

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

7.24.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

In between a week of house packing came upon a number of interesting items and subscriber contributions.

The usual odd stuff, a contract negotiation story, exit velocity, stats vs. the baseball, the draft, a nice tribute to **Tim Kurkjian**, **Buck O'Neil** and trivia.

A subscriber asked about where I find content so I am going to add a resources list at the end starting next week. What are your favorite sources of interesting baseball stuff? Please shoot me an email. Thanks.

Re-fill your coffee and enjoy.

### **THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE**

**Ron LeFlore, Ty Cobb, Omar Moreno and Tim Lincecum** all stole between 90 and 99 bases in a season. None of them stole 100 or more. Name the four players who did steal 100 or more bases in a season. They all did it between 1962 and 1987.

### **MISCELLANEOUS STUFF**

Four Yankees players to hit 30 or more home runs before the All-Star break--  
**Babe Ruth (1921, '28 and '30), Roger Maris (1961), Alex Rodriguez (2007) and Aaron Judge (2017 and '22).**

Yankees +199 run differential is second most at all-star break all time. First was 1939 Yankees at +217.

Mariners entering the All-Star break on a 14-game winning streak.

Only three teams previously had gone into the All-Star break with an active double-digit winning streak: the 1935 Detroit Tigers (10), the 1945 Chicago Cubs (10) and the 1975

Cincinnati Reds (10), according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Each of those teams went on to win the pennant that season, with the Tigers and Reds winning the World Series.

the Mariners are 22-3 in their last 25 games and 30-14 since a rough month of May in which they went 10-18.

With a 13-2 rout of the Red Sox on Sunday afternoon, the Yankees steamed into the break with 64 wins, establishing a new club record for victories before the Midsummer Classic.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the Yanks are the sixth Major League team since 1947 to win at least 64 of their first 92 games, joining the 1954 Indians (64-28), 1969 Orioles (64-28), 1970 Reds (64-28), 1998 Yankees (68-24) and 2001 Mariners (66-26). Only one of those clubs -- the '98 Yanks -- hoisted the World Series trophy at the year's end.

No members of the Hall of Fame were born in Nevada.

**Ryan Helsley** of the Cards, one of the hardest throwers in baseball, became the second pitcher in the pitch-tracking era to reach 103 miles per hour in the All-Star Game in the AL's 3-2 win Tuesday night at Dodger Stadium. And he did it twice, getting a called strike and a foul ball from Minnesota's **Luis Arraez** on a pair of pitches tracked at 103.0 mph. All told, Helsley hit 100.0 or higher eight times in 17 pitches.

**Aroldis Chapman** is the only other pitcher tracked at 103 in an All-Star Game, hitting that number four times in the 2015 game. He still holds the record for the highest velocity in the Midsummer Classic at 103.4.

**Jose Ramirez** of the Guardians had his second multi-hit All Star game. **Willie Mays** is the all-time leader at 6.

Clayton Kershaw is the second Dodgers pitcher to start an All-Star Game in their home park. The first was **Don Drysdale** (1959 All-Star Game at the L.A. Memorial Coliseum)

**Giancarlo Stanton** is only the third Yankee to win all-star game MVP. **Derek Jeter in 2000 and Mariano Rivera 2013.**

**Giancarlo Stanton** was just the 11th Yankee to homer in an All-Star Game. **Babe Ruth** hit the first in 1933. Before Stanton, who had hit the most recent one—**Aaron Judge** hit a homer off **Max Scherzer**, then of the Nationals, in the second inning of the 2018 All-Star Game in Washington, D.C. Judge's drive was caught in the left-field bullpen by Yankees teammate **Luis Severino**.

**Juan Soto** is the second-youngest player to win the Home Run Derby -- one day older than **Juan González** was (23 years, 265 days) when he won in 1993.

Soto is the second Nationals star to win the Home Run Derby in the last five years, joining **Bryce Harper**, who took home the honor in 2018 in front of the home crowd at Nationals Park. Both Nats champions won the Derby in walk-off fashion by the exact same score, 19-18.

The 23-year-old superstar also became the sixth Dominican-born player to win the Derby, joining **Sammy Sosa (2000)**, **Miguel Tejada (2004)**, **Vladimir Guerrero Sr. (2007)**, **David Ortiz (2010)** and **Robinson Canó (2011)**. While Soto took home the trophy, three of the four semifinalists (**Albert Pujols**, Rodríguez and Soto) were born in the Dominican Republic.

Aaron Judge has 8 multi-HRs this season. With 36 Judge is on pace for 61 homers, which would equal **Roger Maris'** 1961 total -- still standing as an American League record. No Major Leaguer has hit 60 homers in a season since **Barry Bonds** hit 73 and **Sammy Sosa** hit 64 in 2001. Judge homered Friday off the Oriole's 6'8" **Tyler Wells**, the only player taller than Judge in MLB.

**Julio Rodríguez**, the Mariners' 21-year-old rookie sensation electrified Dodger Stadium by opening with a historic first round. Mashing 32 homers to begin the evening, Rodríguez set a record for most home runs by a rookie in the opening round of a Derby. In fact, his 32 first-round homers to defeat Rangers shortstop **Corey Seager** (who had 24) were the most by a rookie in any round that has not included a swing-off.

At 21 years and 201 days, Rodríguez became the third youngest Derby participant to reach the finals.

The thrilling first-round effort featured a booming 463-foot homer well up the left-field pavilion to lead it off, and nine home runs of at least 440 feet. In total, Rodríguez's first 32 home runs traveled a combined 2.54 miles, by far the largest total distance of any competitor in the opening round.

Before falling to fellow Dominican countryman Juan Soto of the Nationals in the final round, Rodríguez took it to the two-time defending champion, **Pete Alonso**, eliminating the Mets slugger with relative ease, 31-23, in the semifinals.

Entering the night, there had been a total of four 30-homer rounds in the event's history. Amassing 32 in the first round and 31 in the second, Rodríguez became the first player with two such rounds in a single Derby.

his bid to join **Ken Griffey Jr.** as only the second Mariners player to hoist the Derby trophy came up short -- Rodríguez hit 18 homers in the finals before Soto swatted 19 to win it.

**Most home runs in Home Run Derby history**

**Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (2019), 91**

**Julio Rodríguez (2022), 81**

**Pete Alonso (2021), 74**

**Giancarlo Stanton (2016), 61**

**Joc Pederson (2019), 60**

**Alfonso Soriano** homered twice over the Green Monster at Fenway Park to lead the World team to a 7-0 win in the first-ever Futures Game in 1999. The right-handed slugger went on to hit 412 career homers over 16 Major League seasons with the Yankees, Rangers, Nationals and Cubs.

With rumors swirling that the Nationals will trade Juan Soto, there are not many comps where a young superstar was traded so young. The Marlins' trade of Miguel Cabrera to the Tigers following his age-24 season in 2007 might be the closest comp. In that one, Detroit made out extraordinarily well by acquiring Cabrera and Dontrelle Willis for a six-prospect package headlined by outfielder Cameron Maybin and lefty Andrew Miller. Those two both went on to have success during lengthy MLB careers, but Cabrera was a franchise-changing addition for the Tigers, who signed him to an extension and still have him on the roster almost 15 years later.

Rough night Friday for the Red Sox as Toronto hit a franchise record for runs with a 28-5 win. For the Red Sox, 28 runs is the most ever allowed in a game. At one point, the game neared the biggest win margin in MLB history for a single game (27) and came three runs short of the highest score in a game (30), both from a 30-3 Texas Rangers win over the Baltimore Orioles in 2007.

The rout included **Raimel Tapia** hitting a rare inside the park grand slam for the Jays.

Every Blue Jays hitter in the starting lineup got at least two hits in the effort; **Lourdes Gurriel Jr.** led the way with six, putting up five RBIs. **Matt Chapman**, Tapia — who had seven at-bats — and **Teoscar Hernández** notched home runs.

Red Sox starter **Nathan Eovaldi** yielded nine earned runs in 2 2/3 innings pitched. **Austin Davis** gave up five in 1 1/3 innings, **Kaleb Ort** gave up eight in 2/3 of an inning, **Darwinzon Hernandez** allowed five in 1 1/3 innings and infielder **Yolmer Sánchez** allowed one more in the ninth inning.

**John Lackey** won World Series rings with the Angels, Red Sox, and Cubs and was 8-6 with a 3.44 earned run average in 29 playoff appearances.

**Shohei Ohtani** was the first All-Star picked off since 2008, when **Milton Bradley** was caught by **Carlos Zambrano**. **Clayton Kershaw** said he lobbed the ball to first as a delaying tactic because he wasn't sure what pitch he wanted to throw to **Aaron Judge**.

### **A GREAT DEBATE**

Joe Posnanski describes two versions of a great story of negotiation.

Was it:

In 1952, Pittsburgh's **Ralph Kiner** led the league in home runs for the seventh straight year. Six of those seven Pirate teams were pretty terrible, but that '52 group was particularly bad — going 42-112-1 and finishing last by more than 20 games.

After the season, Kiner met with the Pirates team president, the legendary **Branch Rickey**, to discuss contract terms for the 1953 season. Kiner wanted a raise. Rickey, instead, offered to cut his pay by 25 percent.

"Why do I get a cut?" Kiner asked. "I led the league in home runs."

"Son," Rickey said, "we could have finished last without you."

Or was it:

In early July 1951, **Bill Veeck** became owner of the St. Louis Browns. It was, in so many ways, the perfect match. The Browns were atrocious and had no following and needed something. And Veeck was a circus barker in search of a circus.

the story of **Ned Garver**.

By all accounts, Garver was pretty much the only thing the 1951 Browns had going for them. Garver was a 25-year-old pitcher with a good slider and the grave misfortune of playing for the Browns. From 1948 to 1950, he had a 131 ERA+ — third best in the American League over that span — but he went 32-46 because he was playing for such a lousy team. He was often called the hardest luck pitcher in baseball.

Well, in 1951, for some reason, Garver's luck turned. He started the season 12-4. This was in part because he pitched well (in July, he pitched four consecutive complete games in which he allowed just one run), and, in part, because he caught some breaks (on May 14, he gave up 10 runs against Detroit but got the victory anyway).

Veeck jumped right on it. He started to make a big deal about how Garver had a chance to become the first pitcher in many years — going all the way back to the Chicago White Sox's beautifully nicknamed **Hollis "Sloppy" Thurston** in 1924 — to win 20 games for a last-place team.

