

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

8.14.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Maybe last night's win at Fenway on a perfect 9th inning safety squeeze will get the Yankees out of their slump. It was beautiful.

This morning miscellaneous stuff, invention of the knuckleball, position players pitching, players who did time, and trivia. Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

He led the AL in HRs leading off a game in 2003 with 13, then led the NL in HRs leading off a game in 2006 with 12.

7x All-Star, hit 412 career HRs and stole 289 bases.

Finished 3rd in AL rookie of the year vote in 2001, then in 2002 led the majors in at bats, hits, runs scored. His HR high was in the NL in 2006 with 46.

16 years, 4 teams (2 AL, 2 NL)

Who is he?

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Two major league pitchers surrendered homers to both **Hank Aaron** and **Barry Bonds**--**Frank Tanana** and **Rick Reuschel**.

Jim Palmer

Lowest ERA since 1961 (2,000 innings)

1. **Clayton Kershaw**, 2.49
2. **Don Drysdale**, 2.83
3. **Bob Gibson**, 2.84

4. **Jim Palmer**, Andy Messersmith, Tom Seaver, 2.86

Lowest BABIP (batting average for balls in play) for pitchers with 2,500 innings:

1. **Catfish Hunter**, .246
2. **Jim Palmer**, .251
3. **Charlie Hough**, .253
4. **Bob Lemon**, .258
5. **Warren Spahn**, .261

Palmer never allowed a grand slam in his long big-league career. He faced 213 batters with the bases loaded, and hitters batted .196/.230/.234. batters hit just .218 against him in high-leverage situation.

To give you an idea of how good that is: Batters hit .228 off **Mariano Rivera** in high-leverage situations. High-leverage: 0.993 WHIP. Batters hit just .213 off Palmer with runners in scoring position.

Phillies PA announcer Dan Baker has been the PA announcer in Philadelphia for 29 years. He has announced 20% of all players who ever played in MLB.

The Phillies will honor Baker before Friday night's game. By the end of the season, he will have announced 4,000 Phillies games and 300,000 batters — he's said the names of almost 20 percent of all major-league hitters to ever take an at-bat.

Jacob deGrom went 391 days between starts. He struck out 12 of the first 17 batters he faced, touching triple digits throughout (and the first two sliders he threw were clocked at just under 96 mph, the fastest sliders of the Statcast era).

He fanned a dozen in total and every Braves batter at least once, passing Yu Darvish for the most strikeouts (1,523) by a pitcher through 200 career appearances.

Before his hiatus deGrom was rookie of the year in 2014, won 2 Cy Youngs in 2018-2019, led the majors in era in 2018 with 1.70, led the NL in strikeouts in 2019 with 255.

Rhys Hoskins of the Phillies homered in the first inning three days in a row this week.

The Rangers have lost 23 of their last 26 games in Houston going back to 2019.

Mariners 1-0 win over Yankees in 13 innings Tuesday night was longest 0-0 game since introduction of the extra innings ghost runner in 2020.

The Yankees own the best home record in the Majors, going 41-15 in 56 games in the Bronx this season. The Yankees have already clinched a winning record at home, marking their 31st straight winning season at home (since 1992).

The Orioles hadn't had a winning *month* since August 2017. The O's finished 52-110 and 48 games out last season. They hadn't strung together consecutive winning months since April-June 2016. But with a 30-21 record across June and July, the O's have already wildly exceeded all expectations placed upon them this season.

(AL Records, May 21 - August 9)

Astros	46-25
Orioles	42-28
Mariners	43-29
Yankees	43-30
Blue Jays	39-32

12 pitchers age 37 or older have had **Tommy John** surgery and returned to pitching in MLB. **Justin Verlander** joins **Jamie Moyer** (who had TJ at age 47) as only ones who returned to starter workloads. Verlander has a 15-3 record and 1.73 ERA through 20 starts. His 224 ERA+ is on pace to be -- gasp -- THE BEST OF HIS CAREER! What's more, his velocity has crept up in the second half. Per Stats LLC, Verlander was the first pitcher ever to hit the All-Star break with 12

or more wins, an .800-plus winning percentage, an ERA under 2.00, an opponent batting average under .200, a WHIP under 0.90 and a K/BB ratio of 5.00 or better.

