

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

7.31.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Grabbing a coffee before heading out to tee it up here in Maine. You know how much I love a list so plenty of those, miscellaneous stuff, Peter Gammons on the exclusive fraternity of Cooperstown, and of course trivia.

Enjoy.

THIS WEEK’S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

American League single season HR records:

Right-handed batter—**Hank Greenberg** 58 in 1938 and **Jimmie Foxx** 58 in 1932

Left-handed batter – **Roger Maris** 61 in 1961

Switch hitter – **Mickey Mantle** 54 in 1961

The single season HR leaders in the National League are much more recent. Name them.

Right-handed batter--

Left-handed batter--

Switch hitter --

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Only four players with 500 HR, 3 World Series titles, and a Hall of Fame berth: **Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Reggie Jackson and David Ortiz.**

Most HRs in first 100 games of the season in Yankee history

1928	Babe Ruth	41
------	-----------	----

1921	Babe Ruth	41
------	-----------	----

1961	Roger Maris	40
------	-------------	----

1961	Mickey Mantle	39
2022	Aaron Judge	38

Speaking of Judge, on Thursday night facing Royals closer **Scott Barlow** in the ninth, Judge launched a Statcast-projected 431-foot blast that allowed the Yanks to celebrate their MLB-leading 12th walk-off win.

Judge's three walk-off homers tie **Mickey Mantle** (1959) for the most by a Yankee in a single season.

Then on Friday night he hit two more including a grand slam to reach 41. Judge, **Roger Maris**, and **Babe Ruth** in 1928 are the only Yankees with at least 40 homers by the end of July.

Oh, on Saturday he hit another to make it 42 before August 1. Judge became the second-fastest player in AL/NL history to blast 200 career home runs in the Bombers' 8-2 victory over the Royals at Yankee Stadium. Judge's second-inning, two-run blast off right-hander **Jonathan Heasley** came in his 671st career game. Only **Ryan Howard** (658 games) reached the milestone faster than Judge, who also joined **Jorge Posada** (275), **Derek Jeter** (260) and **Don Mattingly** (222) as the only players drafted by the Yankees to hit 200 or more homers with the franchise.

Judge's Major League-leading 42nd home run was his 12th long ball in 14 games, the most in a 14-game span in franchise history. He eclipsed Babe Ruth (41 homers in 1928) for the most home runs ever hit by a Yankee before Aug. 1,

Best Winning PCT, MLB pitchers who debuted 1961 or later

Clayton Kershaw	192-86	.691
Pedro Martinez	219-100	.687
Max Scherzer	197-99	.666
Roy Halladay	203-105	.659

Most Strikeouts, Mets in first 12 starts

Pedro Martinez	104
-----------------------	-----

Max Scherzer	98
Dwight Gooden	93
Matt Harvey	89
Nolan Ryan	88

Subscribership may be dominated by Yankees and Red Sox fans but there are plenty of others. A Houston fan mentioned that Astros reliever, **Ryan Pressley**, had a streak of 32 consecutive outs broken when he gave up a single in the 9th inning but still got his save. His streak of consecutive outs lasted about a month in duration.

“I know that in 1959, **Harvey Haddix** of the Pirates carried a perfect game through an amazing 12 innings against the Braves, only to have it ruined when an error was made by a teammate allowing the leadoff batter in the bottom of the 13th inning, to reach base. The 12 perfect innings—36 consecutive batters retired in a single game—remains a record.

I was interested in determining whether a longer record of consecutive outs exists by a pitcher in multiple games.”

So down the rabbit hole we went. The answer is:

San Francisco Giants right-hander **Yusmeiro Petit** who set a major league record by retiring 46 consecutive batters in 2014. Petit passed **Mark Buehrle** with 45.

And there are other pitching streaks (many mentioned previously in these pages)

Most consecutive wins. 24. **Carl Hubbell** 1936-37.

Consecutive starts with 6 or more innings pitched. 78. **Bob Gibson** 1967-70.

Consecutive quality starts (6 innings/3 runs or less). 26. **Bob Gibson** 1967-68.

Consecutive shutouts. 6. **Don Drysdale**. 1968.

Consecutive scoreless innings. 59. **Orel Hershiser**. 1988.

Consecutive World Series shutout innings. 33. **Whitey Ford**.

Consecutive All-Star game scoreless innings. 14. **Juan Marichal**.

Consecutive innings pitched without giving up a HR. 269 1/3. **Eric Minton**. 1979-82.

Consecutive saves converted. 84. **Eric Gagne**. 2002-2004.

Consecutive saves to start a season. 14. **Josh Hader**. 2022

Consecutive seasons with 300+ strikeouts. 5. **Randy Johnson**. 1998-2002.

Consecutive seasons with 20 wins. 12. **Christy Mathewson**. 1903-1914.

Consecutive complete games. 39. **Jack Taylor**. 1904.

Big hits from Big Papi are back, with a twist, thanks to a new line of **David Ortiz**-branded cannabis products.

Ortiz, the former Red Sox slugger who was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame over the weekend, is enough of a cannabis aficionado to put his name behind a new line of curated “Papi Cannabis” products from RevBrands.

The first product will be available later this week, pre-rolled blunts called “Sweet Sluggers,” that are described by RevBrands as “filled with the finest flower containing Ortiz’s choice strains like Black Mamba #7, Lava Cake #7, Motorbreath #15 and Bootylicious #4.”

Ortiz hit 541 regular-season home runs, won three World Series with the Red Sox, and was a 10-time All-Star. He’s one of only five players with at least 500 home runs and 600 doubles. Flip over his baseball card and the bold numbers tell the story of an extraordinary 20-year major league career.

Fifty-two of the 75 living members of the Hall of Fame were on hand in Cooperstown for Hall of Fame Weekend, including former Red Sox **Pedro Martínez**, **Jim Rice**, and **Wade Boggs**. Ortiz is the 11th player in the Hall who played more games with Boston than any other team.

Jack McKeon, 91, was in Cooperstown. He managed a 19-year-old **Jim Kaat** in 1959 for the Class C Missoula (Mont.) Timberjacks. McKeon was a 27-year-old player-manager at the time.

McKeon then managed **Tony Oliva** in 1963 with the Triple A Dallas-Fort Worth Rangers.

Kaat credited McKeon with instilling confidence in him. He pitched 223 innings that season. McKeon had a seat in the crowd for the induction and stood and waved at Kaat’s behest.

McKeon In 2003, at age 72, won a World Series as manager of the Florida Marlins. In 2011, he took over the Marlins on June 20 for a second time as interim manager following the resignation of **Edwin Rodríguez** and served out the season. In so doing he became, at 80, the second oldest manager in big league history, behind only **Connie Mack**.

Baseball Writers' Association of America's Career Excellence Award. Past winners of the award include the Globe's **Nick Cafardo** (2020), **Dan Shaughnessy** (2017), **Larry Whiteside** (2008), and **Peter Gammons** (2005)

There have been 16 pitchers in AL/NL history who appeared in 1,000 or more games. The one with the most career innings pitched--**Dennis Eckersley** (3,285 2/3 innings in 1,071 games). Eck came up as a starter with the Indians so he racked up more innings than the rest of the list—all relievers.

Others on the list—bet you guessed most of them:

Jesse Orosco	1252
Mike Stanton	1178
John Franco	1119
Mariano Rivera	1115
Hoyt Wilhelm	1070
Dan Plesac	1064
Mike Timlin	1058
Kent Tekulve	1050
LeTroy Hawkins	1042
Trevor Hoffman	1035
Jose Mesa	1022
Lee Smith	1022
Roberto Hernandez	1010
Michael Jackson	1005
Rich Gossage	1002

Five players to record at least 4,000 total bases with the Red Sox--**Carl Yastrzemski** (5,539), **Ted Williams** (4,884), **Jim Rice** (4,129), **Dwight Evans** (4,128) and **David Ortiz** (4,084)

The strikeouts keep coming for two-way star **Shohei Ohtani**, who reached the 10-strikeout mark for a sixth straight outing on Thursday against the Rangers. He's now just one away from tying the franchise record of seven straight such starts set by Hall of Famer **Nolan Ryan** in 1977. The only other pitchers with longer such streaks in AL/NL history are **Pedro Martínez**, **Randy Johnson**, **Chris Sale**, **Gerrit Cole** and **Justin Verlander**.

