALL CYCLICAL — What made Arenado's July 1 cycle slightly different than your average cycle? Oh, not much, except for the fact that he hit for a cycle ... *but was never on first base*.

Infield single with an E5 so he got credit for a single but did not wind up on 1B.

So that's how Arenado completed his cycle. And according to Jackelen, there are only four other cycles in the Baseball-Reference annals in which the cyclist never did get to hang out at first base.

5/26/64: Jim King, White Sox — out trying to stretch a single into a double

8/9/76: Cesar Cedeno, Astros — singled, landed on third on an E-9

5/15/91: Paul Molitor, Brewers — singled, went to second on a throw

8/14/03: Travis Hafner, Cleveland — singled, went to second on an E-1

Strangest But Truest way to complete a cycle ever!

Miguel Cabrera, doing something he'd never done before in 20 seasons in the big leagues: Stealing third and scoring on an E-2.

I don't know why I did this. But for some absurd reason, I decided I had to know if this was Miggy's first SB-E-2 ever. Turns out, after far too much research, I found he had another one as a Tiger 10 years ago.

May 31, 2012: Steals second, trots to third on an error by **Jarrod Saltalamacchia**. And I'm glad he did, if only for allowing me to spell out Saltalamacchia again!

STRANGE BUT TRUE STUFF I LOVED THIS WEEK – I promise I'm not making any of this up:

The Mets celebrated the Fourth of July by winning 7-4 on 7/4!

The Orioles gave up a game-tying or go-ahead homer in the seventh, eighth and ninth innings of their July 5 game against the Rangers — and won anyway! How many teams had ever done that before? Not a one, according to STATS.

Patrick Wisdom had a Strange But True box-score classic Sunday. He went 0 for 4 with four strikeouts and zero walks *but still scored a run*. (Yes, he got hit by a pitch!) H/T Doug "Kernels" Kern.

The White Sox walked zero times in Game 1 of their doubleheader Tuesday in Cleveland. So how did they start Game 2? With *a leadoff walk*, because of course they did. H/T Chris Kamka.

The Reds may have trouble winning normal games, but they just became the first team to win three games in which the opposing starter hit the 10-strikeout, zero-run daily double! They've won all three of those games this month – against **Gerrit Cole, Scherzer and Charlie Morton**. H/T Joel Luckhaupt.

The Yankees are 2-0 this season when their starting pitcher *gives up back-to-back-to-back homers*. They survived a **Luis Severino** trifecta Wednesday and a Cole three-peat on June 9, because *they're the freaking Yankees*. H/T James Smyth.

EXPLAINING BASEBALL'S NEXT EXPERIMENT TO LIMIT SHIFTS: THE PIE SLICE RULE

Jayson Stark in *The Athletic*

This just in. It's time for another shift — in how baseball plans to neutralize The Shift.

Starting July 22, in the rule-change lab known as the Florida State League, chalk lines will appear in the infield dirt behind second base, sources tell *The Athletic*. Those lines will be shaped like a slice of pie. Not to make everybody run for the concession stands. For a much more nourishing purpose:

To bring back a once-beloved, but fast-fading, relic of baseball's past: The good old single up the middle.

Following this? Of course not. So let's explain.

As you might have heard, the powers that be at Major League Baseball are looking seriously at limiting defensive shifts, possibly as soon as next year. So all season, in the minor leagues up through Double A, teams have had to play under two major shift restrictions:

- 1) No more infielders hanging out on the outfield grass, sneakily stealing all sorts of hits.
- 2) Two infielders must be positioned on each side of second base. So left-handed hitters no longer come to the plate and find three infielders — or half the population of Missouri — on the right side.

But Tuesday, sources said, all MLB 30 teams were informed that, in the Florida State League (Low-A level), they're about to go even further. By which we mean ...

Pie, anyone?

In an attempt to create more space in the middle of the field, baseball is about to draw a giant, pie-slice-shaped chalk line in the infield dirt. It will run diagonally in each direction, from the far tip of the second-base bag to the edge of the outfield grass where shortstops and second basemen traditionally stand.

I know it's hard to envision. So we're here to help. It will look like this.

Now understand what this means for how middle infielders play defense. At the moment, even with the two-on-each-side minor-league shift restrictions, the shortstop or second baseman still

can play hitters up the middle by standing almost directly behind the bag, while playing as deep as they want. Under the “pie-slice rule,” that changes dramatically.

The pie slice allows infielders to set up right next to second base so they can hold runners and more easily get to the bag to field throws. But if they want to station themselves up the middle for defensive-positioning purposes, the rule forces them to play 20 feet or so shallower than many of them play now. And why is that? Because the deeper they position themselves, the farther they’re pushed to the left or right of the bag by the chalk line.