You might see a little foreshadowing here.

No, the concept of a last-place pitcher winning 20 games might not sound like a promoter's dream ... but Veeck had done more with less. He started talking about it to the sportswriters he loved so much: "Wouldn't it be something if Ned Garver could win 20 for *this* team?" And they started mentioning it in their stories.

It did not look like Garver would get there, though — he had a dry August and didn't start September too well, either, and on Sept. 6 was only 15-11 with, at most, six starts remaining.

But he beat Cleveland on Sept. 7 by allowing one earned run in nine innings. And on Sept. 18, he pitched 10 innings against Washington, held the Senators to two runs, and won his 17th game.

No. 18 came in Chicago, a seven-inning, one-run game. He repeated the feat on Sept. 22 against Detroit and won his 19th game.

And so it came down to the final day of the season, Ned Garver and the Browns vs. the Chicago White Sox for Garver's 20th win!

Veeck decided to turn it into a party.

If you wanted to do a Bill Veeck movie — and, hello, how has this not happened yet? — you could start with that game. Veeck set it up so that before the game, his Browns would play an outdoor basketball game against the Harlem Globetrotters. They built a basketball court along the third-base line.

But it gets better than that. He hired a couple of basketball ringers to join the Browns, one of them being the great **Tony Lavelli**, who had been an All-America basketball player at Yale and had played for the Celtics and Knicks in the early days of the NBA.

The Globetrotters won the game 29-17, but as soon as it was over, Lavelli put on a suit and played the accordion for the fans. He was a virtuoso accordionist.

And then Garver came out to pitch. Numerous papers around the country had written about his quest to win 20 — one of the writers who did was Des Moines sports columnist Bill Bryson, who is the father of bestselling author Bill Bryson, who just happens to be one of my favorite writers. Round and round it goes.

Almost 15,000 people came out to the ballpark, which might not sound like a lot, but it was the third-largest crowd of the season for the Browns. Garver wasn't especially sharp on the mound, but his Browns were inspired — and he hit a home run himself — and St. Louis won 9-5. That gave Ned Garver 20 victories.

Three wild things happened after that. One, an absurd rumor began that Veeck was going to trade Garver to Boston for **Ted Williams**. Veeck's response was priceless.

"I wouldn't consider that close to an even deal," Veeck said. "Besides, with that short left-field wall they have there in Boston, Garver might hit more home runs than Williams."

Second, Garver finished second in the MVP balloting, just a few points behind Yogi Berra. It seems astonishing and absurd that a 20-game winner on the worst team in the league would almost win the MVP award, but Veeck's cajoling of sportswriters had an impact (by Baseball-Reference WAR, Garver was actually more valuable than Berra that year).

And third — you were waiting for this, I'm sure — Ned Garver met with Veeck during the offseason to negotiate his 1952 contract.

And, finally we get to the moment: After the season, Garver approached Veeck and asked for a sizeable raise. I mean, of course, he did.

And Bill Veeck said: "We could have finished last without you."

### **DRAFTING THE FAMILY TREE**

When the Orioles and D-backs took **Jackson Holliday** -- the son of Matt Holliday -- and **Druw Jones** -- the son of **Andruw Jones** -- with the first two picks on Sunday, it marked the first time in MLB Draft history that two sons of former Major Leaguers went 1-2. But they were far from the only players taken with a famous relative.

Here's a look at the 2022 draftees with legacies in baseball or elsewhere, in order of when they were selected, through Day 1.

**Player: Jackson Holliday**, SS, Stillwater (Okla.) HS (No. 2 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 1 overall, Orioles

**Relative: Matt Holliday** (father, 15 MLB seasons)

Jackson's dad, Matt, was a seven-time All-Star, the 2007 NL batting champion, the MVP of the '07 NL Championship Series for the Rockies, and won a World Series ring with the Cardinals in '11. He belted 316 homers over a 15-year MLB career and has not just one son, but two -- Jackson's younger brother, Ethan, is one of the elite high school prospects in the nation -- rising toward the professional baseball ranks.

**Druw Jones**, OF, Wesleyan (Ga.) HS (No. 1 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 2 overall, D-backs

**Relative: Andruw Jones** (father, 17 MLB seasons)

His father was a 10-time Gold Glove Award winner in center field and hit 434 home runs over a stellar 17-year Major League career. And Druw has the talent to potentially give his dad a run for his money when it's all said and done, with tremendous power from the right side of the plate and great defensive instincts in center field.

**Player: Kumar Rocker**, RHP, No School (No. 38 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 3 overall, Rangers

**Relative: Tracy Rocker** (father, NFL player)

Kumar gets his athleticism from dad Tracy, who is in the College Football Hall of Fame and

played two NFL seasons before settling into a coaching career. He currently serves as the Philadelphia Eagles' defensive line coach.

**Player: Elijah Green**, OF, IMG Academy (No. 3 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 5 overall, Nationals

**Relative: Eric Green** (father, NFL player)

This year's Draft is filled with the sons of former MLB All-Stars, but Elijah's father Eric was a standout in another sport. The elder Green played a decade in the NFL as a tight end. He made two Pro Bowls as a member of the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1993 and '94 and he was named to the 1990 All-Rookie team.

**Player: Jacob Berry**, 3B/OF, LSU (No. 7 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 6 overall, Marlins

**Relative: Perry Berry** (father, 4 MiLB seasons)

Perry, an infielder out of Louisiana at Lafayette, was taken in the fourth round of the 1990 Draft by the Astros and spent four seasons in their system.

**Player: Brooks Lee**, SS, Cal Poly (No. 5 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 8 overall, Twins

**Relatives: Larry Lee** (father, Cal Poly head coach); **Terry and Mike Lee** (uncles); **Tom Lee** (grandfather, Cal Poly HoF coach)

Baseball is a generational love for the Lee family. Brooks played for his father, Larry, who has been Cal Poly baseball's head coach since 2003. Uncle Terry was a first-round Draft pick of the Giants in 1974 and also played in the Brewers' system. Uncle Mike was a Giants Minor Leaguer from 1974-75.

**Player: Gavin Cross**, OF, Virginia Tech (No. 10 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 9 overall, Royals

**Relative: Adam Cross** (father, 3 MiLB seasons)

Adam Cross spent his brief career as an infielder with the Braves and Padres, though he never rose past A-ball.

**Player: Gabe Hughes**, RHP, Gonzaga (No. 26 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 10 overall, Rockies

**Relative: Donald Hughes** (grandfather, 3 MiLB seasons)

Donald played in the Cubs and Tigers systems from 1960-62, before Major League Baseball had even instituted the Amateur Draft.

**Player: Justin Crawford**, OF, Bishop Gorman (Nev.) HS (No. 13 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 17 overall, Phillies

**Relative: Carl Crawford** (father, 15 MLB seasons)

Justin's dad, Carl, made four All-Star teams -- winning the 2009 All-Star Game MVP Award -- and led the AL in steals four times during nine seasons with Tampa Bay. Like his dad, Justin is an athletic outfielder and left-handed hitter with plus-plus speed.

**Player:** Cam Collier, 3B, Chipola (Fla.) College (No. 8 prospect)

**Drafted:** No. 18 overall, Reds

**Relative:** Lou Collier (father, 8 MLB seasons / Royals pro scout)

While Lou never got much playing time -- he appeared in 315 games over his eight seasons -- he's found more success in retirement, currently working as a Royals scout.

**Player:** Daniel Susac, C, Arizona (No. 12 prospect)

**Drafted:** A's, No. 19 overall

**Relative:** Andrew Susac (brother, 6 MLB seasons)

Andrew Susac was drafted by the Giants in the second round of the 2011 MLB Draft. Also a catcher, Andrew served as Buster Posey's backup during the Giants' 2014 World Series run.

**Player:** Robert Moore, 2B, Arkansas (No. 108 prospect)

**Drafted:** Round CB-B (No. 72 overall), Brewers

**Relative:** Dayton Moore (father, Royals president of baseball operations)

Dayton Moore has been at the helm in Kansas City since 2006, when his son was just 4 years old. Sixteen years, two American League pennants and a World Series championship later, Robert is preparing to build his own legacy in professional baseball.

To picks

**2015:** Dansby Swanson, SS, D-backs

**2012:** Carlos Correa, SS, Astros

**2011:** Gerrit Cole, RHP, Pirates

**2010:** Bryce Harper, OF, Nationals

**2009:** Stephen Strasburg, RHP, Nationals

**2007:** David Price, LHP, Rays

**2005:** Justin Upton, SS, D-backs

**2001:** Joe Mauer, C, Twins

**2000:** Adrián González, 1B, Marlins

**1999:** Josh Hamilton, OF, Rays

**1997:** Matt Anderson, RHP, Tigers

**2002:** Bryan Bullington, RHP, Pirates

**2004:** Matt Bush, SS, Padres

**2006:** Luke Hochevar, RHP, Royals

**2008:** Tim Beckham, SS, Rays

**2013:** Mark Appel, RHP, Astros

**2014:** Brady Aiken, LHP, Astros

**2016:** Mickey Moniak, OF, Phillies

**2017:** Royce Lewis, SS, Twins

**2018:** Casey Mize, RHP, Tigers

Even going back further. For every **ARod** there is a **Paul Wilson**. For every **Chipper Jones** a **Brien Taylor**. For every **Ken Griffey Jr** a **Shawn Abner**.