Ohtani struck out 11 over six strong innings and now leads the Majors with nine starts with double-digit strikeouts this season.

Ohtani has been a strikeout machine this year, as he's punched out 145 batters in 99 1/3 innings, including 68 strikeouts over his last 39 innings.

Justin Verlander keeps on rolling. Early in the week became MLB's first 13-game winner this season by allowing one run on four hits and two walks while striking out nine batters in seven innings to lead the Astros to a 3-1 win over the Mariners at T-Mobile Park. With a 1.86 ERA, he might be the favorite to win the AL Cy Young Award. He's 5-0 with a 0.79 ERA in his last five starts. Oh, he also threw four pitches over 99 mph in the 7th inning. The last time Verlander hit 99 mph four times in one game was Sept. 7, 2013, when he was a 30-year-old with the Tigers.

Justin Verlander, 39, has three consecutive starts with at least 8 strikeouts, making him the oldest to do it since which pitcher **Randy Johnson**, 44, also in three straight starts in 2008.

Then on Friday night, the last pitch of the game thrown by Verlander, which hotshot Seattle rookie **Julio Rodríguez** stroked into left field for an RBI double in the eighth inning, was the only thing that kept the Astros ace from walking off the field Friday night leading the Major Leagues in both wins and ERA.

Still, that did little to diminish yet another dominant effort from the ageless Verlander, who gave up one run and five hits in 7 2/3 innings to lead the Astros to an 11-1 win over the Mariners at Minute Maid Park.

Verlander (14-3) now leads the Major Leagues with 14 wins, and his 1.81 ERA ranks second in the Majors behind **Shane Bieber** of the Rays (1.76), thanks to the one run allowed. Verlander is 6-0 with a 0.86 ERA and 0.84 WHIP in his last six starts and picked up his 240th career win. Verlander improved to 5-1 with a 2.34 ERA and 0.92 WHIP in six starts against Seattle this year.

The thought of winning a third Cy Young Award at age 39 and coming off Tommy John surgery is tough to fathom for Verlander, who won the award in 2011 with Detroit and '19 with Houston and has finished second three other times.

Astros designated hitter **Yordan Alvarez** became the fastest player in club history to reach 30 homers in a season when he went deep in the sixth inning Friday. His homer came in his 84th game of the season.

Nice tribute at Fenway this week for **Joe Castiglione**. Forty years in the radio booth.

Mookie Betts with 23 HRs for the Dodgers has more than all Red Sox outfielders put together. Mike Trout, Aaron Judge, Carl Schwarber all have more HRs as outfielders than the Sox.

Quick—who leads MLB in extra base hits? Bonus points if you said Braves 3B **Austin Riley**. He is hitting .299, 29 HRs and 59 extra base hits. Riley is now on pace to record 95 extra-base hits, which would best the franchise record **Hank Aaron** set with 92 XBH in 1959. Riley's total through the team's first 101 games ranks second only to the 69 XBH Aaron totaled through this same span in '59.

Riley is now just one home run away from joining **Chipper Jones** (2000-01) and **Andruw Jones** (2000-03 and 2005-06) as the only Braves to have consecutive 30-homer seasons this century.

Riley hit .303 with 33 homers last year.

He has a chance to join Aaron (11 times), Chipper Jones (five times), **Eddie Mathews** (three times), **Freddie Freeman** (twice) and **Dale Murphy** (twice) as the only players in franchise history to hit .300 with 30-plus homers in multiple seasons. Chipper Jones was the only player in Braves history with 40 homers and 40 doubles in the same season.

Great question from Dan Shaughnessy in The Boston Globe:

No major league team has had more than five Hall of Famers at one time since the inception of division play in 1969. The 1980 Red Sox had five. So did the 1970-73 Twins. Name them. 1980 Red Sox: **Carl Yastrzemski, Jim Rice, Carlton Fisk, Dennis Eckersley, Tony Perez**; 1970-73 Twins: **Harmon Killebrew, Rod Carew, Bert Blyleven, Tony Oliva, Jim Kaat**.

In the same column he mentioned that Your Boston Red Sox, ladies and gents...Yes, these owners won four championships in this century. But as stewards of an organization that

finished last only once in 80 years (between 1932 and 2012) the Red Sox now have a good chance to finish in last place for the fifth time in 11 seasons.

Red Sox were outscored, 67-13, over a recent five-game losing streak.

The Globe had some comments about **Mookie Betts** and the Red Sox:

Mookie Betts had one at-bat in the All-Star Game. But he was the center of attention for three days with how ably and confidently he represented his sport on a big stage.

Watching Betts address the crowd at Dodger Stadium and get a standing ovation was a reminder the Sox got back only a league-average outfielder and two fringy utility players for him. Beyond the loss of talent on the field, they gave up a player who would have been Boston's next big athletic personality, somebody whose words and actions would resonate across the usual lines.

To hear Dodgers president of baseball operations **Andrew Friedman** and manager **Dave Roberts** talk, Betts doesn't just play for them. He's their partner in taking the franchise to higher ground.

It will be interesting in how much the Red Sox (the team with the highest ticket prices in baseball) invest in **Xander Bogaerts** and **Rafael Devers**.

David Cone won 194 games in a 17-year career. He pitched for the Royals (twice), Mets (3 times), Yankees, Red Sox and Blue Jays. He was a 5 time All-Star and won the 1994 Cy Young for the Royals.

Cone was an integral part of the Yankees late 1990s dynasty, pitching to a 64-40 record and 3.91 ERA in 145 games (144 starts) from 1995-2000, including a perfect game in 1999. Cone was also 6-1 with a 3.86 ERA in 14 postseason games (12 starts) with the Yanks.

Peter Abraham of the Globe -- Looking for a summer read? Try "The Kid Blasts A Winner" by Bill Nowlin. The new book details the 110 game-winning home runs hit by **Ted Williams**. Nowlin defines "game-winning" as providing the final margin for victory. It's a good vehicle to examine another facet of Williams's remarkable career.

Very random stats of the day...**Nolan Ryan**, 28 times in his career the opposing team stole 4 or more bases. Even worse at holding on runners--**Dwight Gooden** 23 times in a much shorter career (2800 IP vs Ryan's 5386 IP).

Hall of Fame week brings around lots of Hall of Famer's stats. **Rube Waddell**. Lefty pitcher 1897-1910 for Louisville, Pittsburg, Cubs, Browns, A's. Won 194 games. I get it that it was a different game then but he did lead the league in strikeouts 6 years in a row and posted an ERA under 2.00 three times.

JAYSON STARK AND WEIRD STUFF

Part of the Red Sox bad month and week was a 28-5 loss to the Blue Jays in Boston. A few fun facts:

This one was 14-0 in the fourth inning. It was 25-3 in the fifth. It was 27-3 in the sixth.

The Red Sox had never lost a game by 25 runs in their history. They were down by 25 in this game with 12 outs to go!

The Blue Jays had never won a game by 20 runs in their history. They were up by 21 in the fifth inning!

No team had scored 25 runs in the first five innings of any game *in 100 years* — since the Cubs did it at Wrigley Field, on Aug. 25, 1922, in a legendary game that ended: Cubs 26, Phillies 23.

The Red Sox had given up two inside-the-park grand slams in the history of Fenway Park. Then **Raimel Tapia** hit the third in this game.

The Sox had also allowed just one batter to get six hits (or more) in a nine-inning game in the last 60 years. They allowed one of those, too — to **Lourdes Gurriel Jr.**

No visiting team had ever hit for the home-run cycle (slam, three-run homer, two-run homer, solo homer) in any game at Fenway. That's in 111 seasons! But the Jays went cycling in this game, because why the heck not.

The Blue Jays had never scored 28 runs in any game in franchise history. The Red Sox had never allowed 28 in any game in their history. But so much for that, too.

So let's put that in perspective. According to our friends from STATS Perform, no team had ever put up 28 runs in a road game, had a home run cycle, hit an inside-the-park slam and had a

player get six hits in a nine-inning game *in the same season*. So then the Blue Jays did that *on one whacked-out night* at Fenway Park, because of course they did.