And more about Astros starting pitching—**Framber Valdez** threw his 19th consecutive quality start in Thursday's 7-3 win over the Rangers at Minute Maid Park, allowing four hits and one walk while striking out eight batters in seven scoreless innings.

The Astros have the lowest ERA among starting pitchers in the AL (3.16), with Verlander (15-3, 1.85 ERA) and Valdez (11-4, 2.73 ERA) leading the way. The workhorse Valdez leads the AL with 142 innings pitched, and needs one more quality start next week in Chicago to **tie Mike Scott's** franchise record of 20 in a row, set in his National League Cy Young season of 1986.

From the fun discoveries on baseballreference.com

Most career shutouts with 3 hits or less

Nolan Ryan	37
Walter Johnson	34
Christy Mathewson	29
Tom Seaver	27
Jim Palmer	25

The Mets acquired **Daniel Vogelbach** from the Pirates on July 22. New York went 15-2 since he joined the team, and he's hitting .341 with two bombs and 10 RBI.

The Three True Outcomes are homers, walks and strikeouts. Entering this week, the rate of home runs per nine had declined from 1.26 in 2021 to 1.09 in 2022. The rate of walks per nine had dropped from 3.34 to 3.13. The rate of strikeouts per nine had fallen from 8.90 to 8.47.

According to the research of the great Jayson Stark of The Athletic, this would be the first time since 2005 and just the second time in the last 30 years that all three of those rates declined in the same season. Just when it appeared homers, walks and strikeouts were on a ceaseless

quest to take over the sport, along comes this sudden decline (accompanied by an overall decline in runs per game, from 4.53 to 4.32).

The Angels were the first team in history to win at least 25 of their first 44 games and lose at least 33 of their next 44, per Retrosheet.

We somehow went three full seasons without a manager being dumped before the All-Star break. The last had been **Mike Matheny**, who was dispatched by the Cardinals just a day before the break in 2018.

Organizations apparently made up for lost time this year. The Phillies got rid of **Joe Girardi** on June 3, the Angels moved on from **Joe Maddon** just four days later, and the Blue Jays dismissed **Charlie Montoyo** on July 13. Only four times this century has an interim skipper steered a team to the playoffs, most recently **Jim Tracy** (replacing **Clint Hurdle**) with the Rockies in 2009. The Blue Jays' **John Schneider** and the Phillies' **Rob Thomson** both have a legit shot this year.

Which total was higher: **Babe Ruth's** career home runs or his innings pitched? Innings: 1,221 1/3 to 714 home runs

Former MLB pitcher **Nelson Figueroa** returned to the mound Tuesday when the Staten Island FerryHawks, for who he serves as pitching coach, were in need of an emergency arm for a doubleheader. Figueroa, 48, did what any dedicated coach would and tossed a (seven-inning) complete game for the Atlantic League club, throwing a whopping 119 pitches. He allowed 10 runs and struck out four batters.

Also Tuesday, **Shohei Ohtani** hit his 118th career home run, passing Ichiro for the second-most by a Japanese-born player in MLB. Oh, he also tossed another six scoreless innings. **Hideki Matsui**, who hit 175 home runs across 4,442 plate appearances.

Four players this season to homer in the same game that they pitched--**Luis González** (5/15 for SF), **Shohei Ohtani** (6/9 for LAA), **Diego Castillo** (6/22 for PIT) and **Yu Chang** (8/6 for TB).

The last player aged 40 or older with a 5-hit game? **Chipper Jones** (5-for-5 on 7/3/12 at the age of 40 years, 70 days).

Braves 21-year old rookie **Vaughan Grissom** became the youngest AL player to homer and steal a base in his MLB debut in Braves Wednesday win in Boston.