**1980: Darryl Strawberry, OF, Mets**

**1978: Bob Horner, 3B, Braves**

**1977: Harold Baines, 1B, White Sox**

**1969: Jeff Burroughs, OF, Senators**

**1965: Rick Monday, A's**

### **AUTOMATIC INTENTIONAL WALK**

**Joe Posnanski always has an opinion**

In many ways, I suspect that this failure to update the television baseball experience in any meaningful way speaks to baseball's difficulty in engaging new fans. How do you update a venerable game like baseball, considering that one of its most stubborn and beloved charms is that it's the game that DOESN'T change?\*

*\*You might remember that recently MLB eliminated the four-pitch intentional walk. That was, like, a huge change for baseball. The new automatic walk has been around now for five years, believe it or not, and it's so utterly minor (pitchers used to have to throw the four pitches to walk someone intentionally, now the manager just points to first base) that I imagine most people have never given it a second thought, and why should they? It's nothing.*

*But — I'm thoroughly embarrassed to admit this, though it's simply a fact — every single time a manager points to first base, I am reminded how much I hate this change. I try not to be some yelling-at-clouds baseball traditionalist; I'm actually very open to radical changes to the game including Joe Sheehan's suggestion to make the games seven innings long (more on this soon). At least that's what I tell myself. But then I see something as trifling as the elimination of four pointless pitches to intentionally walk someone, and think: Eh, the game is worse without those pitches. The continuity of the game is broken. The fans don't get a chance to boo. You don't get*

*a few seconds to fully appreciate the magnitude of what's happening. It breaks from the history of baseball. It removes the once-in-a-decade thrill of seeing someone reach out, Kelly Leak style, and hit an intentional ball.*

*The big idea was to save time ... but how much time does this really save? And whatever time it DOES save ... does it make the game more fun? More interesting? No. Again, I'm embarrassed by how much I care about this, but I'm hoping that the new pitcher's clock speeds up the game to the point where they bring back the intentional walk.*

All time born in Puerto Rico team

1. Roberto Alomar\*, 2B
2. Carlos Beltran, CF
3. Roberto Clemente\*, RF
4. Orlando Cepeda\*, 1B
5. Carlos Correa, SS
6. Carlos Delgado, DH
7. Ivan Rodriguez\*, C
8. Jose Cruz, LF
9. Jose Valentin, 3B

There's absurd depth here too — **Francisco Lindor** is your backup shortstop, **Bernie Williams** your backup centerfielder, **Yadi Molina, Jorge Posada and Benito Santiago** your backup catchers, **Juan Gonzalez** your backup DH — it's nutty.

Pitching? Not so good.

### **THE FIRST ALL STAR GAME IN LOS ANGELES 1959**

Dan Holmes in [baseballegg.com](http://baseballegg.com)

The only reason **Los Angeles** got to host its first **MLB All-Star Game** back in 1959 was what the *Chicago Tribune* called the "greed of selfish, shortsighted, spoiled ballplayers."

Well, it wasn't completely untrue. But the full story illustrates how the economics of baseball were changing rapidly in the late 1950s, following the bold move by two of the game's most popular franchises to the west coast.

In 1959, an unexpected exhibition contest became the first All-Star Game played in California. It had two long-range consequences – it sparked a bidding war for national TV broadcasts of the national pastime, and it planted the seeds for the most powerful union in the United States.

This year, the Dodgers host the 2022 All-Star Game, the third time the franchise has lent its home ballpark to the contest, and the second time at Dodger Stadium. It's been more than four decades since Los Angeles has hosted the most enjoyable of professional sports All-Star games, and more than 60 years since LA was the site of an exhibition game that a lot of people felt was unnecessary.

### Why a Second All-Star Game?

In 1959, for the first time, MLB hosted two All-Star Games. Why?

It came down to money. The players had finally pushed hard enough to get the leagues to agree to a second mid-season exhibition to add money to an important cause: the players pension fund. However, that decision was met with disdain by many in media, which was firmly ensconced in the "management" camp at that time in history.

"Baseball players don't need another All-Star Game to sweeten their already sugary pension pot," wrote Jimmy Powers of the *New York Daily News*. A Los Angeles paper called the game "a greedy grab."

### Players Negotiated or the Game

Thanks to the leadership of pitcher **Robin Roberts**, infielder **Eddie Yost**, and soon-to-be batting champion **Harvey Kuenn**, the trio who represented the players in negotiations, the league agreed to add the game in Los Angeles. That decision was made only on July 8, less than a month before the scheduled Aug. 3 date for the second ASG.

Sixty percent of the proceeds from the LA game would go to the player pension fund, which Roberts explained would largely be used to pay money to "old-time" players who were in the league before 1947, had no retirement benefits, and were in dire need. At the time, former MLB players who qualified for pension funds could begin collecting at the age of 50. The league and the players had agreed to a 60/40 split of All-Star Game proceeds in 1954.

There was much controversy in the press at the time surrounding the game. Some of it stemmed from an apparent coverup by MLB Commissioner **Ford C. Frick**, who reportedly leaked that the 16 teams voted unanimously to support the idea. But other sources present at

the time claimed that the vote was 13-1 in favor, with two teams (reportedly the Tigers and White Sox) abstaining. The no vote was rumored to have been from Cleveland.

The Los Angeles Coliseum was strategically selected due to its capacity (more than 90,000 seats), which was felt could attract a giant crowd. Indeed, it did: 55,105 attended the 1959 game in LA, about 16,000 more than were on hand in Pittsburgh for the first game.

### A Must See Event

**Vin Scully**, who retired from his seat behind the microphone in 2016, was on hand at Los Angeles Coliseum for the first Midsummer Classic hosted by Los Angeles. The baritone redhead was only 31 years old.

“I can remember that the team [the Dodgers] didn’t know if they would sell any tickets for a second All-Star Game with players from teams [the American League] that fans in California had never seen,” Scully said years later.

Come out they did, and not only to see ballplayers. Fans witnessed a cavalcade of stars that evening, both on the diamond and in the stands. The spectacle brought out Hollywood’s biggest stars.

Lucille Ball, star of television’s first must-see sitcom was on hand, as was movie star Cary Grant, and the beautiful Marilyn Monroe, movie starlet and former wife of Yankee legend **Joe DiMaggio**.

The game itself was memorable enough, though far from the most thrilling in history.

Dodgers ace **Don Drysdale** started the game. The pitcher had been named the outstanding player of the previous All-Star Game in Pittsburgh, played one month earlier. But on this evening the tall, handsome right-hander was the victim of two home runs – one by **Frank Malzone** of the Red Sox, the other by that impish quotable catcher of the Yankees, **Yogi Berra**.

The National League stars got homers from **Frank Robinson** and **Junior Gilliam** of the Dodgers, but the big blow of the game was a gigantic blast off the bat of Cleveland’s Rocky Colavito’s, whose homer traveled an estimated 430 feet.

The American League avenged a loss in the July game, winning 5-3 in a game beamed across the US in prime time for the first time.

### Highlights and Hall of Famers

**Willie Mays** made a catch reminiscent of his back-to-the-infield grab in the 1954 World Series, when the Giants star ran deep into center at cavernous LA Coliseum to catch a ball hit by

Malzone. The play elicited a rare event – cheers from Dodger fans in appreciation of a Giants ballplayer.

20-year-old **Jerry Walker** of the Orioles started for the AL squad, and he was so unexpected in that role that even some in the press box had to scramble to learn about the fairly unknown All-Star pitcher. Walker didn't have much time to fret over facing Aaron, Mays, Musial, and company.

"I was so scared before I started to pitch, that I didn't have time to think about it," Walker told reporters.

Somehow no one thought to arrange a ceremonial first pitch for the 1959 MLB All-Star Game in Los Angeles, though it was played near Hollywood, where glitz and ceremony are rarely absent. Still, the occasion was electric. For the first time, the league scheduled the Midsummer Classic to start in the later afternoon, which meant an 8 p.m. start on TV for viewers in the Midwest and East Coast.

Twenty future Hall of Famers were on the rosters. The superstars included **Ted Williams**, **Mickey Mantle**, **Stan Musial**, and **Henry Aaron**, as well as Robinson and **Minnie Miñoso**, two pioneers for black and Latin players.

Fourteen players who were on the rosters for the 1959 All-Star Game in LA are still living: pitchers Roy Face, **Jerry Walker**, **Bud Daley**, **Camilo Pascual**, and **Pedro Ramos**; infielders **Bobby Richardson**, **Luis Aparicio**, **Tony Kubek**, **Bill White**, **Dick Groat**, **Bill Mazerowski**, and **Orlando Cepeda**; and outfielders **Rocky Colavito** and **Mays**.

Berra, an Italian-American born St. Louis, didn't miss the chance to mention the contributions by himself, Malzone, and Colavito: "It's a great day for Italians," Yogi said.

### Second ASG More Profitable

The second All-Star Game, which would also be played each year from 1960 to 1962, proved popular and profitable. The league sold the television and radio broadcast rights in 1959 for \$250,000, the same sum as they fetched for the other "original" All-Star Game in Pittsburgh.

The game in LA netted \$262,336.64 in net receipts, while the earlier Pittsburgh game came in at just over \$194,000.

Playing baseball on the west coast was still very unusual for teams in the American League. So much so that the Chicago White Sox, embroiled in a pennant race, insured their four All-Stars (**Luis Aparicio**, **Nellie Fox**, **Sherm Lollar**, and **Early Wynn**) for \$1 million each for their safe flight to LA. They even convinced AL president **Joe Cronin** to have the league pay for the policy.

### Dollars Continue to Rise

Within a few years of the pension wars, the players were working to form a union, and in 1965, they hired a labor attorney named **Marvin Miller**. The decision changed baseball history.

Within a decade, the average salary for an MLB player increased from less than \$15,000 in the mid-1960s to more than \$100,000 in the mid-1970s.

The league learned something from the 1959 All-Star Game in The City of Angels – primetime baseball could garner big ratings and lots of dollars.

In 1958, MLB's sixteen teams combined to get less than \$45 million in broadcast rights. But 1967, MLB was getting almost \$190 million in rights to broadcast local games on TV and radio, as well as national games on two networks, CBS and NBC. The Dodgers, who became the first franchise to top three million in attendance, led the way.

### **Buck O'Neil's long-awaited Cooperstown selection unleashes jubilation, champagne at Negro Leagues Baseball Museum**

Alec Lewis, The Athletic

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — They all gathered for this moment. Quinton Lucas, the mayor of Kansas City, snaked his way from the back of the room toward the right side, where he found big-league legends **Joe Carter and Frank White**. They shook hands. Even laughed a bit. Then, underneath the dimmed lights inside the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, those men and nearly 100 optimists trained their eyes on a projector screen.



MLB Network's 5 p.m. special was beginning. Hosts such as **Bob Costas and Harold Reynolds** explained that they were there to announce newly inducted members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. One of the potential additions was baseball player, coach, scout and ambassador Buck O'Neil.

When Reynolds mentioned O'Neil's name as a contender, the men, women, adults and kids inside the museum O'Neil helped establish cheered: *"Yeah!!!!!!!!!!!"*

This scene was a month in the making. On Nov. 5, the National Baseball Hall of Fame announced two separate 10-person ballots that its Early Baseball Era committee and Golden Days Era committee would consider. Overall, the candidates included **John Donaldson, Dick Allen, Jim Kaat, Minnie Miñoso** and so many more, including the late O'Neil.