The Red Sox didn't just start giving up touchdown passes in this game. They also allowed 14 and 13 runs, respectively, in their two previous games, against the Yankees leading into the All-Star break.

This was **Kevin Gausman's** 18th start for the Blue Jays. They hadn't scored in double figures in any of the previous 17. Then they scored 11 runs for him in this game *in one inning*.

So as he took the mound in the fifth inning, that meant Gausman was pitching *with a 22-run lead*. And you don't see that regularly. Best I can tell, from a way-too-time-consuming trip through Stathead, Gausman became only the fourth starting pitcher in the last 74 seasons to find himself out there twirling with a 22-run lead (or more). The others:

Chuck Stobbs, Red Sox, on June 8, 1950. Pitched a complete game (because 1950) in a game in which his team led the Browns 29-3 in the ninth. That's a 26-run lead if you're subtracting along at home (or even if you're not).

John Candelaria, Pirates, on Sept. 16, 1975. Headed for the mound in the seventh, up 22-0 over the Cubs at Wrigley. That sounds like a 22-run lead by my calculations.

Dave Frost, Angels, vs. A's on Aug. 25, 1979. The Angels took control of this one so early, thanks to an eight-run first inning, that they just put Frost on automatic pilot — and let him go all nine in a 24-2 bashing of the Blue Jays. So he, too, got to twirl away with a 22-run cushion.

But before Gausman, you know how many pitchers had ever thrown a pitch up 22 runs (or more) *as early as the fifth inning*? Yessir. That would be none.

The Jays scored 11 runs in the 5th inning after they had nobody on and two outs. That has never happened in MLB history.

Six Blue Jay players scored 3 runs or more. None of them batting in the 1-2-3 slots. Never happened before.

Tapia hit a slam (inside the park) in this game. **Danny Jansen** hit a three-run bomb. Jansen and **Matt Chapman** launched two-run homers. **Teoscar Hernández** hit a solo shot.

They call that the home run cycle. I know I've never seen one. But here's the Weird and Wild part of the Blue Jays' home run cycle:

From the opening of Fenway in 1912 until two months ago, the Red Sox had hit for the home run cycle seven times — but had never allowed one to any visiting intruders. But now, naturally,

they've allowed two of them just this season — and both came in **Nathan Eovaldi's** last eight starts! He also got one started on May 17, against the Astros.

The Blue Jays had played 29 series this year before they rolled into Fenway. They hadn't scored 28 runs in any of those series. Then they scored 28 in Boston *in one game*.

Gurriel was only the fifth player in history to get six hits in a nine-inning game at Fenway. You know what bonds those five players? *None of them played for the Red Sox.* (The others: **C.J. Cron in 2016, Floyd Robinson in 1962, George Myatt in 1944 and Myril Hoag in 1934.**)

The Red Sox bullpen didn't have what you'd call a lockdown evening. By which I mean, they gave up *19 runs* in this game. Let's put that in perspective. The Sox played 14 games in the 2018 postseason — and their bullpen allowed 21 runs in that entire postseason (or 19 runs if you don't count the 10th through 18th innings of games that ended way past your bedtime).

The Blue Jays hadn't had a seven-run inning all season. They finally had one in this game (in the third inning) — *and it wasn't even their biggest inning of this game* (thanks to that 11-run fifth).

All nine starters for the Blue Jays had a multiple-hit game — *by the fifth inning*. That had happened in just one other game in the Baseball-Reference database, according to Sharp: The A's also did that in a 21-7 mashing of the Astros on Sept. 10, 2019.

In fact, every Blue Jays starter had at least three hits — except for **Vlad Guerrero Jr. and Santiago Espinal**, who had spent their previous game ... *playing in the All-Star Game*.

The good news for the Red Sox was **Christian Vázquez** hit two home runs in this game. The bad news was it didn't stop his team from losing *by 23 runs*. According to ESPN Stats and Info, he's only the second player in the modern era to go deep at least twice in a game his team lost by 20 runs or more. The other: **Jim Thome**, for Cleveland, in a 23-3 wipeout in Minnesota, on June 4, 2002.

Thanks to those two attractive blowouts against the Yankees, the Red Sox managed this inspirational feat: They got outscored by 47 runs *in three games*. You know how hard that is to do? So hard that the last team to do it was those Weird and Wild stalwarts, *the Louisville Colonels*, this time the 1894 edition. They got outscored, 60-11, in an August series that had to be relocated to Philadelphia *because the Colonels' stadium caught fire*.

All-Star weird stuff

The losing pitcher in that game was the Dodgers' **Tony Gonsolin**. What was so Weird and Wild about that? Oh, only the fact that *he had no losses all season* at the time (11-0). So how many

other starting pitchers in history had arrived for an All-Star Game with no losses but then took the loss in that game? Correct. That would be *nada*.

Juan Soto at least got three at-bats in this game, so that was good. And what pitcher did he face in the third of those AB's? That would be **Gregory Soto** of the Tigers. According to loyal reader/tweeter Greg Harvey, Soto versus Soto was only the third All-Star matchup ever of guys with the same last name. The others: **Andruw versus Todd Jones** in 2000, **Odúbel versus Kelvin Herrera** in 2016.

Clayton Kershaw in his last start before the All-Star Game: Seven perfect innings — against the Angels. Clayton Kershaw in the All-Star Game: Gave up a hit on his first pitch, to **Shohei Ohtani** — *who plays for the Angels* (and told him he'd be swinging).

The National League has now won *three of the last 25 All-Star Games* (3-21-1). Just to give you an idea of how hard that is, before this year, 20 teams in the 21st century had had a stretch in which they went 3-21. Those teams averaged 103 losses in those seasons. But somehow, a bunch of All-Star teams that included **Albert Pujols, Barry Bonds, Chipper Jones, Chase Utley, Mookie Betts, Buster Posey, Randy Johnson, Max Scherzer, Clayton Kershaw, Roy Halladay**, etc., etc., etc., found a way to go 3-21? Incomprehensible.

Giancarlo Stanton won an MVP award in the National League in 2017. He won an All-Star Game MVP award this year. You know how many other players have ever won an MVP in one league, then won an All-Star MVP in the other league? Exactly one — a fellow named Frank Robinson. Won an NL MVP award for the Reds in 1961. Won an All-Star MVP trophy in the other league in 1971.

Astros not Intimidated, Jim Kaat, O's, Shades of Gray

THEY LOVE NEW YORK — Those two New York teams are pretty good this year, right? Well, tell it to the Astros.

They've played 11 games against the Yankees and Mets over the last few weeks. They threw 1,638 pitches in those 11 games. Well, here's something I think you need to know about those 1,638 pitches:

Not *one* of them was thrown with the Astros trailing!

Oh, they did lose two of those 11 games, thanks to a couple of Aaron Judge walk-offs. But other than that, they never trailed at any point in any game. Unbelievable.

THE KAAT-ON CLUB — As I sat there in Cooperstown on Sunday afternoon, watching **Jim Kaat** get inducted into the Hall of Fame, I started reflecting on the incredible story of this man, who pitched in the 1950s, '60s, '70s and '80s:

- Kaat pitched to **Ted Williams**.
- Who faced **Red Ruffing**.
- Who was a teammate of **Babe Ruth**.
- But Kaat also pitched to **Tim Lincecum**.
- Who played in a game with **Albert Pujols**.
- Who is still active!

Jim Kaat: Walking history museum.

The Orioles lost 110 games last season. They played .500 ball the first 100 games this year. Last time we saw that big a turnaround—only done twice and you have to go back 123 years. There was **Cupid Childs'** 1899 St. Louis Perfectos (from 39-111 to 54-45-1).

And let's not forget **Chicken Wolf's** 1890 Louisville Colonels (from 27-111 to 64-36).

So perfect. Tuesday night at Dodger Stadium: **Gray (Josiah)** versus **White (Mitch)**. Thank you!

Perhaps you were wondering: Was this the first Gray-White duel in history? Well, before I could even ask, the official Name Game guru of Weird and Wild, David Benjamin Firstman, was already answering.