Dodgers have won 17 of last 19 against the Padres. The Padres' run differential for the season is plus-32. L.A.'s run differential in 10 games against San Diego is plus-37.

Mets stepped up in series last weekend with the Braves, taking 4 out of 5. And **Max Scherzer's** pitching line against the rival Braves this year—14 IP, 1 ER, 20K, 0 BB. That's what you want from your ace.

Two pitchers share the Mets' single-game strikeout record--**Tom Seaver** (4/2/1970) and **David Cone** (10/6/1991) with 19.

Aaron Judge blasted his 45th home run of the season in the seventh inning of the Yankees' contest against the Mariners on Wednesday. The home run, which was the 203rd of Judge's career, moved him into a tie with **Roger Maris** for the 16th-most home runs all-time in franchise history.

The homer also keeps Judge ahead of Maris' 1961 home run pace. Should Judge surpass Maris' 61 homers from 1961, he will break the American League record for most home runs hit in a single season.

Next on the Yankees all-time home run list is **Robinson Canó** with 204. The complete list is below.

1. **Babe Ruth** – 659
2. **Mickey Mantle** – 536
3. **Lou Gehrig** – 493
4. **Joe DiMaggio** – 361
5. **Yogi Berra** – 358
6. **Alex Rodriguez** – 351
7. **Bernie Williams** – 287
8. **Jorge Posada** – 275
9. **Derek Jeter** – 260
10. **Graig Nettles** – 250
11. **Don Mattingly** – 222
12. **Jason Giambi** – 209
13. **Mark Teixeira** – 206
14. **Dave Winfield** – 205
15. **Robinson Canó** – 204

Then on Friday night Judge hit number 46 at Fenway Park, adding his 100th RBI for the season.

The home run cycle, in which a player hits a solo homer, a two-run homer, a three-run homer and a grand slam. Which is exactly what **Chandler Redmond**, a minor leaguer in the St. Louis Cardinals organization, did.

Playing the Double-A Springfield Cardinals, Redmond went 5-for-6 with the aforementioned four homers and 11 RBI to lead a 21-4 rout against the Amarillo Sod Poodles.

He began his long ball onslaught in the fifth inning, hitting a two-run homer followed by a grand slam in the sixth inning. The solo homer came in the seventh inning, and he took full advantage of having one baserunner on in the eighth.

So not only did Redmond hit a home run cycle, he hit a home run cycle in the span of four innings.

To go with 5 for 6 with 11 RBIs Redman had 17 total bases. His OPS climbed from .745 to .813 in one night. No major league player has ever had the home run cycle. Redmond was a 32nd-round draft pick in 2019.

The Red Sox have had four rookies make at least three starts this season: **Josh Winckowski** (11), **Kutter Crawford** (8), **Brayan Bello** (3), and **Connor Seabold** (3).

They haven't done that since 2006 when it was **Jon Lester** (15), **Lenny DiNardo** (6), **Kason Gabbard** (4), and **David Pauley** (3). That team won 86 games.

Rafael Devers, **José Ramírez**, and **Vladimir Guerrero Jr.** are the only American League players with at least 20 home runs and 20 doubles.

The Phillies are 10 games over .500 since **Bryce Harper** went on the injured list June 26

Dylan Cease of the White Sox is challenging **Justin Verlander** for the American League Cy Young Award. The righthander is 12-5 with a 1.96 ERA. Only Verlander (15-3, 1.85) has a lower ERA. Cease has allowed one or fewer earned runs in 19 of his 23 starts. The White Sox haven't had a Cy Young winner since **Jack McDowell** in 1993. Their last ERA champion was **Joe Horlen** in 1967 with a 2.06 ERA. Horlen finished second in the Cy Young voting that season to **Jim Lonborg**

This would seem almost impossible with the new extra-inning rule, but **Magneuris Sierra** of the Angels twice drove in the go-ahead run during extra innings Wednesday in a 5-4 victory at Oakland. Sierra had a single in the 10th inning to drive in the ghost runner. The Athletics tied the game in the bottom of the inning. Sierra got up again in the 12th and doubled to give Los Angeles another lead and this time they held it. He was the first Angel to drive in two go-ahead runs in extra innings since **Gary Pettis** on May 28, 1987. They were also Sierra's first two RBIs of the season.