So after current Negro Leagues Baseball Museum president Bob Kendrick read that November news release twice to ensure O'Neil's name was on it ("I missed it the first time!" he said), he realized the museum would have to do something. Hence, this Kansas City gathering. These were the folks who understood the history of O'Neil's previous Hall of Fame snubbing. These were the folks who did not expect this opportunity to come again.

On Sunday, they were on pins and needles, shifting in their seats and caressing their chins. One woman, between commercials, said, "More time to drink!" Kendrick, a longtime friend of O'Neil's, rubbed his hands together as he watched the projector screen. On television, Baseball Hall of Fame president **Josh Rawitch** read off the names of those who had been voted in on the Golden Era ballot first: Gil Hodges, Jim Kaat, Minnie Miñoso and Tony Oliva. Then came the

Early Era ballot. Only two were selected. The first, Rawitch said, was **Bud Fowler**. The room quieted. This was their man's final shot. Rawitch then read the name.

**"John Jordan Buck O'Neil Jr."**

Everyone, from Lucas to Carter to White, erupted. Kendrick, standing at a lectern, stepped back. Pulled off his glasses. Wiped his wet eyes. And nodded his head as if to say, "Finally, they got this right."

Hours before the moment, Kendrick walked up the pavement on East 18th Street in Kansas City. He wore a black suit with burgundy red trim. A hat, matching those colors, topped his head. A briefcase dangled from his shoulder. He was ready.

"I guess," he said, laughing.

He entered the museum, small-talked with a few staffers, then headed toward his office on the second floor. He unlocked the door, sidestepped the desk, which is overlooked by a portrait of O'Neil, sat down, placed his hat on his desk and laid his briefcase on the floor.

It had already been a long day. He woke up after a little sleep and wanted to clear his mind by filling his stomach, so he drove to his favorite soul food restaurant, Niecie's. The magnitude of the day showed itself then when the waitstaff asked him about O'Neil's chances. Kendrick didn't mind answering. He never does. But his mind needed more rest and his body needed to burn fuel, so he drove out to his nearest range and hit so many golf balls that he worried he'd be sore.

Kendrick chuckled about that inside his office, before returning to the day, and to the memories it fostered, specifically recollections from 15 years ago.

In 2006, the Hall of Fame created a 12-member panel to vote on Negro Leagues candidates in a special election. O'Neil, then 94, was one of them. Leading up to the day of the announcement, The Kansas City Star wrote a bevy of stories, one of which was authored by Wright Thompson. Thompson spent time with O'Neil. He observed a speech O'Neil gave to kids at a local school. Once O'Neil finished his stories on the history of Negro League ballplayers like him, he asked the young kids for a favor. "O'Neil almost never asks for anything," Thompson wrote. But on this day, he asked the kids whether they'd pray before they went to sleep that night. "Lord," he asked them to pray, "let old Buck get into the Hall of Fame."

Another scene from before the 2006 announcement: O'Neil sat in the passenger seat of a white Yukon and played a word association game with, Tonya Tota, who was the museum's operations director.

"Baseball?" Tota asked.

**“Satchel Paige,”** O’Neil responded.

“Love?”

“Ora,” he said, referring to his late wife of 51 years.

“Children?”

“Gift of God.”

“Cooperstown?”

“Baseball.”

Replaying these anecdotes, Kendrick can’t help but shake his head. He sometimes asks how he arrived in this office, where he is the president of this museum that was a vision of O’Neil’s. The answer, he often comes up with, is the spirit of O’Neil. Never more was that spirit alive than on a dark day inside these offices. At the mention of it, Kendrick grabbed his keys. Stood up. Unlocked the conference room next door and drifted back in time.

Inside that room on Feb. 27, 2006, was a 94-year-old Buck O’Neil. He sat at the head of the table in the morning, waiting to hear whether he had been inducted into the Hall of Fame. Kendrick’s phone buzzed with the news. He stepped outside the office to find out O’Neil had not been voted in. His task, then, was to inform O’Neil. When he mustered the courage, entered the conference room and told his close friend the verdict, O’Neil didn’t yell or throw something or scream. Instead, O’Neil comforted those who wanted to do those things on his behalf.

Remembering that day in his office before Sunday night’s announcement, Kendrick thought of an image still in his mind.

“It was Buck, after everything that day was over,” he said. “He was walking down East 18th Street. Carrying his briefcase. His back was turned. A little slumped. It was the image of dejection.”

Here now was the image of jubilation. With the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum buzzing after the announcement, the folks behind the bar began pouring glasses of champagne. Amid the conversations were clinking sounds. Nearly everyone was invited for a toast.

Once Kendrick, Carter, White, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum director of community engagement Kiona Sinks and many others swished the celebration liquid, they reminisced.

Carter told the story of first meeting O'Neil at a Wichita State game in 1979. O'Neil introduced himself as a scout for the Chicago Cubs. In 1981, the Cubs and O'Neil signed him. Carter then told another story. About what happened after O'Neil did "The David Letterman Show."

"Him and Bob Kendrick were walking back to the hotel," Carter said, "and Bob was talking to him. And all of the sudden, Buck was nowhere to be found. Bob looked around, and there was a lady in a red dress. Buck had stopped and talked to her. He came back and said, 'You cannot pass up a woman in a red dress.' And so, that's why everybody wears red."

Carter tugged on his red coat.

Around the room, conversations abounded. About O'Neil's baseball beginnings: O'Neil loved baseball as a young boy, too. He would read the papers dropped off at his family's house in Florida, some detailing the achievements of Negro League players. And get this: Long before he was known as someone who spread goodwill for the game — especially after Ken Burns' 1994 documentary, "Baseball" — O'Neil would spread out his family's newspapers across the yard. Local kids would come over and catch up on their baseball news.

There were conversations about the racial injustices O'Neil faced growing up, such as not getting to attend Sarasota High. The new school was built as he was preparing to enter high school, but only White students could attend. His grandmother relayed the news. He was devastated.

There were conversations about Buck, the player for the Kansas City Monarchs who posted a career batting average of .288. And Buck, the first Black coach in Major League Baseball. Buck, the scout who signed **Ernie Banks and Lou Brock**. And Buck, the voice for the lost Negro League legends of years past as the honorary board chairman of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. In 1991, The Kansas City Star quoted O'Neil as saying: "I talk to a lot of kids. And I'm about to go to Jackson State and Grambling to talk to some kids who don't know who Jackie Robinson was. If they don't know who Jackie was, you know they don't know the guys before Jackie. This is a passing thing. This is the end of it. We need the museum, something to tell the story about these guys."

His passion for keeping the stories — the ones about the human beings who never earned their due — is what led to the dejection in 2006. O'Neil knew what he had accomplished, but he also knew an induction would further shine a light on the museum and what it stood for, setting it up for a thriving future. If Sunday's vibe was any indication, this place has been and will continue to thrive with O'Neil's spirit flowing through it.

Once the attendees dispersed Sunday night, Kendrick stood on the floor of the museum and scrolled through his phone. He had missed calls from Royals chairman and CEO John Sherman, among many others, including **Ozzie Smith**, who was a member of the Hall of Fame board-appointed electorate. Kendrick dialed Smith back quickly.

“What’s up Wizard?!” Kendrick said, beaming.

The call continued. Then another. Later on, Kendrick would retreat up the stairs to his office. Past the conference room that was the site of that dark day in 2006. Into his office that houses the O’Neil portrait. Kendrick would grab his hat and briefcase. Exit the museum. And walk down East 18th Street, chest held high, an image of joy.



### **MLB’s ‘Three True Outcomes’ are all down, for the first time in 17 years. Why?**

Jayson Stark and Eno Sarris

A very weird thing has happened to the Three True Outcomes in 2022, on their way to devouring the sport of baseball. See if you spot a surprising trend here.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>HR/Game</u> | <u>K/Game</u> | <u>BB/Game</u> |
|-------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
|-------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|

2021 1.22 8.68 3.25

2022 1.08 8.36 3.11

If that trend you spotted was *all* of the Three True Outcomes going down this season, you win. And if you're thinking that must be rare, it's because the Three True Outcomes have been the Space Shuttle of all baseball trends — roaring upward year after year for more than a decade and a half.

And then, whaddayaknow, gravity finally kicked in, here in 2022. It's the first time all three of those Outcomes — homers, strikeouts and walks — have gone down in the same season in 17 years (since 2005) ... which was the only previous season it had happened in the last 30 years.

But remember, baseball three decades ago was almost a completely different sport. The average team hit only *five home runs a week* in 1992. That rate had practically doubled by 2019. The average pitching staff in 1992 had a strikeout rate like **Chi Chi González** (5.6 per 9 innings pitched). By two years ago, the average K rate (9.2 per 9 IP) was closing in on **Nolan Ryan** (9.5).

So we'd gotten used to the idea that the home runs would keep flying and the strikeouts would keep mounting — and the high Three True Outcomes sky would just get higher. Turns out we were wrong about that. So the question is

What happened?

Why would homers *and* strikeouts *and* walks all drop this year — or, if you really think about it, any year? What has been driving that trifecta? We asked that question of executives and veteran hitting coaches around the game. Even they were confused, and admitted it readily.

"I don't have a good theory for you on that one," said a thoughtful American League executive.

"I don't know why," said a National League exec who had a long career as a big-league hitter. "I'm really surprised by the last two (strikeouts *and* walks both going down)."

"I don't know," said Braves hitting coach **Kevin Seitzer**, who got 1,500 hits as a player and coached that Braves team that won the World Series last fall. "I don't have a theory for you because I'm surprised by those numbers."

But just because they couldn't figure it out doesn't mean the rest of us can't at least try. So here is how we'll do this. We rounded up the best theories we could from those executives and hitting coaches. Then we unleashed our own analytics guru, Eno Sarris, to see if they were onto something. It was a fascinating exercise. See what you think.

## It must be the baseball

This was the most common and most convenient explanation we heard. The ball is different. So the home run rate is suddenly back to 2015 levels. And there are lots of ripple effects. Here is how one NL executive put it:

“It’s pretty clear why home runs are down. I haven’t done a ton of research on how that’s affecting the other two. Maybe there are some subtle changes in the ball that have cut down on strikeouts and helped command.