If they violate the rule by playing inside the chalk lines, the team at bat gets to choose one of the following: the outcome of the pitch, the outcome of the play or an automatic ball. It’s kind of like a baseball offside call.

Or think of it as baseball’s version of the neutral zone in football ... or the restricted area in basketball, the small area under the basket where defenders cannot draw a charging foul on an offensive player. Those sports limit how teams can play defense in those areas. Now baseball will experiment with the same concept.

But we know what you’re thinking. So let’s explain ...

Why baseball is doing this

We foreshadowed this idea in an article about The Shift in February. In that story, we quoted the commissioner, Rob Manfred, as saying he doesn’t view limiting the shift as a “change.” He views it as a “restoration” of how the game used to be played.

What the commissioner said he misses — and every hitter on Earth misses way more than him — is the old-fashioned ground-ball single up the middle. Fifty years ago, when **Pete Rose** hit a hard three-hopper ball up the middle, no infielders were standing there. These days, when **Pete Alonso** strokes that same groundball up the middle, there is almost always somebody waiting to slurp it up and make him wonder why he didn’t just sell out and try to pull a rocket off the foul pole.

So the original concept behind requiring two infielders to stand on each side of second base was to open up that area (and others). But after a half-season of minor-league experimentation, it’s pretty clear that’s not happening.

Why not? Because that shortstop who used to defend a left-handed hitter by setting up on the right side of second base could still position himself 3 inches to the left of second base. So that part of baseball’s shift-curtailing efforts was having little impact.

But wait. We also foreshadowed that back in February.

The data for this season is incomplete. But here is what happened in the minor leagues last season, in leagues that required two infielders to set up on each side of the bag in the second half:

Percentage of groundballs/bunts turned into outs:

2021 (first half *): 70.2 percent

2021 (second half **): 70.8 percent

(-only shift limit: no infielders set up in outfield)*

*(**-added shift limit: two infielders on each side of 2B)*

In other words, that two-on-each-side rule had virtually no impact. So what was the potential solution? Simple. Could that sweet aroma you're smelling be ...

A slice of pie

In our February shifts story, the definitive explanation for why baseball is doing this came from former major-league infielder **Morgan Ensberg**, who is now a Double-A manager in the Rays organization.

He'd spent the last few months watching what happened when teams stationed two infielders on each side of second base. Was he seeing more singles up the middle — or many more ground-ball singles, period? Nope. Never happened.

Why? Because defensive positioning these days is so precise. So teams still could station the second baseman in the spot where left-handed hitters hit most of their groundballs. Then the shortstop still could stand so close to second base that he was in position to gobble up most groundballs in the middle of the field. (For right-handed hitters, reverse that.)

So to create more singles up the middle, Ensberg told *The Athletic*, "you'd have to do more than just say, 'Two infielders on each side.' You'd actually have to say the second baseman and shortstop can't be within 10 or 15 feet of the bag. It would have to be like a pie slice up the middle somehow, where no infielders are allowed."

Voila! By remarkable coincidence (or not), here comes that pie slice later this month — with baseball officials studying it *very* closely. After all, they're now in crunch time for deciding ...

What kind of shift limits are coming to the big leagues?

We can't say for certain that shift limits will arrive in a major-league park near you in 2023. But the "when" part of this doesn't even feel like the most pivotal question anymore. This feels so inevitable that the most interesting question isn't "when" this sport will impose a limit on shifts. It's "how."

And that job will fall into the laps of baseball's new competition committee — which for the first time, thanks to the March labor agreement, includes active players and an active umpire. Here are the members of that new committee, according to sources:

Players: **Whit Merrifield** (Royals), **Jack Flaherty** (Cardinals), **Tyler Glasnow** (Rays), **Austin Slater** (Giants). **Alternates:** **Walker Buehler** (Dodgers), **Ian Happ** (Cubs).

Umpire: Bill Miller.

Executives: Bill DeWitt Jr. (Cardinals), Mark Shapiro (Blue Jays), John Stanton (Mariners), Tom Werner (Red Sox), Dick Monfort (Rockies), Greg Johnson (Giants).

That committee has already met twice in recent weeks, sources say. And shift restrictions are high on its list of rule changes under intensive study.

On one hand, this is the first time one of these committees has included active players in the discussion of where the sport goes from here. On the other hand, as those close to the MLB Players Association routinely point out, those active players are still outnumbered by MLB executives.

So players don't have the power, in and of themselves, to push baseball in the direction they want it to go. But they do have a seat at the table, and MLB officials have said for weeks there's a reason for that:

They want player buy-in on this change and any others. And Manfred has continued to say he prefers to shy away from implementing any change unilaterally, even though the new collective bargaining agreement gives him the authority to do that, 45 days after MLB formally makes a proposal.