Jackie Bradley Jr. and **Whit Merrifield** were teammates when South Carolina won the 2010 College World Series. Now they're teammates with the Blue Jays. Bradley was selected the Most Outstanding Player of that CWS. Since 1970, Bradley, **Pat Burrell**, **Dansby Swanson**, and **Dave Winfield** are the only players to win Most Outstanding Player in the College World Series and win a World Series in the majors

August 11, 2020, New York State hosted three Major League games for the first time in more than 100 years -- Yankees vs. Braves in the Bronx, Mets vs. Nationals in Queens and Blue Jays

vs. Marlins at Sahlen Field in Buffalo, N.Y. The Blue Jays hosted games in Florida and Buffalo due to COVID.

"Field of Dreams" was nominated for Best Picture in 1990. It lost out to "Driving Miss Daisy"

Suni Lee is known for having one of the hardest uneven bars routines in the world. So, when the three-time Olympic medalist and Saint Paul, Minn., native took the mound to throw out the first pitch before Friday's Blue-Jays-Twins game, it should have come as no surprise that she would try to up the degree of difficulty.

Wearing a customized Twins jersey, Lee did that -- and more -- in performing an effortless flip off the mound and then delivering the ball to home plate, much to the delight of the Target Field crowd.

The moment came almost a year to the date of Lee becoming the sixth American woman to claim an all-around title at the Olympics. The now 19-year-old also received a silver medal in the team event and a bronze in the individual uneven bars in Tokyo.

Now a gymnast at Auburn, Lee scored a perfect 10.0 five times during her freshman season en route to eight All-America honors and a national championship.

<https://therecount.com/cdn-cgi/image/width=1280,f=auto/https://files.therecount.com/site/videos/2645884179/1659974952.jpg>

The Cleveland Guardians today announced the following roster moves:

Optioned Mustard to High-A Lake County. The club did not make a corresponding move.

Mustard, 17, has struggled at a historic pace this season, failing to secure a victory in any of the first 50 Sugardale Hot Dog races at Progressive Field in 2022 (one race was rained out). The tantrum-throwing condiment is being sent down to the Guardians High-A team – the Lake County Captains – to try and get his mental and physical game back to a MLB-caliber level. He is expected to report to the Captains on Monday and race in Tuesday's contest.

2022 Sugardale Hot Dog race results:

Ketchup: 25

Onion: 25
Mustard: 0

Most of Braves Field was demolished in 1955 to make room for campus additions at Boston University. But now, thanks to a creative idea, you can stand at the same spot **Hank Aaron, Lou Gehrig, Willie Mays, Jackie Robinson, Babe Ruth, and Ted Williams** once did.

Using GPS technology and old photographs, the BU athletic department determined the exact spot where home plate was at Braves Field. It's now a bright white landmark on the artificial turf at Nickerson Field.

The plate-sized patch is just behind one of the soccer goals.

Braves Field hosted the 1915 and '16 World Series played by the Red Sox as nearby Fenway Park was deemed too small for the occasion. The 1948 Series between the Braves and Indians was there as well, along with the 1936 All-Star Game.

YOU'RE BUSTED

	<u>Crime</u>	<u>served</u>
Willie Wilson	purchase cocaine	3 months
Sammy Stewart	many drug charges	88 months
Pete Rose	tax evasion	5 months
Raul Mondesi	Public corruption and embezzlement	8 years
Denny McLain	Racketeering, extortion, and cocaine possession, Conspiracy, fraud, theft from a pension fund, money laundering	10.5 years
Ron LeFlore	armed robbery	3.5 years
Jerry Koosman	tax evasion	6 months
Lenny Dykstra	Bankruptcy fraud, concealment of assets, money laundering, Grand theft auto, providing false information.	15 months

Orlando Cepeda	Possession of marijuana	10 months
Oil Can Boyd	Threatening life of mistress	4 months
Vida Blue	Attempting to purchase cocaine	3 months
Willie Mays Aikens	Distributing cocaine	14 years

FERNANDO TATIS JR.