“The other thing is, whether it’s conscious or not, if the pitchers are aware the ball’s not flying out like a Pro V1, they tend to pitch to contact a little bit more.”

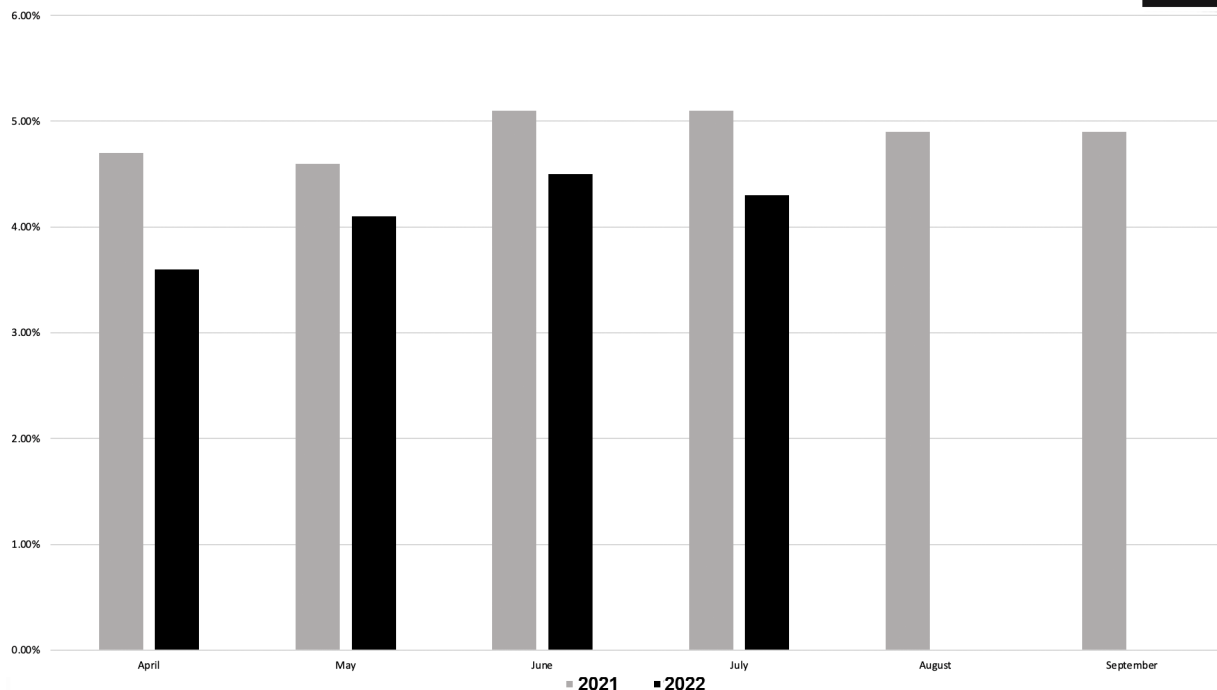
So how does that theory hold up? Here’s Eno.

**Eno Sarris:** Offense is indeed down, you might have noticed. A couple of things are obscuring how much it’s down, though. As Joe Sheehan pointed out in his newsletter, there’s a rash of position players pitching, and they allow a ridiculous .405/.466/.773 line when they’re pitching. We should probably take them out of the sample. Also, there are no more pitchers hitting! You’d expect that to increase offense, too. The extra innings rules are adding offense. There’s also the changing strikeout rate to deal with. And then the weather is warming, so we should compare like to like.

So, to get a sense of how much homers are down, let’s look only at home runs on contact during the first nine innings of a ballgame when the pitcher was not a position player, and let’s do it month by month. Simple, right? Thanks to Baseball Savant, it is.

# Home runs are, indeed, (still) down

Homers allowed only by pitchers in first nine innings, divided by contact, 2021 (gray) & 2022 (black) by month



Ok, yes, we've established the first thing. Homers are still down, and aside from April — remember, there were two balls used last year and that would mess with the numbers some — they are consistently down around 10 percent from last season. Despite the fact that the humidifier is playing a role in this, there's not really great evidence that the humidifier's role is changing as we enter the humid months. It's some combination of the humidifier and the league using one deadened ball that is the source of the reduction in home runs.

As for the strikeouts and contact part, stay tuned.

## When home runs disappear, walks disappear

We should always remember that numbers in baseball don't exist in a vacuum. They're connected. But some stats are more connected than others. Here's an AL executive on that topic.

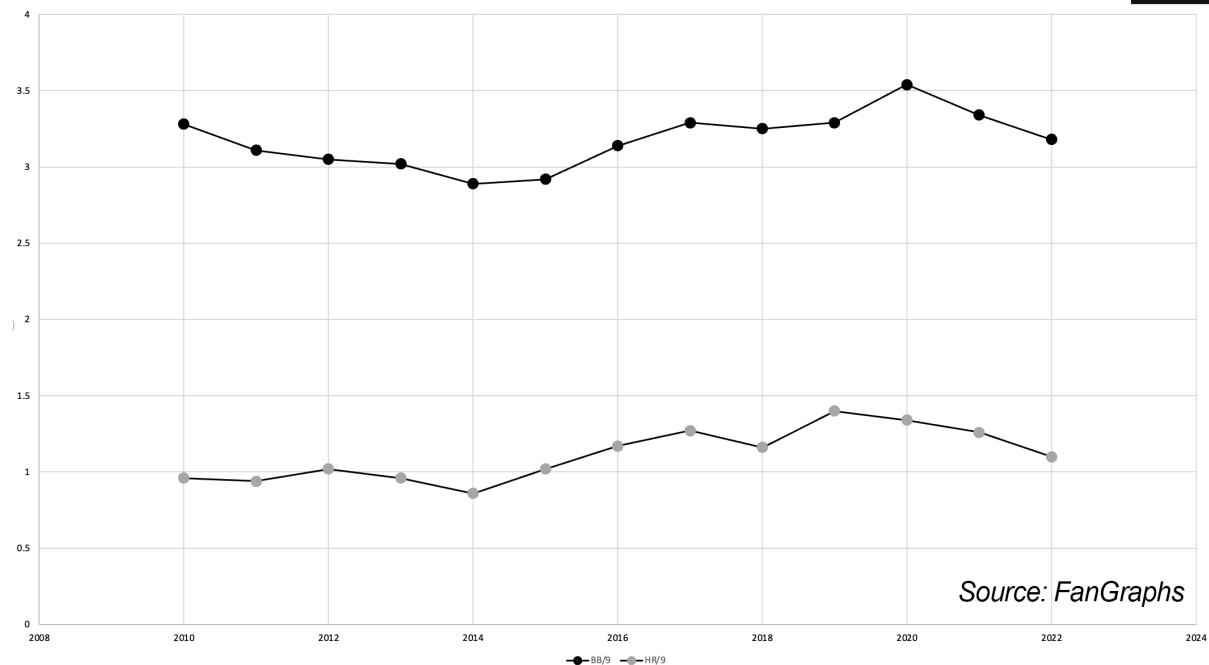
"Home runs and walks go together. When home runs go down, they usually work together with walks. I'm honestly not sure why strikeouts are down. I don't have a good theory for you on that one."

Is he onto something?

**Sarris:** This is sort of an amazing chart that speaks for itself. Look how well home run rates and walk rates track together!

## Tied Together: Homers go up, walks go up

League-wide home runs and walks per nine by season in the pitch tracking era



It's kind of mesmerizing, isn't it? One goes up, the other goes up, one goes down, the other goes down.

Walks are the result of being afraid of the big fly, to some extent. Fewer homers to worry about, and the pitcher is more likely to pitch in the zone and walk fewer guys. It's something that's been proven on the player level, that the more damage a batter can do, the farther the pitcher will be from the center of the zone. But it's also intuitive.

Walk rates and whiff rates don't usually hang out together

Then again, some stats are *less* connected than others. Walks and strikeouts would be two of those – unless you're **Joey Gallo**. So when we spoke with one NL exec, he got the reasoning for the home run rate. But walks and strikeouts? What's up with that, he wondered.

"I'm really surprised by (strikeouts and walks both declining)," he said. "I just know, watching the game every night, you don't see the command. You don't see the craft of painting corners and throwing it with precision to all four quadrants. But I don't see how that explains why strikeouts and walks are both down."

### So is there an explanation he's missing?

**Sarris:** Let's return to some of those other external factors that have changed around baseball. Pitchers were striking out a whopping 45 percent of the time in 2021 before that experiment was ended. Just removing them from the sample gives us a better idea of how much the strikeout rate has dropped.

Non-pitchers' strikeout rate in 2021: **22.6 percent**

Non-pitchers' strikeout rate in 2022: **22.3 percent**

OK, so just taking the pitchers out of the batters' box was a big part of why strikeouts seem down this year. But there was also a huge brouhaha last year. Remember the sticky stuff controversy? It seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? But there was enforcement that reduced the spin rate across the league, and spin rate by itself does have a connection to outcomes. There was an MLB memo in mid-June last year, and we saw the rates go down afterward. So let's repeat the exercise above, but compare the last two months of 2021 to the first few months of 2022.

Non-pitchers' strikeout rate in July through September 2021: **21.9 percent**

Non-pitchers' strikeout rate in 2022: **22.3 percent**

Ah-hah. Taking the pitchers (and Spider Tack) out of the equation shows that strikeout rate is actually steady underneath. Still, if the point was to reduce strikeouts, those two efforts were successful in turning back the ever-advancing tide of Ks, all the way back to 2017. There's more work to do.

### Maybe hitters are changing their approach

It took about three innings into this season for everyone to notice that the baseball no longer flies like it used to, back in the good old rocketball days of 2019 and 2020. As we said earlier, that has had more ripple effects — obvious and subtle — than most casual observers think.

But is it possible that one of those ripple effects is that hitters have begun to understand it's time to do something different, since big launch angles and barrels haven't produced the results they used to? At least one AL exec thinks that's happening:

"I do feel like I've seen more hitters pan the field and recognize the shift," says the exec. "So they shorten their swing to go the other way in certain spots. The game-planning is so good now, I actually think it's helping hitters adjust. And I think the decline in walks per game speaks to that.

"Right now, there's more info going to the dugout between innings than I've ever known of. So in-game adjustments are happening. And that might be why walks and strikeouts are both down. All the info on pitcher profiles for that night could be helping the hitter."

### Is that a real thing?

**Sarris:** Maybe. I, too, have heard from coaches who are starting to see hitters take advantage of open real estate. And some hitters will even admit it.