Aug. 5, 1910: **Dolly Gray** (Senators) versus **Doc White** (White Sox) — for the earth-tone championship of the United States of Baseball.

Mets' July 16 doubleheader opener with the Cubs. It was only *the numbers of the two starting pitchers*: **Taijuan Walker** (99) versus **Marcus Stroman** (0). the winning pitcher in this game? Another No. 0 in your program, the Mets' **Adam Ottavino**. That means this was the first game ever in which one Numero Zero started and another Numero Zero got the win.

The Angels managed to lose *six games in a row in which Shohei Ohtani homered*.

it got me wondering how close Ohtani came to the record for most consecutive losses by any team in games in which the reigning MVP homered.

Ken Griffey Jr.	7	1998
Freddie Freeman	7	2021
Jimmie Foxx	6	1934
Jim Bottomley	6	1929
Ohtani	6	2022

RARE STUFF

Don Larsen's World Series perfect game. Game 5 of the 1956 World Series. Yankee Stadium vs. Brooklyn Dodgers.

Only 1 batter reached 3 balls in the count (**Pee Wee Reese** in his 1st at bat)

Larsen only threw 97 pitches. Don has stated that he never felt that much control over his pitches before.

Don pitched only 1 2/3 innings with 4 walks in Game 2, giving up 4 runs (unearned due to an error)

There were only 2 players that came close to hits. (**Jackie Robinson and Gil Hodges**)

Don Larson was the last player alive from both teams when he died in 2020 at age 90.

The No-hitter. There have been 317 No-hitters in Major League history.

The Perfect Game. There have been 23 perfect games in Major League history.

The unassisted triple play. There have been only 15 players that have completed an unassisted triple play.

But you want rare—a World Series perfect game.

Speaking of rare—

Fewest hits in a 9 inning game by both teams: Answer: One hit. September 9th, 1965, at Dodger Stadium. Dodgers v. Cubs. **Sandy Koufax** pitched a perfect game. **Bob Hendley** pitched a complete game for the Cubs and only allowed 1 hit that had nothing to do with the only run that the Dodgers scored. Final score 1–0.

April 23, 1999, third inning, Cardinals v. Dodgers at Dodger Stadium. **Fernando Tatis, Sr.**, of the Cardinals hit two grand slams in the third inning, and both against pitcher **Chan Ho Park**.

1966 - **Tony Cloninger** hits two grand slams and drives in nine runs as the Braves blowout the Giants at Candlestick Park, 17-3. Cloninger is the first National League player to hit two grand slams in a game and is the first pitcher ever to drive in nine runs.

In 1966 **Roberto Clemente** hit an inside the park walk off grand slam.

MINNIE MINOSO

Sunday was a remarkable day for Cuban baseball, as longtime Twins star **Tony Oliva** and White Sox star **Minnie Miñoso** (both elected by the Golden Era committee) entered the Hall.

Miñoso, a career .299/.387/.461 hitter over parts of 20 seasons

Lifting some Minnie Miñoso highlights from a Posnanski column from Cooperstown.

Rookie season 1951 Miñoso: .326/.422/.600, 45 doubles, 14 triples, 10 homers, 76 RBIs, 112 runs, 31 stolen bases.

'53, hitting .313, scoring and driving in 100 runs, and leading the league in stolen bases for the third time.

In '54, he was the best player in the American League — he hit .320/.411/.535 with 119 runs scored, 119 RBIs and he led the league with 19 triples.

He hit .316 in '56, again led the league in triples, and cracked 21 homers.

He hit .310 and led the league with 36 doubles in '57, and also won a Gold Glove in the inaugural year of the award.

He went back to Cleveland the next year and hit .302 with 24 homers. Hit .302 the next year with 21 homers and 92 RBIs.

Then he went back to Chicago in 1960 and put up *another* MVP-type season, hitting .311 with a league-leading 184 hits, 20 homers and 105 RBIs.

Incredible stuff. From 1951 through '60, 10 seasons, Miñoso hit .307 with a .397 on-base percentage. Over that stretch, only **Mickey Mantle** scored more runs, only Mantle and **Yogi Berra** drove in more runs, only **Luis Aparicio** stole more bases (one more base, actually), only **Nellie Fox** cracked more hits.

Add together Miñoso's major league hits, minor league hits, Cuban League hits, Mexican League hits and Negro leagues hits, you come up with the staggering number of 4,073, seventh all-time. Here's that list of players with more than 4,000 total professional hits:

1. **Pete Rose**, 4,769
2. **Ty Cobb**, 4,379
3. **Ichiro Suzuki**, 4,367
4. **Henry Aaron**, 4,245
5. **Jigger Statz**, 4,093
6. **Julio Franco**, 4,074
7. **Minnie Miñoso**, 4,073
8. **Derek Jeter**, 4,059
9. **Stan Musial**, 4,023

HE DID WHAT?

On July 27, 1998, **Tyrone Horne** hit for the "home run cycle" for the Arkansas Travelers. Horne, who spent 12 years in the Minor Leagues but never made it to the big leagues, hit a homer with one on, then a three-run shot followed by a grand slam and a solo blast, making it the only known occurrence of a homer cycle in professional baseball. Horne had a career year that season in the Cardinals organization, finishing with a .313/.402/.601 line with 37 homers and 140 RBIs.



RANGERS AND ONE RUN GAMES

The Texas Rangers are doing something quite astonishing in 2022. They have played 28 one-run games so far, including a 5-4 loss to the Mariners on Tuesday night (and a 4-3 loss to Seattle on Monday).

Twenty-eight one-run games.

They have won FIVE of them.

Yeah, that's right, the Texas Rangers are 5-23 in one-run games this year. That's a .179 winning percentage. It might not be easy to visualize just how horrendous a .179 winning percentage is ... so imagine that the Texas Rangers played ONLY one-run games over a 162-game season.

At their current pace, they would go 29-133.

There are still two months left in the season for things to even out at least a little bit for Texas, but at this moment this is far and away the worst one-run percentage for a team in the 21st century.

1. 2022 Rangers, 5-23 (.179)
2. 2021 Diamondbacks, 10-31 (.244)
3. 2018 Reds, 10-29 (.256)
4. 2022 Angels, 6-17 (.261)
5. 2008 Braves, 11-30 (.268)

In fact, the last team to win such a small percentage of one-run games was ... never. Yes, that's right: Never.

in NON-one run games, these Rangers are 38-30, a .558 winning percentage that, believe it or not, would put them in the top wild-card spot in the American League.

let's first get the American League West part of this story out of the way. Look at the one-run records in the AL West:

1. Houston Astros (18-8, best in baseball)
2. Seattle Mariners (23-12, second-best in baseball)
3. Texas Rangers (5-23, worst in true baseball history)
4. Anaheim Angels (6-17, second-worst in baseball)
5. Oakland Athletics (8-16, third-worst in baseball)

What the heck is going on in this division? What kind of voodoo do the Astros and Mariners have over the rest of the AL West? The Astros are 7-2 in one-run games against the Rangers, Angels and A's. The Mariners are 10-1. It's really striking.

Here, for your enjoyment, are the one-run records for the last 10 teams to win the World Series:

2021 Braves: 26-31

2020 Dodgers: 7-5

2019 Nationals: 17-21

2018 Red Sox: 25-14

2017 Astros: 19-13

2016 Cubs: 22-23

2015 Royals: 23-17

2014 Giants: 18-22

2013 Red Sox: 21-21

2012 Giants: 30-20

Total: 208-187 (.527)

See that? The World Series winners over the last decade are only a touch above .500 in one-run games — and even that's only because of the extraordinary one-run game performances of the 2018 Red Sox and 2012 Giants. Take those two away and these teams are EXACTLY .500 in one-run games.