Which situation will have more playoff impact—**Michael Brantley** missing the rest of the season for the Astros with shoulder surgery, or **Fernando Tatis Jr.**'s 80 game PED suspension from the Padres? (if you believe it was an accident that the steroid was in medicine for ringworm I have a bridge to sell you.)

And a (somewhat) counter argument from the Joe Sheehan baseball newsletter:

I suppose if I'd known I was going to need to send a bonus Padres piece tonight, I'd have saved the bonus Padres piece I sent Thursday night.

MLB announced that Fernando Tatis Jr., who has spent the entire season out with an injured left wrist, has been suspended 80 games for violating the Joint Drug Agreement. Per MLB's statement, Tatis was suspended after testing positive for Clostebol, a banned substance. Testing positive for Clostebol was the reason for the **suspensions of Dee Gordon** in 2016 and of **Freddy Galvis** in 2012. If you don't remember their 40-homer seasons, you may be more familiar with clostebol as an essential element of the East German sports program in the 1970s and 1980s.

Per the latest JDA rules, Tatis is ineligible for the 2022 postseason. I would presume the Padres would activate him off the IL immediately, as there's not much reason to continue his rehab assignment. The sooner he begins serving his suspension, the fewer 2023 games he will miss. It appears that even though Tatis is ineligible for the playoffs by rule, Padres' playoff games count towards the suspension, per Jeff Passan. The Padres have 48 games left, so at the least, Tatis will miss April of 2023.

In a statement, Tatis said he ingested the Clostebol as part of treatment for ringworm. He took responsibility for not checking the list of banned substances, and is not appealing the suspension. It's *de rigueur* to mock players' explanations, but I see no reason to do anything but take Tatis's statement at face value. He's guaranteed the bulk of the money he will ever earn, and the fastest way to lose a lot of money is to eat a suspension. The fastest way to blow your chance at the Hall of Fame is to test positive. (Offer not valid for **David Ortiz**, and only David Ortiz.) This all applied, I should note, to **Robinson Cano**, whose second violation was for another Cold War-era steroid.

That brings me to updating a chart I ran when Cano was suspended the first time.

MLB Players Suspended for Analytic Positives, by birth nation, 2005-22

Dominican Republic 27

United States 25

Venezuela 5

Cuba 3

Japan 1

Puerto Rico 1

Panama 1

Since Cano's first suspension, there have been 15 suspensions of MLB players under the JDA for failing a drug test, 13 of them for first-time offenders. Of those 13, nine hail from the Dominican Republic. There have now been more Dominican major leaguers to test positive in the history of the program than players from any other nation. Let's put that figure into context, using the breakdown of MLB players by nationality in 2022.

	Susp%	Over%
Dominican Republic	43%	12%
United States	40%	71%

Venezuela	8%	7%
Cuba	5%	2%
Puerto Rico	<1%	2%
Japan	<1%	<1%
Panama	<1%	<1%

(For the purposes of this exercise, as for the World Baseball Classic, Puerto Rico is considered a separate entity from the U.S.)

Can you spot the outlier?

Dominican players are getting popped at more than three times their representation in the baseball population. They are responsible for almost all the repeat offenses as well -- six of eight, with Dominican **Jennry Mejia** the only player to test positive three times. They have been responsible for 14 of the last 18 suspensions, repeaters included, since 2018.

Throw Venezuela, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Panama in, and more than half the suspensions have been given out to players from Spanish-speaking countries/protectorates, players who make up about 22% of the player pool.

Something is getting lost in translation in this process. Unless you want to argue that Dominicans are just three times as likely to cheat as Americans are -- an argument that would have gotten you a deserved beating in my old neighborhood -- you have to see that there is a systemic failure happening here.