So where does this go from here? It could follow several different paths.

A) Baseball, and the competition committee, will watch the Florida State League closely in the second half. They'll be looking to see if the pie-slice concept makes an impact. They'll also want to make sure it doesn't lead to any counterproductive unintended consequences.

B) The competition committee then could recommend expanding the experiment to other minor leagues, abandoning it completely or even bringing it to the big leagues.

C) Based on that recommendation, MLB could make a formal shift-limit proposal to the union in the offseason, with the understanding that the 45-day rule could allow that change to arrive in the major leagues as soon as next season. Or MLB could decide to buy more time for additional study and experiments.

D) If there is a formal proposal, MLB would have to negotiate any rules changes with the Players Association. But both sides would be aware that the 45-day rule applies a time sensitivity — and significant leverage — that didn't exist in the past.

It is way too soon to know how any of this will turn out. But there appears to be so much acceptance — from many players and from the commissioner's office, of the idea that some sort of shift limitation is worth a try — that everyone in the game can feel it coming. We just don't know when ...

Or whether it will be served with a slice of pie.

At the 1999 All-Star Game, Fenway Park was the center of the baseball universe, and other thoughts

By Dan Shaughnessy, Boston Globe

The baseball All-Star Game is Tuesday at venerable Dodger Stadium, and five days later the family of baseball will gather in Cooperstown for the first "normal" Hall of Fame induction ceremony in three years. Red Sox Nation can't wait for the enshrinement of David Ortiz.

It'll be good to take our eyes off the 2022 Sox for a few days to celebrate the sport and gods of the game.

All of which reminds me of 1999, when Fenway Park was the center of the hardball universe and we enjoyed perhaps the best baseball weekend in 120 years of taking ourselves out to the ballgame.

It was **Ted Williams's** final visit to Boston. It was **Pedro Martinez** summoning the stuff of **Carl Hubbell**. It was 29-year-old **Ken Griffey Jr.** beating not-yet-tainted **Mark McGwire** in the greatest Home Run Derby of them all.

And it was without doubt the greatest collection of baseball talent ever assembled on any diamond as 31 players nominated for MLB's All-Century Team joined the 1999 American and National League All-Stars on the Fenway lawn, surrounding Williams before and after he threw a ceremonial first pitch to **Carlton Fisk**.

The Home Run Derby was wildly popular at this time. McGwire had hit 70 bombs in '98 and was credited with "saving baseball" after a strike canceled the World Series in 1994. McGwire's showdown with **Sammy Sosa** at Fenway was perhaps a tougher ticket than the All-Star Game.

Globe Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Stan Grossfeld was denied a press credential for the '99 Derby. The stodgy Sox were unhappy with publication of a (discreet) photo of catcher **Scott Hatteberg** relieving himself at the infamous dugout runway trough just a few feet from the Red Sox bench (Hatteberg loved the photo and requested a copy for his home bar). Lacking a credential, Grossfeld received a permit from Mayor Menino for a hydraulic cherry picker lift on Lansdowne Street. As the Derby started, our man Stan rose, Lazarus-like, from the far side of the Green Monster, camera in hand, and got the best photos of the event. His best one appeared on page 1 on July 13, 1999.

McGwire had an epic first round, but the Derby was won by Griffey, and one of Griff's home run balls was caught in the right field seats by Berj Najarian, a young Boston University grad who was then a member of the New York Jets public relations department. One year after the Derby, Bill Belichick brought Najarian to New England and Berj has served as Belichick's consigliere for 21 seasons.

Game day did not disappoint.

Williams was engulfed by dozens of legends, including **Stan Musial, Willie Mays, Bob Feller, Hank Aaron, and Bob Gibson**, as he sat in a golf cart near the Fenway mound. None of them wanted to leave. As the moment lingered, I noticed nervous television types scurrying around, talking into their radios, then we heard the PA announcer say something to the effect of, "Would the greatest players of all time please clear the field?"

That means you, Bob Gibson!

Williams was finally taken to Box L-22 upstairs on the third base side, where he entertained guests throughout the night. Ted particularly wanted to meet the young pilots who'd buzzed Fenway's light towers with a daredevil pregame flyover. The boys broke some Back Bay windows in their zeal to impress Ted, but all agreed it was worth it.

Matt Damon visited Ted during the game, bringing his dad, the late Kent Damon, who was a longtime baseball coach at Newton North High. When Matt told Ted he'd read Williams's book, "The Science of Hitting," Ted challenged the young actor and asked, "What's the most important message in that book?"

"Get a good pitch to hit," answered Damon.

Correct, young man.