“I fell in love with the homer in college and became a dead-pull try-to-hit-a-homer-every-time type of hitter,” said the Diamondbacks’ leadoff hitter **Josh Rojas**. “I kept hitting into the shift, that ball in the four-hole is an out every time, and even the ball up the middle is an out. I said, screw the homer, I just want to get on base as much as I can, and I started to spray the ball more and find the holes.”

So there are players doing it. When you zoom out, you can find a little evidence that the league is slowly catching on. Against the shift and with no runners on base, left-handers are going to the opposite field more in the last two seasons than they have in the Statcast Era (since 2015) at least. But ... the effect is small.

### Lefties going oppo more?

Year    Lefty Oppo into Shift

2015 23.8%

2016 23.6%

2017 23.7%

2018 24.0%

2019 23.5%

2020 23.8%

2021 24.8%

2022 24.1%

Basically, this says that lefties so far this season have gone oppo into the shift 52 more times than they would’ve, comparably, in 2016. I’d say this is closer to natural variance than any sort of real finding.

### Do opposites suddenly attract again?

Along those same lines, Phillies hitting coach **Kevin Long** also thinks hitters have changed because the deadened ball and mysterious humidifier effect have forced them to change. Are they looking to shoot the ball through holes on the other side of the field in a big spot? Here’s why he thinks the hitters are different in 2022:

“Probably because guys are finding out like, listen, it doesn’t matter how hard I hit the ball. It’s not going anywhere. So I’m going to shorten my swing down and I’m going to try to find some more holes. I heard **Jeff McNeil** say the other day something like, ‘I don’t even care if I hit it 47 miles per hour. I just want to find a hole because it doesn’t do me any good to swing harder, because the ball is not going out.’

“I know with our team, we’re aggressive. I don’t know why the swing rates in general would go up. But maybe because you can cover more (of the strike zone) when you’re not trying to do as much. So if you’re not trying to do as much, you’ve got more bat-to-ball skill, which allows you to expand a little bit.”

### Is that what’s happening sport-wide?

**Sarris:** Let’s lead with the swing rates, without addressing the reason behind it first. Because there is something funky going on with swing rates across the league — batters are swinging more than they ever have in the pitch-tracking era, at balls and at strikes. But this isn’t going to look significant on a graph, or in a table, because batters are swinging at 47.4 percent of the pitches they see now, up from 45.4 percent in 2008.

That just doesn’t seem like a big deal when you say it like that.

But it probably is! The march upward in swing rates has been steady, increasing a little with every year. The two highest swing rates have come in the last two seasons, and the three highest in the past four seasons. Batters are swinging at 32.3 percent of the pitches they see outside of the zone now, compared to 24.9 percent in 2008. And then consider this: we’re talking about over 700,000 pitches a season, or even 384,000 this season.

So remember when we compared the shift opportunities over time to see what the real change was? If batters were swinging at pitches the same way they did back in 2008, they’d have swung at over 7,600 fewer pitches by this point in the season.

That actually seems like a big deal.

### It’s all about the swing

Or maybe there’s an explanation for the rising walk rate that’s so basic, we’re overthinking it. Maybe, said Seitzer, the hitters are just swinging more, and making less hard contact.

“I’m surprised by those numbers. Now the walks being down, I’m not surprised, because guys are swinging a lot. And maybe they’re swinging a lot more and putting balls in play instead of striking out. I mean, I don’t feel like we are, but you’re seeing that across the league. Has the exit velocity been down? Because I feel like there’s a lot of soft contact.”

But do the numbers across the sport match the eye test of a longtime hitting coach? Let's ask Eno.

**Sarris:** Batters seem to want to hit the ball hard, still. The percentage of balls hit over 95 mph is a Statcast-Era-high 38.7 percent and the average exit velocity is in the same range it's been for the last four years, really.

But you have to be careful here to make sure you don't invalidate what people are seeing on the ground based on league-wide numbers like this. Because exit velocity is a complicated result that is part hitter, part pitch velocity, and also part ball construction. While exit velocity is probably five parts bat speed and one part pitch speed, that still leaves some possible effect from the fact fastball velocity is up to 93.9 mph this season, yet another record in a string of records. And then we know that the construction of the ball has been changing in recent years, and that balls can have more or less bounce depending on the materials used.

In other words, it's pretty complicated. I wouldn't tell anyone they're wrong about what they see based on these overall numbers.

So is it all of the above?

All right, let's review what we've learned. But before we do, here's the deal with trying to explain *anything* in baseball: It's never as simple as we want it to be. We always look for one explanation when, most of the time, there are a million.

It starts with the baseball, because it always does. But every action has a reaction. Every barrel that doesn't leave the yard leaves a mark on the guy who hit it and the pitcher who is grateful for that gopherball he didn't give up. So thanks to Eno's great work, we have seen ...

- The deadened baseball increasingly looks like the culprit for the drop in home runs.
- The weather has heated up, but the long-ball rate hasn't heated up with it — at least not at a pace anywhere near what was expected. So apparently, it's not all about the humidors.
- The decline in walks? We connected those dots to the decline in homers. Walks rise when pitchers are afraid of what happens when the ball is in the strike zone. And the decline in that fear factor is like the Fourth True Outcome.
- But why are strikeouts down? Exactly why you'd expect them to go down once you remember the big picture: No more Spider Tack. And no more pitchers traipsing toward home plate with a bat!
- And how do the drops in walks and whiffs go together? Turns out hitters are letting it fly now, at rates we haven't seen in the recent past. And some of them are even learning to flip balls the other way to beat the shift.

So this is why we stare at baseball's most important numbers. They don't define the game; they illuminate the game. And they tell us something about shifting trends in the game.

Sometimes those trends shift in ways we're not used to. And we hate it when that happens. Even the smartest front offices, coaching staffs and analysts in baseball have to regroup at times to look deeper inside what those numbers and trends are really telling us.

But the bottom line is, it's mostly a good thing if the Three True Outcomes aren't dictating the way baseball is played, every inning, every night. What we don't know — what we can never know — is if any of this is permanent and lasting, or whether the sport is already doing its usual deep dive on how to adjust back.

So don't touch that remote. As the Three True Outcomes dip and dive, we promise we'll be on that case!

### **Sometimes a Stat's Value Lies in the Passion It Stokes**

**The easily understood 'exit velocity' metric helps drive fans' conversations, even if it isn't always a useful predictor of success**

Josh Zimbrum in WSJ

When I first encountered the newest trendy baseball statistic—exit velocity, or the speed of a hit baseball—it struck me as yet another example of the type of stat that had driven me away from the sport.

Some people love immersing themselves in terabytes of baseball statistics, but despite my general love of numbers, I'm not one of them. I found that many stats often served to alienate fans. The game of baseball didn't change that much—but the way many other fans started talking about it, or the way the media covered it, felt inaccessible.

Yet as I looked into exit velocity, I came to a different conclusion. While it might not be the greatest analytical stat in the toolbox, its value is as a metric that any sort of fan can understand and enjoy.

Exit velocity became ubiquitous in 2015 with the launch of Statcast, a system that uses high-resolution cameras and radar to produce reams of new statistics about the speed, angle and spin of balls, the movement of players, and so on.

Soon every great hit was replayed with the stats: the exit velocity, the launch angle, the distance traveled. Batters have entered something of an arms race to boost their exit velocity.

But exit velocity isn't that useful for predicting how many runs a team will ultimately score. It might even create distorted incentives for players to swing too hard, lowering batting averages that are already at the lowest in more than 50 years. Last season, the highest exit velocity in Major League Baseball was recorded by Yankees slugger **Giancarlo Stanton**, when he struck what one report called a "122.2 mph rocket." That rocket promptly hit the mound, was fielded by the second baseman and turned into a double play. Home runs might be an old statistic but they always get you at least one run, instead of two outs.

Exit velocity "sits well below the most important offensive statistics when it comes to correlating with overall offensive output, even falling behind batting average," according to a detailed analysis on FanGraphs, a baseball-analytics website.

**Benjamin Baumer**, a former sabermetrician for the Mets, and **Andrew Zimbalist**, a sports economist at Smith College, wrote the book "The Sabermetric Revolution," which provides a rigorous overview of the concepts popularized by Michael Lewis's book "Moneyball" (made into a movie starring Brad Pitt) about the rise of baseball analytics.

They find that batting average only predicts about 67% of the runs a team will ultimately score. On-base percentage, the statistic focused on in "Moneyball," predicts about 78%. An even better statistic, with about 89% predictive power, is called OPS, or on base plus slugging, which combines on-base percentage and multiple base-hit percentages into a single stat.

So why use exit velocity, which is less informative than batting average, when there's OPS?

Mr. Zimbalist offers a reason. He recalled recently attending a minor-league game in Worcester, Mass., and being intrigued to see the scoreboard displaying each player's OPS. Until he overheard a couple behind him.

"The two of them sitting behind me had no idea what OPS was," he said. "It's in bright neon characters, [but] he didn't know what OPS was. You're making your fan feel ignorant."

In other words, statistics that click with purists might not click with all fans. This brings us to Benjamin Burroughs, a professor of emerging media at the University of Nevada Las Vegas who theorizes that baseball has several different "planes of fandom."

The first plane is the traditional fan who roots for their team, attends games, buys merchandise.

That's the fan I once was, playing Little League, chasing the great baseball-card bubble in the early 1990s, and treasuring visits to Wrigley Field and the old Yankee Stadium. (I'm not alone in losing interest. Among fans ages 30-49, only 9% say baseball is their favorite sport, after football, basketball and soccer, according to a 2021 Washington Post poll.)

Then there is the “fantasy plane,” popular since the early 2000s, comprised of fantasy-baseball enthusiasts who use a different vocabulary and root for the players stacked upon their virtual rosters. About 46 million Americans play fantasy sports, according to the Fantasy Sports & Gaming Association, and here baseball is the second most popular sport (after football), played by 39% of fantasy competitors.

In a 2018 paper, Mr. Burroughs proposed a third plane, “the statistical plane,” comprised of the vast army of stats junkies—or saberfans—who build spreadsheets of different data points, looking for the most revealing relationships.

There’s overlap between the groups, but there can be tensions, too. Some sabermetrics fans, Mr. Burroughs notes, are fans of statistics first and baseball second, and look down on fantasy sports. Some fantasy-sports fans don’t really like statistics and play from their gut. The framework spoke to me because I’d long felt alienated by conversations about fantasy baseball.