Maybe this news just caught me on the wrong day. Earlier this week, I read a six-year-old Patrick Hruby piece that argued, convincingly, that this war on sports drugs has long outlived its usefulness. I've certainly made the argument, over and over again, that the use of drugs by players didn't affect our game by even a fraction of what people believe it did. There are no magic home-run pills, and the baseball we watched at the turn of the century can be explained without ever using the word "BALCO." (What I wouldn't give to have the drag signatures for

baseballs circa 1999.) The arguments around baseball and drugs have been diseased from the jump, and are still poisoning the air supply a quarter-century later.

So no, I'm not going to call Fernando Tatis Jr. a liar, not going to make jokes about his statement, not going to rend my garments about the cheating cheaters who cheat. I am, however, going to point to these numbers, these numbers that show Dominican players being suspended at a rate that beggars belief, and ask that you think about the program, the process, and the path by which we got here.

The impact of this suspension on the 2022 Padres, strangely, isn't likely to be significant. As I wrote yesterday, Tatis hadn't faced live pitching in a year, wasn't likely to play every day upon his return, and may have been playing out of position some of that time. I project that this suspension costs the Padres a win, which doesn't change my opinion that they will be the first NL wild card.

Not having Tatis in a short series stings a little more. He'd surely play every day, and by then he'd have a month of playing time under his belt. Playoff Tatis would have likely been the best version of the player this year. Quantifying that impact over three or five or seven games is a rounding error -- that's just baseball -- but the Padres will surely miss Tatis in October more than they will in August and September.

HISTORY LESSON 1 – TOAD RAMSEY AND THE INVENTION OF THE KNUCKLEBALL

HE INVENTED A COCKTAIL....AND THE KNUCKLEBALL

Michael Clair, mlb.com

No one ever chooses to be a knuckleballer. Every player would rather throw a blazing heater than be forced to become one of those weirdos who rely on the vagaries of the floating, fluttering, dippy, ducking, diving pitch. It's only fitting then that the man who gets some credit as being the originator of the pitch came to it in his own strange way.

Enter: **Thomas "Toad" Ramsey**. While it may be rude to call him by his nickname -- which he earned for his portly body -- it's also been more than 100 years since he last played baseball, so I think we're OK.



THOS. RAMSEY, "P. Louisville"

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OLD JUDGE

CIGARETTES.

GOODWIN & CO., New York.

Ramsey only came to "discover" the pitch because of an unfortunate accident. Working as a bricklayer, Ramsey sliced the tendon of his index finger, forcing him to hold the ball by his fingertips. This produced two different "curves" or drop-balls.

Sure, it wasn't quite a knuckleball -- and the 19th century sportswriters couldn't possibly comprehend the glory of what the pitch could become -- but it was a kind of knuckler. A proto-knuckleball, if you will, with movement similar to that of a modern-day knuckle-curve.

It was a devastating pitch and batters were helpless against it. The Chattanooga Daily Times said he fired his "drop-ball" from his "southpaw wing as if he were a wizard and his arm were the wand."

Though largely forgotten today, Ramsey's curve kept him in the public memory long after he retired. On Jan. 6, 1923 -- more than 30 years after Ramsey threw his final professional pitch -- the Youngstown Vindicator wrote:

"The ball would leave the hand and go on a straight line to the plate, then suddenly shoot down. Ramsey has almost perfect control of this curve and threw it with as much ease and confidence as most hurlers possess when they slam through straight ones. Ramsey's other curve left his hand in exactly the same manner, but would fly off at a sharp angle just as the batsman would wing at it. Ramsey's curve was pronounced by experts to be the perfect demonstration of rotating a sphere."

That skill led to one of the greatest seasons in baseball history. With the Louisville Colonels in 1886, Ramsey pitched a league-leading 588 2/3 innings and threw 66 complete games. He struck out 499 batters. He basically replicated that performance the next season, including striking out 17 batters in a game against the Cleveland Blues -- this during a time when a pitcher needed four strikes to send a batter packing.