There was an actual game, a 4-1 American League victory, but about the only thing anyone remembers is MVP Pedro, who was at the height of his powers in '99, striking out five of the six hitters he faced — three Hall of Famers (**Barry Larkin, Larry Walker, Jeff Bagwell**) plus McGwire and Sosa, two guys who combined to hit 1,192 big league homers.

The losing pitcher was Phillies righthander **Curt Schilling**.

Not quite sure whatever happened to that nice young man, but I think I recall him doing some special things five years later at Fenway.

Major League Baseball agrees to pay minor leaguers \$185 million to settle federal suit

By Michael Silverman

Minor league players just scored a major financial victory over Major League Baseball.

MLB will have to pay a \$185 million penalty to minor-leaguers to settle a lawsuit alleging back wages and hourly pay violations, according to the preliminary settlement agreement of a class action suit filed Friday in federal district court in San Francisco.

Also in the agreement is a stipulation that MLB must direct all 30 clubs to rescind all current contractual prohibitions from paying minor-leaguers all 12 months of the year and that each club must be in compliance with labor laws (minimum wage, overtime).

The case, Senne vs. MLB, has been winding its way through the judicial system, including the US Supreme Court.

In the plaintiffs' motion for preliminary approval of the settlement, they wrote: "In short, there is no way to characterize this result as anything less than outstanding."

The court wrote that the monetary relief "strongly favors preliminary approval," describing the penalty as "a very respectable amount given the number of novel issues and complexities of this case, as well as potential issues for appeal that remain."

An MLB spokesperson e-mailed this: "We are only in the second year of a major overhaul of the 100-year-old player development system and have made great strides to improve the quality of life for minor league players. We are proud that minor league players already receive significant benefits, including free housing, quality health care, multiple meals per day, college tuition assistance for those who wish to continue their education, and over \$450 million in annual signing bonuses for first-year players.

"We are pleased we were able to come to a mutually agreeable resolution but are unable to comment on the details until the agreement is formally approved by the Court."

Final settlement of the case could take months.

In a statement, Garrett R. Broshuis, co-counsel for the plaintiffs, said, “This settlement is a monumental step for minor league players toward a fair and just compensation system. As a former minor league baseball player, I’ve seen first-hand the financial struggle players face while earning poverty-level wages – or no wages at all – in pursuit of their major league dream. For the better part of a decade, it has been my honor to help lead this fight and to shine a light on the unfair labor practices that have long plagued America’s pastime.”

In a March summary judgment, Supreme Court Chief Magistrate Judge Joseph Spero of the US District Court in the Northern District of California agreed with the minor league players’ claim that they are year-round MLB employees, which makes them eligible to be paid according to state and federal labor laws and practices as they mainly pertain to overtime and minimum wages in California, Arizona and Florida.

That ruling contained just one specific dollar-amount penalty: \$1.88 million for failure to comply with California labor laws.

Spero’s ruling cleared the way for a jury trial beginning in June but on May 10 the sides reached a settlement.

The development is only the latest of what amounts to a flurry of changes to the minor league landscape over the last few years, including news from the fall of 2019 that MLB wished to contract and restructure the minor leagues so they would be run by MLB. That wish came true in February of 2021, after MLB announced wage increases across the minor leagues.

Many, not all, teams have taken steps to improve living conditions for their young talent pool, especially during spring training.

This is the first season that MLB is requiring teams to provide housing for its minor-leaguers. Efforts to unionize the minor-leaguers are ongoing, but they are not members of the Major League Baseball Players Association.

This summer, after the US Senate Judiciary Committee said it would look into MLB’s 100-year-old antitrust exemption, the Advocates for Minor Leaguers organization asked for its members to be protected from the exemption with a “Minor League Curt Flood Act” that would strengthen minor leaguers’ leverage and improve working conditions.

In a 2016 federal spending bill, the “Save America’s Pastime Act” was passed with the support of both MLB and Minor League Baseball. The act allowed MLB teams to be insulated from minimum wage and overtime provisions in the Fair Labor Standards Act skirt paying overtime to their minor-leaguers.

THIS WEEK’S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Lou Gehrig's consecutive games streak ended in 1939 at 2130 games. Cal Ripken Jr. broke the record with 2632, his streak ended in 1998.

You need to name the next three longest post-Gehrig streaks?

An NL righty hitter infielder 1975-1983, 1207 games (won an MVP, played in 4 World Series)

STEVE GARVEY

An AL righty hitter infielder 2000-2007, 1152 games (won an MVP)

MIGUEL TEJADA

Lefty hitting outfielder 1963-1970, 1117 games (won a rookie of the year, 1987 elected to HOF)

BILLY WILLIAMS

HOUSEKEEPING

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