300 win club:

1. **Cy Young** 511
2. **Walter Johnson** 417
3. **Grover Cleveland "Pete" Alexander** 373
3. **Christy Mathewson** 373
5. **Pud Galvin** 365
6. **Warren Spahn** 363
7. **Kid Nichols** 362
8. **Greg Maddux** 355
9. **Roger Clemens** 354
10. **Tim Lincecum** 342
11. **Steve Carlton** 329
12. **John Clarkson** 328
13. **Eddie Plank** 326
14. **Nolan Ryan** 324
14. **Don Sutton** 324
16. **Phil Niekro** 318
17. **Gaylord Perry** 314
18. **Tom Seaver** 311
19. **Old Hoss Radbourn** 310
20. **Mickey Welch** 307
21. **Tom Glavine** 305
22. **Randy Johnson** 303

23. **Lefty Grove** 300

23. **Early Wynn** 300

Justin Verlander 240 and **Zack Greinke** 222 are the only active pitchers with more than 200 wins. In close pursuit **Max Scherzer** 196, **Clayton Kershaw** 192, **Adam Wainwright** 191. It doesn't feel like we will see another 300 game winner anytime soon unless Verlander continues his success well into his 40's.

CRAFTING A HALL OF FAME PLAQUE: GO BEHIND THE SCENES AS DAVID ORTIZ' HARDWARE WAS CREATED.

Peter Abraham, Boston Globe

PITTSBURGH — Visitors to Matthews International are asked to wear steel-toe shoes, safety glasses, and earplugs prior to stepping out on the main factory floor.

"Please don't touch anything and watch where you walk," said Paul Storino, a project manager.

It's advice well-taken when making your way through a foundry. Molten bronze is about 2,000 degrees, and the workers who handle it are wrapped in safety gear and wear helmets that seem suited for a spacewalk. Even from a distance, the heat shimmers off the golden liquid metal.

Don't get too close? No problem.

But this soot-covered, noisy, and oppressively hot place produces treasured pieces of baseball history that will be admired for decades to come.

This is where the plaques are made for the Hall of Fame.

Matthews, a company that specializes in grave markers and bronze signs of all shapes and sizes, has worked with the Hall of Fame since 1983, manufacturing the plaques commemorating the feats of 160 legends.

You wouldn't know something special is happening inside just looking at the place. The foundry is in a nondescript brick building alongside a busy road about 4 miles from PNC Park.

As the Hall of Fame plaques were being manufactured in late June, so was a large round sign that would be set into a plaza outside a bank, along with a small statue of a recently deceased man with his beloved dog.

The Hall of Fame plaques are a tiny piece of their business and as plant manager Trevor Dunthorne was careful to note, Matthews puts the same care into all its products.

“But the people here love doing the plaques,” Dunthorne said. “We take a lot of pride in them.”

From making the initial mold to pouring the bronze and then finishing the plaques to make sure every detail stands out once it takes its place on the oak wall of the Plaque Gallery in Cooperstown, many Matthews employees have a role in the process.

It starts when Tom Tsuchiya, a Cincinnati-based sculptor, creates the image of the player. He works off photographs provided by the Hall of Fame so the player is shown at a particular era of his career.

The plaque is not a reproduction of any one image. It’s three-dimensional original artwork.

Jon Shestakofsky, a Belmont native, is the Hall’s vice president of communications and education. He shepherds the process and works closely with Matthews to make sure everything comes out right.

If not, they start over again.

The final approval comes from Hall of Fame president Josh Rawitch.

For a player like **David Ortiz** there are thousands of images to choose from. Tsuchiya looks for different angles of a Hall of Famer’s face and found one Globe photograph from Ortiz’s final game in 2016 particularly helpful.

Others are a much greater challenge. One of the inductees this year, Negro Leagues pioneer **Bud Fowler**, died in 1913 and only two photographs of him were available.

“I can look at a grainy photo and use my knowledge of what humans look like and fill in blanks,” Tsuchiya said. “It’s a team effort with the Hall.”

Tsuchiya, 49, started working for Matthews in 2016. His first two creations were Ken Griffey Jr. and Mike Piazza.

“This is a dream come true for me,” said Tsuchiya, a baseball fan who also has created statues for the Cincinnati Reds that are displayed outside of Great American Park. “It’s the most special thing I do.”

The Hall of Famers do not play any role in creating their plaques. The first time they see it is when it’s unveiled at the induction ceremony.

The wording on the plaque is something Shestakofsky and others on the Hall of Fame staff sweat over.

“A labor of love but also something we have to make sure is 100 percent correct,” said Shestakofsky, who worked in media relations with the Red Sox before joining the Hall. “It’s something people will be reading for years to come.”

Ortiz’s plaque reads:

Minnesota, A.L. 1997-2002; Boston, A.L. 2003-16. Powerhouse left-handed slugger who was at his best in the clutch with legendary postseason performances that took the Red Sox from championship drought to three World Series titles in a 10-year stretch. Eight times named top designated hitter while earning 10 All-Star selections. Drove in 100-or-more runs in 10 seasons, leading American League three times. His 541 home runs, 632 doubles and 1,768 RBI are all-time highs among designated hitters. Extra innings walk-off hits in Games 4 and 5 of 2004 A.L.C.S, netted series M.V.P. honors. Set A.L. record for batting average (.688) en route to 2013 World Series M.V.P.

Ortiz visited Cooperstown in June and at the request of the Hall, signed the spot on the wall where his plaque will be. Ortiz also took time to walk through the gallery and look closely at the plaques, particularly of those players he played against.

“This is an amazing place,” Ortiz said. “That plaque means you accomplished something special. That’s when you know you made it.”



GAMMONS: DAVID ORTIZ JOINED A BROTHERHOOD OF EQUALS, WITH A BOND BEYOND NUMBERS

Peter Gammons in The Athletic

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — The two hours before the Hall of Famers walk up the ramp to their seats at the Clark Center is the overture to the symphony; the crowd buzzes with anticipation, MLB Network leads in with two-and-a-half hours of buildup, John Fogerty’s “Centerfield” blares and on this particular day, July 24, 2022, families and teammates — including a Red Sox delegation of **Dustin Pedroia, Mike Lowell, Trot Nixon, Jason Varitek, Kevin Youkilis, Derek Lowe, Tim Wakefield** and other friends — weave their way to their seats.

The day’s ceremony was a celebration of baseball in America, spanning the days of **Bud Fowler** — who was being honored for what he did for the game around the time Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the football manager at Massachusetts’ Groton School — to those of **David Ortiz**, the MVP of the World Series a mere nine years ago. He is also, of course, the slayer of The Curse of the Bambino, which reminded me of a statistic that MLB Network researcher Craig Nordquist gave me.

Only four players could claim 500 HR, 3 World Series titles, and a Hall of Fame berth: **Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Reggie Jackson** and now Ortiz.

Backstage, as the line moves, there are hellos for **George Brett** and the eternally elegant **Sandy Koufax**, hands shaken as **Robin Yount and Rollie Fingers, Ozzie Smith and Pudge Rodríguez, Mike Schmidt and Wade Boggs** all have their annual *how're ya doing?* exchanges. They are comrades for life, all, for as **Tom Seaver** once said, "this is the most exclusive club in America — you can't be born into it, you can't buy your way into it, you perform your way into it."

Joe Morgan held every one of his fellow members in the highest standing. "Here, no player was better than anyone else. We are all peers. Equals. Respected," he said, and that applied to the legendary Koufax, the longest-standing first-ballot HOFer, or Ortiz, the latest. If one worked with Joe, one knows what that meant to him, and how much respect he had for the 'HOF' at the end of his peers' autographs.

Gazing at all the Hall of Fame players and two executives (**Pat Gillick** and **John Schuerholz**) who were so important to the game, the 500 HR/three Ring/HOF distinction ran on parallel tracks when it comes to baseball in America. Two of the four players to accomplish it were sitting on that stage. And the first man to do it began his long road towards the feat on July 11, 1914 — that being the day Ruth made his debut at Fenway Park against the Cleveland Naps. The first batter Ruth ever faced was Naps' leadoff hitter **Jack Graney**, who had two hits in the game, and 108 years and 12 days later Graney was honored with the 2022 **Ford Frick** Award for baseball broadcasting. The Red Sox first baseman that day was **Hal Janvrin**, whose grandson David Silk was a member of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Miracle on Ice team, and whose backcheck and ensuing flip out of the defensive zone with seconds left in the game prompted 2021 Frick Award winner Al Michaels' "Do you believe in miracles?" In New England, one can connect the dots between Babe Ruth, David Silk and David Ortiz, Jack Graney to Ruth, as well as to a HOF journalist named Tim Kurkjian, this year's recipient of the BBWAA Career Excellence Award, and with it permanent recognition in the Hall of Fame.