It helped that Ramsey was a major proponent of the K, too -- long before the sabermetric revolution brought that to the fore.

"If I yield up a groover and the fellow at bat gives it a slap and it goes to short, who fields it to first in time, why is that an out for the baseman and an assist for shortstop, and all right for me, in a manner of speaking," Ramsey said. "But look at you -- if that shortstop had been playing a slightly different position, and the ball had got by him, it would have counted as a hit off me. That's funny as after the ball left my hand I had no further control over it."

The best example of his love of the strikeout? Our knuckleball-twirling hero was once offered \$100 to pitch a game, but Ramsey instead wanted \$5 per strikeout.

Naturally, Ramsey aimed to record a K for every out -- even purposefully dropping balls hit back to the mound to help him along the way. He finished with 24, but had to settle for \$50 and a week of room and board.

Unfortunately, all those innings -- and a love of drinking (he's credited as inventing the "Toad Ramsey cocktail": a pint of whiskey dropped into a pitcher of beer) -- meant that Ramsey's career was short. After pitching his first game in 1885, he was out of baseball after 1890 (even though he did lead the league in K/9 that final year).

So, next time you watch a knuckleball float through the air and completely befuddle a batter, spare a thought for the rudely forgotten Toad Ramsey.

AND ANOTHER HISTORY LESSON

Early Wynn was the first pitcher to turn 300 wins into a milestone. When he won his 300th in 1963, he was the seventh modern pitcher to do it (since 1901):

(1) **Walter Johnson**, 417

(2 and 3) **Christy Mathewson and Pete Alexander**, 373

(4) **Warren Spahn**, 341 (he would finish with 363)

(5) **Eddie Plank**, 326

(6 and 7) **Lefty Grove** and **Early Wynn**, 300 exactly

And Wynn badly wanted 300 victories. He won his 299th for the White Sox on Sept. 8, 1962 — and he had three more starts before the end of the season to win No. 300. But he lost all three, pitching terribly in each (he went 0-3 with a 7.04 ERA in those games). In all, Wynn's 1962 was bad enough that he hinted around that he would retire from playing and take a job in baseball management. In fact, the White Sox released him in November for "purposes of retirement."

"This is what Early wanted," White Sox general manager Ed Short said. "In the event the position he seeks fails to materialize — and he wants to pitch again in quest of his 300th major league victory — he will be welcome at our spring camp."

Wynn, himself, was quiet ... but people close to him realized that he desperately wanted 300 victories. In December, Short suggested that maybe the atrocious 120-loss New York Mets should sign Wynn because “he’d be worth a lot of publicity value when he wins his 300th game.” But the Mets declined, with general manager George Weiss saying that the team “would rather forget about the fading big-name stars.”

By January, it was clear that Wynn would take ANY job to get his 300th victory.

From Arthur Daley’s column in *The New York Times*:

Early Wynn is a wealthy businessman who resides in Venice, Fla. He owns a construction outfit, a restaurant and various other enterprises in whole or in part. His home is a baronial mansion. He has a couple of boats and more than a couple of automobiles.

He should be contented. He is not. He still lacks the one thing he yearns for more than anything else in this world, his 300th victory as a major league pitcher.

“I saw Early Wynn not long ago,” his old manager, **Al Lopez**, said around the same time, “and I think he’d like to come back and win TWO games, not just one, to give him 301 victories. Then he’d retire.”

Sure enough, Wynn, at age 43, showed up at White Sox camp in an effort to get those victories. “This is no gag,” Wynn insisted.

“He’ll have to prove himself,” Lopez said.

He didn’t. In his first spring training outing, he gave up two triples, a double, a single and a home run against Philadelphia. It got only marginally better after that, and the White Sox unconditionally released him in early April. The Cubs expressed interest. The Cardinals expressed interest. The Houston Colt 45s expressed interest. At least that’s what the papers said. But none of them signed him.