A statistic such as exit velocity, Mr. Burroughs said, is valuable not because it’s the best predictor but because the different planes of fans can all understand it and talk about it, unlike OPS.

“If you can weave the statistics into the narrative, it makes it palatable for everyone,” he said.

The die-hard statistician can run all sorts of new analyses on it; the fantasy-sports fan can use it to try to find an edge on drafted players, and traditional fans don’t need any background in statistics to appreciate it.

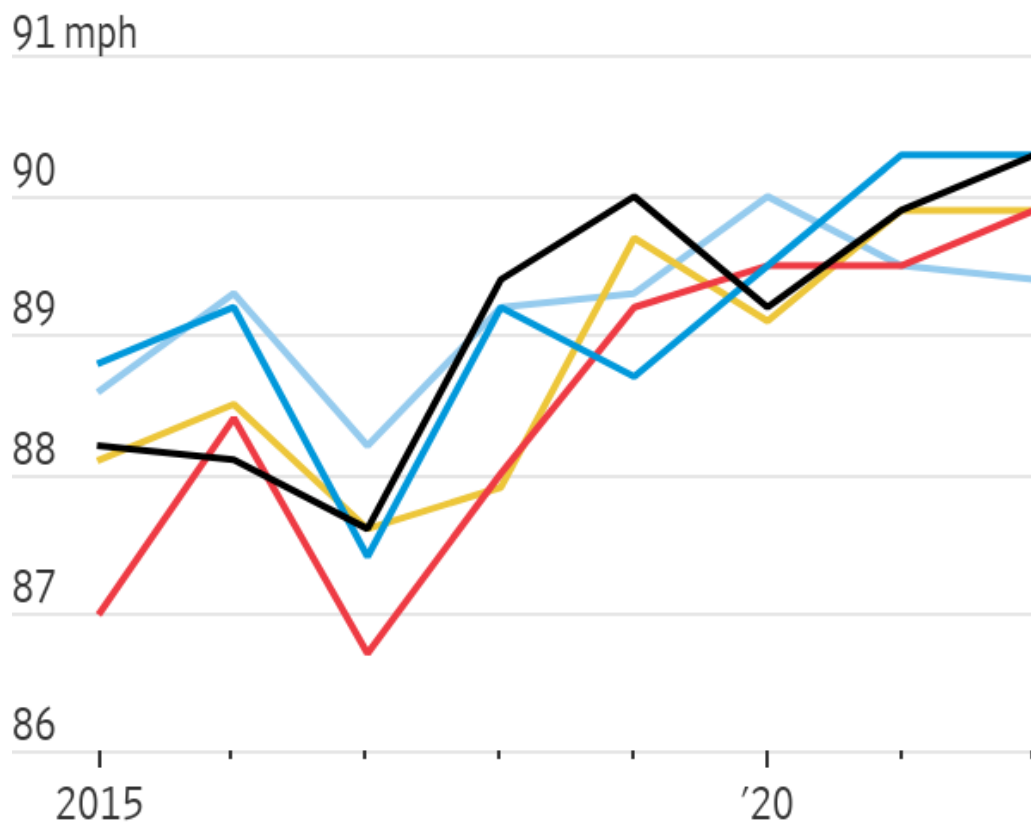
For example, statistically there is no difference between a 118 mph home run that flies clear out of the stadium and a 97 mph one that lands in the first row of seats. But to a fan, the first is something special. I remember going to the old Yankee Stadium with a friend’s father who pointed out where a **Mickey Mantle** home run once struck the facade at the top of the ballpark. Imagine what the exit velocity must have been.

## Free-Swingers

Teams have boosted their average exit velocity since the stat's launch in 2015.

### Top five teams for exit velocity in 2022

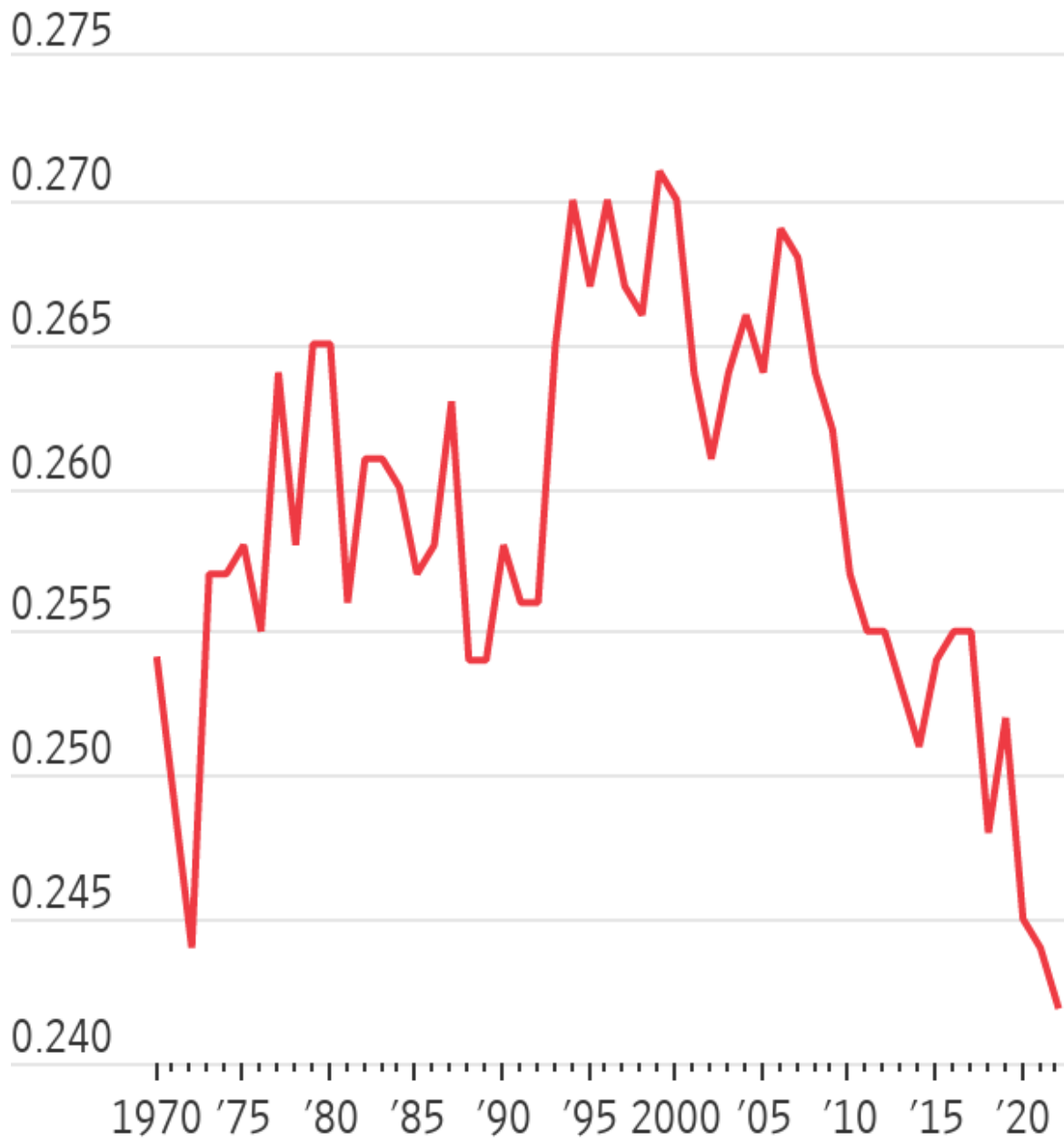
■ Yankees   ■ Blue Jays   ■ Braves  
■ Twins   ■ Dodgers



Note: Data for 2022 are as of July 21.

Source: MLB.com

## Major League Baseball batting average, by season



Source: Baseball-Reference.com

## **Stark: On Tim Kurkjian, the joy of baseball writing and Cooperstown**

Jayson Stark in *The Athletic*

I first got to know the great **Tim Kurkjian** in April 1988, all thanks to the historic ineptitude of the Baltimore Orioles.

They were on the road to starting their season 0-21. I was on the road to following them around until they won. And along the way, I was lucky enough to befriend a once-in-a-generation baseball storyteller who was on the road to Cooperstown.

On Saturday afternoon, Tim will have his life-changing Cooperstown moment, as the 2022 winner of the Baseball Writers' Association of America's Career Excellence Award. I'll be there, because how could I not be? So will our longtime friend, mentor and guru, **Peter Gammons**. But the thrill of listening to Tim deliver his epic speech on Induction Weekend isn't all we'll share.

As Peter wrote three and a half years ago, on the day I learned I would be joining him in the writers' wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame, the three of us are bonded by more than the surreal distinction of having our careers honored forever in the Hall.

This is about dreams that somehow came true. This is about gratitude for living that dream. This is about joy that comes with the understanding that our life's work has never felt like a job. This is about baseball, and our love fest with the sport that has made it all possible.

I can honestly say no one I know exudes that joy more than Tim Kurkjian. You only have to spend five minutes around Tim at a ballpark to be infused with the feeling that he falls in love with baseball again every day. And because he does, he brings the rest of us along with him.

For weeks now, I've been talking to our many mutual friends about what separates Tim from everyone else in our business. Along the way, I noticed something. Merely talking about him makes people happy.

Here's just one example. I asked Guardians manager **Terry Francona**, our onetime ESPN teammate, about him on last week's episode of the "Starkville" podcast. The smile that lit up Francona's face radiated across my Zoom screen. It looked familiar — because Tim is one of those one-of-a-kind humans who makes everyone smile.

"I'm glad you brought his name up," Francona said. "He showed me around (the inner workings of ESPN). He didn't have to do that. Like, he was just so *Tim*. And anybody that's been around him — like, I can see *you* smile — it's hard not to like him. You've got to really try if you don't want to like him. He's truly one of the sweethearts in the game."

I've been with Tim in every imaginable public setting. In airports. At dinner. Walking through ballparks. In hotel lobbies. Strolling through hallways in Bristol, Conn., and at the Winter

Meetings. On TV sets. In production meetings. Walking along city streets. Around batting cages and crowded lockers.

He's always Tim. He cares about his work. He cares what everyone around him thinks. He cares about friends. He cares about family. He cares about strangers. He cares about baseball and all of those who care about it with him. He cares about our business. It all matters to him, every minute of every day.