At one point between speeches, Reggie Jackson took a break to stretch his legs. I asked him if he realized he was in that 500/3/HOF foursome. He stopped, stared, went silent for a full minute. "That's unbelievable," he said. "You know what's really important? The World Series rings." Reggie has five of them.

When Greg Amsinger and I interviewed Ortiz at the conclusion of the ceremony, Big Papi said "I cannot believe it," shaking his head. When one sits in that gallery, you are part of unimaginable history. The previous day, sitting in the lobby of the Otesaga Hotel, Johnny Bench was in a conversation about what an accomplishment it is to play 10 seasons in the major leagues, and what it means for a player who got in his 10 years to have his name on a Hall of Fame ballot. I mentioned **Steve Cishek**, who has 10 years, 143 days of major league service and a 2.91 career ERA. "I never realized he has had that great a career," said Bench. A Johnny Bench "wow" for a kid who didn't make all-Barnstable County in high school.

In one break, inductee Tony Oliva said to Sandy Koufax, "I'll never forget that (in the 1965 World Series) you threw five straight fastballs by me in two at-bats. When the series was over, I went and had my eyes checked."

Bud Selig was on stage, anticipating the 40th reunion of the only Brewer pennant-winning team in 1982, with four of the five HOFers on that team sitting on the stage: **Robin Yount, Paul Molitor, Ted Simmons, and Rollie Fingers (Don Sutton** has passed away). "I'm still (mad) about losing that series," Yount said later. "It's about winning." Kaat pitched in four of the seven games in that World Series. He was wearing his ring when he made his acceptance speech.

It's why when we honor **Gil Hodges**, we think of two years: 1955 and 1969, two of the most significant World Series victories of some of our lifetimes. Hodges, **Jackie Robinson, Pee Wee Reese, Duke Snider and Don Newcombe** were HOFers on the 1955 Dodgers, while **Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford and Phil Rizzuto** opposed them on the '55 Yankees. Koufax pitched in 12 games for the Dodgers that '55 season, but did not appear in the World Series. That Hodges' daughter Irene gave a remarkable speech representing her father and Rachel Robinson remains a preeminent figure in the game made this particular Hall of Fame weekend such a reminder of Them Bums beating the Yankees. Then 14 years later, the Dodgers' New York City replacement, the Mets, winning it with a team managed by Hodges and starring Seaver served as an appropriate bookend on an unappreciated career.

Cooperstown was filled with Minnesotans for Oliva and Kaat. At Monday's forum, they talked of the 1965 emergence of **Mudcat Grant**, who became the first American League African-American player to win 20 games and who helped win the Twins' only pennant until 1987. At that forum, Ortiz talked of the guidance he received when he was a young member of the Twins from an opponent he couldn't hit, Boston's Pedro Martínez. "He was such a good friend that he gave me advice and helped me even though we were opponents," said Ortiz. "Then he'd strike me out."

The weekend is about history and memories, great reminiscences of greats. Kaat recalled his second start, in September 1959 when Dwight Eisenhower was president, and the double **Ted Williams** hit off him, all the way to the 379-foot marker. He remembered **Al Kaline** as the toughest hitter he ever faced, while Oliva remembered Koufax as the best he ever faced. Ortiz remembered Pedro as his toughest foe, at least when he was a kid with the Twins, and then that shifted to **Roy Halladay** when he was the centerpiece of the Red Sox lineup.

All weekend, Ortiz was asked about being released. Pedro remembered something else about that moment in January 2003. At the time, teams had their rosters pretty well set, Ortiz was 27, and his long arms made teams think he was getting close to the age when he would have trouble hitting fastballs on the inner half of the plate because he should have had a long swing. Pedro, however, studied hitters.

"David was one of the few big, long-armed hitters who was quick enough to hit good pitches in," he said. "I told the Red Sox I threw him good fastballs and cutters in and he could get to

them, and that if they then pitched him away he'd use his opposite-field power to put up huge numbers in Fenway Park." Ortiz played in 1,014 games at Fenway with a .310/.407/.587/.994 slash line, 113 OPS-plus and 222 home runs.

At the Monday forum, Kaat made his case for **Dick Allen's** HOF candidacy. Oliva made his for **Luis Tiant's**.

Two days earlier, beginning the weekend in easy chairs in the Otesaga Hotel, Bench talked of the 1975 World Series, which he joked "we won, three to four." He said he still believes that **David Concepcion** belongs in the Hall, and that he told **Ozzie Smith**, "if it weren't for you, Concepcion would have been in years ago."

Bench recalled **Dwight Evans'** catch of Morgan's liner to right in Game 6 of that World Series, and said, "I still can't believe he caught that ball. I said at the time that it looked like the ball caught him." When I did an event before the 2015 All-Star Game in Cincinnati with Bench and Morgan, he made Morgan admit to me that it was the best catch he ever saw. When I worked with Morgan, it was like I was a Boston rival, but he also finally conceded, "Luis Tiant had unbelievable guts and intelligence."

Bench, at the Otesaga, remembered that "Tiant wasn't like a Gibson or Seaver, guys you dreaded facing. I was comfortable hitting against Tiant — I was comfortable, but I never was successful. He just got me out. He was amazing. That World Series really was a lot of fun."

Bench remains an active presence among his fellow Hall of Famers; he checked in with **Derek Jeter and Jim Palmer**, Hall of Famers who could not make the weekend because of Covid-19, to make sure they were all right. When he is in Florida, he likes to go to a breakfast spot which is often jammed full of men in their seventies in baseball uniforms, still playing. He went to see a Savannah Bananas game because Johnny Bench loves the sport. The Bananas' pitcher? **Bill Lee**. In the 1975 series, Lee was beating the Reds 2-1 in Game 2 when Bench, leading off the top of the ninth, doubled to the right field corner. Lee was relieved, the Reds scored two runs, won 3-2, and escaped Boston with the series tied.

Back at Fenway, in Game 7, he went 0-for-3 against Lee, but Morgan's ninth-inning single won the game and the series. **Tony Perez** was in the lobby as we talked, and Bench remembered that he "cried when the Reds traded Tony (before the 1977 season.) He was such a respected man. He was incredible with runners in scoring position."

He recalled how "Tony had knocked in 90 runs for nine consecutive seasons, and on the last day of the next season he had 89. I came up with two outs and runners at second and third, and I was set on doing anything I could to get Tony the chance to knock in another run. I did everything I could do to walk, and I finally did it. Tony got a hit and the RBI."

Baseball is about the players. They are why we spent money for a ticket.

The players are people, with human flaws and emotions, memories and deep feelings. Hall of Fame Weekend is about the greatest people who ever played baseball. It is about Jim Kaat visiting Dick Allen's horse stables and spending the day shoveling them out and talking baseball until the sun went down. It is about Pedro Martinez caring about a fellow Dominican and helping him, even though they were on different teams. It is about the memory of Koufax vs. Kaat in the seventh game of the 1965 World Series, and how the modest, understated Koufax makes time stand still when he walks in the door. Or how Oliva and Rod Carew were roommates for 11 seasons, and how a 77-year-old man who grew up in a town of 2000 in Massachusetts could care about finding the dots to connect Babe Ruth, Jack Graney and a friend named David Silk to Babe Ruth and Big Papi.

Two of my closest friends in my 51 years covering Major League Baseball are **Tim Kurkjian and Jayson Stark**, and I know they would agree that seemingly every day someone plays the role of **Kirk Gibson** and presents something we can't believe we saw or heard or read, because of the players. When the news broke that Jayson would receive the 2019 writers' award in Cooperstown, he immediately got a congratulatory text from **Jeff Bagwell** and a call from Don Sutton.

When Tim's election was announced, the first call was from Johnny Bench, who said "you're one of us."

I was doing a SportsCenter hit for ESPN at the Anaheim winter meetings in 2004 when it was announced that I had won the writers' award, and when I got done with TV I found the first call was from **Ken Griffey, Jr.** Waiting to go up to the stage at The Clark Center, **Willie Mays** asked me to sign a ball, and I told him "I'm not a Hall of Fame player."

"You're one of us," he said, "and if you don't sign, I'll kick you in the behind."

When I told Tim and a few of his ESPN colleagues that story Sunday, one of my ESPN friends said, "when you said 'Willie Mays,' your voice went up so high we all thought you were imitating Tim."

Hey. I still couldn't believe what I'd just heard. In Cooperstown, N.Y., the road goes on forever, and the party never ends.

HE'S BASEBALL'S ONLY MUD SUPPLIER. IT'S A JOB HE MAY SOON LOSE.

Jim Bintliff collects the Delaware River mud that is smeared on Major League baseballs to make them less slippery. But that tradition is in jeopardy.

Dan Berry, The New York Times

A 45-gallon rubber barrel sits in a cluttered garage along the Jersey Shore, filled waist-high with what looks like the world's least appetizing chocolate pudding. It is nothing more than icky, gooey, viscous, gelatinous mud.

Ah, but what mud. The mud that dreams are made of.

This particular mud, hauled in buckets by one man from a secret spot along a New Jersey riverbank, is singular in its ability to cut the slippery sheen of a new baseball and provide a firm grip for the pitcher hurling it at life-threatening speed toward another human standing just 60 feet and six inches away.

Tubs of the substance are found at every major league ballpark. It is rubbed into every one of the 144 to 180 balls used in every one of the 2,430 major league games played in a season, as well as those played in the postseason. The mudding of a "pearl" — a pristine ball right out of the box — has been baseball custom for most of the last century, ever since a journeyman named Lena Blackburne presented the mud as an alternative to tobacco spit and infield dirt, which tended to turn the ball into an overripe plum.

Consider what this means: That Major League Baseball — a multi-billion-dollar enterprise applying science and analytics to nearly every aspect of the game — ultimately depends on some geographically specific muck collected by a retiree with a gray ponytail, blurry arm tattoos and a flat-edged shovel.

"Within the last six weeks, I've shipped to the Diamondbacks, the Rangers and the Blue Jays," the mud man, Jim Bintliff, said recently, as he lingered protectively beside his garaged barrel of goop.

But M.L.B. executives do not exactly get all misty-eyed over the whimsical tradition of what is called Lena Blackburne Baseball Rubbing Mud, which they say is too often inconsistently applied. In their quest to make balls more consistent — and the game more equitable — they have tried to come up with a substitute, even assigning chemists and engineers to develop a ball with the desired feel.

The score so far:

Lena Blackburne: 1

Major League Baseball: 0

Glen Caplin, an M.L.B. spokesman, said that "pre-tack baseballs" are continuing to be tested in the minor leagues. But the reviews have been mixed.

"If you change one property of a baseball, you sacrifice something," Caplin said. "The sound off the bat was different. The ball felt softer. The bar to change a ball is very high."

Still, he said, “It’s an ongoing project.”

Bintliff knows the game isn’t over. He said that baseball’s apparent efforts to displace him and his mud used to disrupt his sleep. Now, he said, he’s become more philosophical.

“If they stopped ordering, I’d be more upset by the end of the tradition, not my bottom line,” he said, standing in his garage in red shorts and white high-top Chuck Taylor sneakers. “If they don’t want the mud, they don’t have to buy it.”

The tradition began with **Russell Blackburne**, a.k.a. Lena, a feisty, weak-hitting infielder who banged around the major leagues in the 1910s before settling in as a major-league coach and manager. A lifer, seen in black-and-white photos beside the likes of **Ty Cobb** and **Connie Mack**.

While coaching third base for the Philadelphia Athletics in 1938, he heard an umpire complain about the struggle to prepare brand-new balls for use. Blackburne experimented with mud from a Delaware River tributary, not far from his New Jersey home, and found that it de-glossed the ball while mostly maintaining its whiteness.

He now had a side job. After a while, every major and minor league team was using what sometimes came to be called “Mississippi mud” — though “mysterious” would have been more apt than Mississippi.

Before Blackburne died at 81 in 1968, he bequeathed the secret spot to an old friend who had joined him in mud harvesting: Bintliff’s grandfather, who left it to Bintliff’s mother and father, who, in 2000, passed it on to Bintliff.

Bintliff, 65, served in the Navy and worked for decades as a printing-press operator, but the mystical mud remained a constant in his life. Even now, he sees himself as he was in 1965, a rail-thin boy loading pails of freshly collected mud into the back of his grandfather’s Chevy Impala.

Over the years, Bintliff and his wife, Joanne, who handles the administrative work, have tinkered with the business model. For example, he used to harvest mud once or twice a year. But expanding their market to scholastic and professional football teams — including more than a few in the National Football League — has required monthly returns to the riverbank.

The fundamental work, though, remains the same, with timing dependent on the tide.

Bintliff will drive his Chevy Silverado pickup 70 miles or so to the secret spot and walk 50 yards through woods. Along with his shovel and buckets, he will have a machete for any overgrowth and a few fibs for any inquisitors. The mud does miracles for his garden, he might say.

Then back to his Jersey Shore home. The drive takes longer than the harvest.

For the next four weeks, Bintliff will strain the mud into the rubber barrel, skim the river water rising to the top, use plenty of tap water to eliminate odor, apply a “proprietary treatment” he declines to describe — and let the stuff settle.

“It ages like a fine wine,” he said.

When the mud has achieved its optimum vintage, he fills the outstanding orders — \$100 for the 2.5-pound professional size, \$65 for the 1.5-pound institutional size, and \$25 for the 8-ounce “personal” size — and heads to the post office to ship some more mud-packed plastic containers.

Bintliff said his profit is modest. For example, he said, Major League Baseball pays less than \$20,000 a year to have 10 pounds of the Lena Blackburne mud sent to each of the 30 major league teams. If a team needs more during a season, it deals directly with him.

He said he is motivated less by the money than by the wonder of it all. Imagine: This mud, containing a very particular mineral composition, is used to bless every major league baseball. And if the wonder escapes Major League Baseball, then, Bintliff said, “So be it.”

The question of where Lena Blackburne’s mud fits in today’s game comes as M.L.B. Commissioner Rob Manfred heads up the drive for consistency. But in a sport of countless variables, this pursuit can sometimes seem quixotic.

To begin with, baseballs are like snowflakes; though each one is handmade and held together with 108 red stitches, no two are identical. What’s more, they behave differently depending on the local environment — a challenge that M.L.B. has tried to address by requiring every ballpark to store baseballs in a humidor set at 70 degrees Fahrenheit and 57 percent relative humidity (The humidor for the Colorado Rockies ballpark is set at 65 percent relative humidity to adjust for the high altitude.).

The humidors are one reflection of the true preciousness of a mere baseball. Less than three inches in diameter and weighing about five ounces, it is the sun around which the game revolves — albeit a sun that soars, bounces, curves and eludes.

To ensure a replenishing supply of baseballs, M.L.B. has become part-owner of the Rawlings Sporting Goods Company, which manufactures major league balls in a factory in Costa Rica. The move also presumably gives M.L.B. some say-so in the finished product.

And to protect the baseball’s honor, M.L.B. has taken several steps, including cracking down on the doctoring of balls with Gorilla Glue-like substances that allow a pitcher to increase the spin rate and achieve almost Wiffle ball movement.

Still, there remains the messy matter of mud.

According to Caplin, the M.L.B. spokesman, the game's front office began receiving complaints that some game balls were both lacking the desired grip and "chalky to the touch," perhaps from lingering too long at the bottom of ball bags. M.L.B. began an investigation that included asking each of the 30 teams to send videos of their clubhouse employees "mudding" the balls for game-day use.

"What you found was 30 different ways of how to apply the mud," Caplin said. "Some guys just used a towel, while other guys really rubbed it in, getting it ingrained into the leather."

M.L.B. executives responded by sending a memorandum last month to every team with updated regulations for the "Storage and Handling of Baseballs." The instructions for how to mud a baseball are Talmudic.