I've seen him in airport terminals, on two hours of sleep, treating fans who approach him like lifelong pals. I've seen players, coaches and managers who gravitate in his direction before games, listening to his stories, almost grateful to be in his presence.

I've heard him have conversations with players about stuff that no one else ever asks about or thinks about: *Why they play golf right-handed but throw or hit a baseball left-handed. ... Who can't keep track of signs and who knows everybody's signs (including the other team's). ... The top-secret outside-the-box ways that bench guys and relief pitchers fill up all their dead time. ...* So why do players connect with Tim Kurkjian? That's why. As his good friend, former Orioles/Rays media relations genius Rick Vaughn, puts it, he "feels the game."

I've sat around bars, restaurants, press boxes and TV green rooms, embroiled in a million of those famous Timmy debates: *Who's the greatest No. 37 in baseball history? ... What would you have a better chance of doing — getting a hit in a major-league game, scoring a point in an NBA game or completing a pass in an NFL game? ... Rank the five funniest players you ever covered. ...* Know how much time you can fill chewing on stuff like that? Not enough!

I've spent hundreds of hours on the phone with Tim, over a period that now spans more than 30 years. From almost the day we met, we understood that we shared something — a curiosity about the beautiful weirdness of baseball. So one of the highlights of every week, for years, was our Friday phone calls, where we kicked around tales of the bizarre stuff we'd picked up *that* week.

Back then, he was writing a must-read Sunday baseball notes column in The Baltimore Sun. I was writing "Week in Review," a prehistoric version of the Weird and Wild opus that now appears in *The Athletic*, for The Philadelphia Inquirer.

There was no Twitter then. There was no digital vehicle that enabled me to read him or him to read me, or anyone on Earth to read both of us. So we'd spend 30, 60, 90 minutes on the phone, laughing about the wacky tidbits we'd picked up in a clubhouse or found buried in a box score. Then we'd ask each other: *So what can we do with that?*

Our brains worked a lot like they work now. We asked the right questions. We just had so few places to go for the answers. There was no Baseball-Reference then. Neither of us could afford to call the Elias Sports Bureau and have them research all our off-the-wall questions. So we had

to figure out how to do it ourselves. The answer, most of the time, was just intensive manual labor.

One or two times a year, we'd realize it was time to take one of those dreaded "trips through the encyclopedia." That's because the only way to find our answer was buried in the pages of the old Neft and Cohn paperback edition of "The Sports Encyclopedia" of baseball, which had season-by-season stats for every team.

So I'd take, say, 1900 to 1945. He'd take 1946 to whatever year we were in at the time. Then we'd start rummaging through the years. I'm almost embarrassed to admit this stuff took hours, sometimes days.

Eventually, we'd report back with the answer, which we assumed pretty much nobody cared about except us. But it made our columns different and (hopefully) fun, which mattered intensely to us. So finding someone who shared my passion for that fun and research was the greatest gift Tim ever gave me.

Then there were those books we kept. Yikes. By that I mean the day-by-day books in which we wrote down, every day, how all the teams in the sport did the day before. And also the starting-pitcher books in which we logged every freaking starting-pitching line in baseball every freaking day. And I'm guessing you've heard about our world-famous box-score books.

With no Baseball-Reference to tell us what any player or team did back on say, April 28, or the week of June 17, we essentially constructed our own database, by hand, by cutting out every single newspaper box score every day and pasting it in a box-score book. That sometimes required driving all over town, looking for late editions and box scores we'd otherwise miss. But we did it. Every day. For years.

Eventually, when Retrosheet and Baseball-Reference came along, I bailed. But Tim kept on clipping and pasting — for at least another decade. If our box-score books — but especially his — don't find a place in the Cooperstown archives one of these days, that's a missed opportunity for humankind. They're like the baseball version of the Dead Sea Scrolls, right?

But now think of the challenges we faced at ballparks, trying to research some of this stuff in the moment, during games, on newspaper deadlines. We couldn't exactly run home for an hour to check our books. We definitely couldn't call our wives. They were way too smart and normal to want any parts of this. So Tim and I traveled around, lugging the most humongous "work bags" in sports writing history.

That way, if something happened and we had to know, we could still reach for our box-score book, or the encyclopedia, or the Sporting News register, or the official "Green Book" and "Red Book." They were right there, in our work bags, which were only slightly smaller than a minivan and weighed about as much as the average tractor-trailer.

But I always felt better about hauling those monstrosities around — because I knew Tim was hauling a veritable suitcase that was even bigger and heavier.

All these years later, Tim credits/blames me for inspiring him/convincing him that this absurdity was the price we had to pay to find the singular baseball nuggets we took pride in uncovering. Naturally, I credit/blame him.

But the guy we should really credit/blame/thank/etc. is Gammons. He was also part of those Friday phone-call marathons, and he encouraged us, and appreciated us, in a way that let us know we might be onto something.

Let me assure you: To be a young baseball writer back then and have the iconic Peter Gammons take a genuine interest in what you thought, what you wrote, what you heard — that was better than winning a Pulitzer. But that was only the beginning of how Peter touched the lives of Tim and me in ways that changed everything.

Peter didn't just write about baseball better than everybody else. He invented how to write baseball for everybody else. I tell him all the time that everything I've done in my career, he did first — only better. Tim and I share that feeling. We're not alone.

We watched Peter go from the newspaper business to the big Sports Illustrated stage and then to ESPN. A few years later, Tim followed him to both of those places. I often wonder how different everything about my career would be if they hadn't paved the way.

Back in the day, on the "Mike & Mike" show at ESPN, **Mike Greenberg** used to call Tim and me "the Sons of Gammons." We couldn't have been more proud of that. Later, Buster Olney joined that band and became the third son. Before Peter, there was no such thing as people like us, who miraculously made the transition from being just "writers" to finding ourselves looking into cameras and telling stories a whole new way.

At one point, against all odds, ESPN created a special weekly "Seamheads" edition of "Baseball Tonight" that put Buster and me on the air with our unlikely host, this guy named Kurkjian. Like everything else he has ever done, Tim mastered that host gig in a way that made all of us look smarter and cooler than we actually were.

In theory, it was "a TV show." In reality, it was the ultimate exhibition of what baseball writers do, how we talk and why we love our profession.

We "emptied the notebooks" every week with cool tidbits we'd picked up during our travels. We swapped trade rumors, dug into big-picture topics that had no other place on TV and laughed at our geeky, seamhead dopiness at every opportunity. Our point guard, Tim, made all of that possible.

“That show really produced some of the best, most substantive conversations that I think have ever gone on the air for ‘Baseball Tonight,’” said our producer back then, Justin Havens. “It was the best dialog, in some ways, that we ever got on that show. And the fact that it was done with a non-traditional host, I think speaks to Timmy’s greatness and to his versatility.”

Next thing we knew, Tim Kurkjian was heading for yet another place that baseball writers almost never go — sitting in a broadcast booth, as major-league games unfolded below him, and once again, acting like this was something he was born to do.

All those stories inside him kept spilling out. All those rankings and lists, of the greatest everythings in baseball history — they became part of the story of every game. And if you needed somebody to run in a sausage race in Milwaukee, or wear the goofiest costume of the week, or go dance with JoJo Siwa, hey, guess who was going to do that? Here’s a hint: Not Karl Ravech. *Of course Tim did all of that.*

“Did he look like a goofball dancing? Sure,” said longtime “Baseball Tonight” producer Gregg Colli. “But that’s why we love him. He’s doing that because that’s going to make the broadcast better. That’s going to stand out, like him doing the sausage race in Milwaukee. It’s just the little things that he’s OK with doing because he knows it’s for the betterment of the product. It’s just who he is.”

But it’s important here that we not get too caught up in who Tim Kurkjian is if it means we don’t properly pay tribute to everything he’s done. When his name first appeared on the writers’ Hall of Fame ballot last summer, I learned there were voters who weren’t sure whether to vote for him because they thought of him as “a TV guy.”

“Take a look at him,” I replied. “Why do you think he’s on TV? It isn’t like he used to hit cleanup for the Yankees. He’s on TV because he was one of the greatest baseball writers in America.”

I understand that not everyone remembers that now. But you know who does? Tim Kurkjian, a man who looks in the mirror every morning and sees a baseball writer, not a TV star. Read his fabulous book, “Is This a Great Game, or What?” There’s an entire chapter extolling baseball writing, and the array of baseball writers he has known.

In that chapter, Tim lovingly recalls his days as a newspaper beat writer covering the Rangers and Orioles. Spending 150 days a year on the road. Writing five stories a day, up against three different deadlines. Writing more stories about losing teams, by his calculation, than any other writer in the 1980s. Competing with the likes of Ken Rosenthal and Richard Justice, his formidable competition on the Orioles beat. And how lucky he was to live that grueling life, doing that thing he truly loved.

What made him so exceptional then is what still makes him so exceptional today. He sees things that no one else sees. He knows things that no one else knows. And he has that gift of making you care about those things you didn’t know you cared about, just because you feel like

he's including you in the loop of fun. And he includes all of us, just through the conversational, often hilarious way he tells those tales.

He has become the ultimate ambassador for the sport he covers. But just try to comprehend all the ways he has found to embody that role. As a writer. ... As an important voice in the ESPN studios. ... In the booth as games are unfolding. ... Compiling his beloved Quirkjians. ... Winning over casual fans with that infectious laugh, on the set with **Scott Van Pelt**. ... Or simply by the way he treats everyone he meets, in the box seats or an airport jetway.

"Special." That's the word Ken Rosenthal uses to describe him. It's perfect. Tim has always had a special way about him. He still has it. This weekend, he will carry that special glow all the way to Cooperstown, the home of baseball legends ... and now, quite fittingly, of a baseball-writing legend named Tim Kurkjian.

### **THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS**

**Ron LeFlore, Ty Cobb, Omar Moreno and Tim Lincecum** all stole between 90 and 99 bases in a season. None of them stole 100 or more. Name the four players who did steal 100 or more bases in a season. They all did it between 1962 and 1987.

|                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Ricky Henderson</b> | 130-1982, 108-1983, 100-1980 |
| <b>Lou Brock</b>       | 118-1974                     |
| <b>Vince Coleman</b>   | 110-1985, 109-1987, 107-1986 |
| <b>Maury Wills</b>     | 104-1962                     |

### **HOUSEKEEPING**

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