"All baseballs projected to be used in a specific game must be mudded within 3 hours of all other baseballs being used in that game, and must be mudded on the same day that they are going to be used ... Baseballs should not be out of the humidior for more than two hours at any point prior to first pitch ... Rubbing mud should be applied to each baseball for at least 30 seconds ensuring that mud is rubbed thoroughly and consistently into the entire leather surface of the ball ... "

The memorandum directed team employees to consult the "Mudding Application Standards" poster, on display in every clubhouse, to ensure that the color of a mudded ball is neither too dark nor too light, but just right.

Three big league teams — the Yankees, the Philadelphia Phillies and the Washington Nationals — declined to allow a reporter to watch a clubhouse employee engage in the seemingly innocuous but apparently sensitive task of rubbing mud into a baseball. Fortunately, M.L.B. also sent all teams a 50-second instructional video demonstrating the almost worshipful care expected in properly mudding a pearl.

A splash of water is poured into the jar of Lena Blackburne mud. The hands of an unknown clubbie dips three fingertips lightly into the mud, then selects a virgin ball from a box of a dozen. For the next 36 seconds, the hands rub, roll and massage, working the mud into the grain and along the seams before plopping the now off-white ball back in the box.

The simple act is surprisingly solemn, as if the integrity of the national pastime depended on communion between a ball made in Costa Rica and mud shoveled from a Jersey river.

But Jim Bintliff, the harvester of mud, knows better than most that the tides are forever changing. All he can do for now is to continue honoring a ritual begun by a mostly forgotten infielder from the dead-ball era who lives on with every thrown pitch.

The other day, Bintliff threw his flat-edged shovel into his pickup and headed again to the secret place. He came back with 20 pails of beautiful, mucky tradition.

JOE POSNANSKI ON THE BIGGEST COLLAPSES

In the context of Boston Red Sox AWFUL July, he wrote a column on some other great fades.

No. 1: 1995 California Angels

This was an odd year in so many ways — remember, the owners wanted to start the season with scab players, the season didn't start until late April, etc. — so it's easy to miss just how remarkable this collapse was. On Aug. 24, the Angels were 67-44, eight-and-a-half games up in the AL West. But what was really incredible was that even though they promptly lost nine a row and 11 of their next 12, at the end of the slide they were STILL 5 1/2 games up in the division.

It didn't seem to matter how badly the Angels played; nobody else in the AL West was good enough to take it from them.

But then the Angels went on an ANOTHER nine-game losing streak. And this time it did matter because at the exact same time, the humble Seattle Mariners — behind the power of Ken Griffey Jr., and the brilliant pitching of **Randy Johnson** — got red hot. The M's won 10 of 11 and took a three-game lead in the division. In all, the Angels had lost 22 of 28 games when it looked like the division was all but wrapped up.

The Angels heroically won five in a row to end the season, so they ended up tied with Seattle, leading to a one-game playoff ... which the Mariners won 9-1 behind a three-hit, 12-strikeout performance from the Big Unit.

No. 2: Tied — 2011 Red Sox and 2011 Braves

These aren't really tied — the Red Sox collapse was MUCH worse than the Atlanta collapse — but we'll put them together since their dreams ended on the same day, that incredible, absurd, wonderful, terrible final day of the 2011 season. As I might have mentioned, I'm writing a book called *Why We Love Baseball*, which will be, loosely speaking, a countdown of the greatest moments in baseball history.

A little behind-the-scenes: For a number of reasons, I've been going back and forth and back and forth on whether to include that day in the book.

The Red Sox were 82-51 and leading the division after sweeping a doubleheader on Aug. 27. They had the best record in the American League, the second-best record in baseball, and though they weren't thinking about wild cards, well, in case of emergency, they were NINE GAMES UP in the wild-card race.

The collapse was thorough. I can vividly remember tweeting something in the middle of the month — maybe after the Red Sox lost two or three in a row — along the lines of: “At what point do Red Sox fans start panicking?” It was kind of a joke; they were still nearly 100 percent certain to make the playoffs.

Only they kept on losing and kept on losing more — five in a row, then two in a row, then three in a row, then suddenly — after going 7-19 for the month — they HAD to beat Baltimore on the last day to get into the playoffs. They led the Orioles 4-2 going into the ninth inning. Closer Jonathan Papelbon struck out the first two batters swinging — it looked easy. Heck, some Red Sox were probably back in the clubhouse drinking beer and eating fast-food chicken.

And ... yes, I see you Red Sox fans. I see you squirming. I see you trying to choke the computer screen. I see you asking, “Why is this guy bringing this up?”

So, yes, you can ask: “Is this REALLY why we love baseball?”

Anyway, the Orioles came back to win the game, and everybody of note either left the Red Sox or got fired, and that was that.

Atlanta's story was simpler: That was not a great Braves team, but they seemed pretty much assured of the final wild-card spot ...

... and then they lost their final five games, the last one in extra innings, to drop out.

No. 4: 2007 Mets

Oh, the poor Mets. Up seven games after beating Atlanta on Sept. 12. You know how hard it is to blow a seven-game lead with 17 games left?

The Mets lost five in a row ... and their lead over Philadelphia shrunk to 1 1/2 games.

But then they righted things, winning five of six, building the lead back to 2 1/2 games with seven games left. And six of those seven were against two of the worst teams in the National League — Washington and Florida.

On Monday, they lost to Washington 13-3 as a couple of Ryans — **Ryan Church and Ryan Langerhans** — drove in a combined five runs.

On Tuesday, the Nationals pounded future Hall of Famer **Tom Glavine** and took a seven-run lead into the bottom of the ninth. The Mets, impossibly, scored six runs and had the tying run on second with only one out. But Washington's **Jon Rauch** came in, struck out **Carlos Delgado** and got **Paul Lo Duca** to line out.

On Wednesday, the Mets led 4-0 after three innings but again had no answer for Ryan Church and lost 9-6.

On Thursday, they played a makeup game against the Cardinals and got shut out by **Joel Piñeiro** and **Jason Isringhausen**.

On Friday, they were no match for the mighty Marlins.

After pounding the Marlins 13-0 on Saturday, the Mets went into the final game of the season tied with Philadelphia for the division lead. They had Glavine on the mound. All they needed to do was win, and they were guaranteed a playoff.

Glavine lasted one out, gave up seven runs, and that was that.

No. 5: 1951 Dodgers

Yeah, this one's pretty famous ... but I don't think it was a collapse. The Dodgers were 13 games up on Aug. 11. And they didn't play that badly — they were 18-12 over their next 30 games, but the Giants (thanks in part, we now know, to an elaborate sign-stealing system) won SIXTEEN IN A ROW and 23 of 26 to pull within six and a half games on Sept. 8.

The Dodgers went 9-11 the rest of the way, which obviously was not ideal, but it should have been good enough to close out with a 6 1/2-game lead. But the Giants won 14 of their last 15 to force the famous playoff, which just might make it into *Why We Love Baseball*.

In all, the Giants went 36-7 to finish the season.

OK, if we're talking PURE collapses, I might not have put the Dodgers in there and might have instead put in the 1964 Phillies or 1999 Reds (an underrated collapse — they were up a game with five left and lost four of those five).

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

American League single season HR records:

Right-handed batter—**Hank Greenberg** 58 in 1938 and **Jimmie Foxx** 58 in 1932

Left-handed batter – **Roger Maris** 61 in 1961

Switch hitter – **Mickey Mantle** 54 in 1961

The single season HR leaders in the National League are much more recent. Name them.

Right-handed batter—**Mark McGwire** 70 in 1998

Left-handed batter---**Barry Bonds** 73 in 2001

Switch hitter – **Chipper Jones** 45 in 1999.

HOUSEKEEPING

Sunday Baseball Tidbits is distributed every Sunday morning. Its goal is to provide “2 Cups of Coffee worth of baseball news, analysis, history and trivia” from a range of sources. All content belongs to its respective copyright holders. This newsletter is provided for the non-commercial enjoyment of our subscribers. Please email nhsuperseven@yahoo.com for a free subscription. We will never share your email address. Questions, comments, ideas, corrections or pointers to content you think subscribers would enjoy are encouraged and appreciated.

RESOURCES

(coming soon)