Then, it was rumored he would sign with Minnesota as some sort of promotional thing. Didn’t happen. The Red Sox and Orioles stirred up some rumors. Didn’t happen. The Kansas City A’s reached out; this seemed like a sure deal since the A’s were owned by Charlie Finley then and Finley loved crazy promotions. “We want Early,” Finley said, “he deserves to win that 300th.”

But, incredibly — considering how rich Wynn was and how much he wanted to win that 300th game — the deal fell through.

“Early threw a figure at me, and I threw one back at him,” Finley said. “As yet, neither one of us is willing to accept the other man’s figure.”

One day later, in a surprise for everyone, Wynn signed with Cleveland, the place where he had become a star in the first place, back in the 1950s. “I feel I’m going back home,” he said happily.

He pitched three weeks later against the White Sox — a perfect setup for him to get his 300th victory against the team that gave up on him. And he pitched very well, giving up just two runs. But Cleveland lost 2-0.

A week later, he pitched against the White Sox again, and he pitched OK — six innings, three runs. But when he left the game, Cleveland trailed 3-2 — Cleveland actually came back and won the game. But Wynn did not get the victory.

On July 4, he threw six shutout innings against Boston — and left the game with Cleveland up 1-0. But the White Sox tied the game in the eighth and it went 14 innings — so, again, Wynn did not get the victory.

He finally won No. 300 against Finley’s A’s in Kansas City — so Finley got the promotion after all. Wynn did not pitch well in the game; he lasted only five innings and gave up four runs. But Cleveland beat up Kansas City starter **Moe Drabowsky** and Wynn finally had his big win.

“It seems so strange after waiting so long for it,” he would say.

Here’s the final part of the story: Wynn pitched in 15 more games that season — 14 of them in relief — and he pitched well, posting a 1.65 ERA in 27 innings. But he never did get victory No. 301. Cleveland lost 12 of the 15 games. And in the three they won:

1. Wynn started against Kansas City but didn’t last the five innings required for a victory.
2. Wynn picked up a save in a September game against Detroit by pitching 2 1/3 scoreless innings.
3. Wynn came in for two batters against the Angels, gave up a hit to **Jim Fregosi**, got **Charlie Dees** to line out, and he never threw another big-league pitch.

HOW 'FIELD OF DREAMS' TURNED IOWA INTO BASEBALL'S MECCA—THEY ARE BUILDING IT AND THEY ARE COMING

John Jurgensen, Wall Street Journal

DYERSVILLE, IOWA—"Field of Dreams" is a quiet constant, a baseball movie that has been stirring feelings in people for 33 years. Suddenly it's producing a bumper crop of business, too.

Major League Baseball built a tentpole event here with last summer's inaugural "MLB at Field of Dreams," which climaxed with a Chicago White Sox walk-off home run against the New York Yankees. The Fox broadcast drew more TV viewers than any regular-season game in 16 years. The rural pageantry has returned for a second year. On Thursday the Chicago Cubs play the Cincinnati Reds in an 8,000-seat park carved out of the corn next to the ballfield where the film was shot.

The former movie set itself, long a mom-and-pop tourist attraction, is about to undergo an \$80-million expansion under its new owners, a group that includes Hall of Fame player **Frank Thomas**. First up: a tournament complex that can host 80 youth baseball and softball teams. Next, an RV park and a 104-room boutique hotel.

Meanwhile, 140 miles to the west in Polk City, there's now a second "Field of Dreams" field. For a TV series based on the movie, crews constructed a diamond and erected lights next to a hilltop farmhouse. The farmers who own the property, the Moeckly family, nurtured the outfield corn to camera-ready height.

"We were literally out here spoon feeding some rows with fertilizer to get it going" after a cold, wet spring, says Anna Moeckly, whose husband, Tyler, is a seventh-generation farmer on the land.

"Field of Dreams" is a flagship commodity in the market where people's emotional attachment to movies meets their commercial value as brands. Various industries are trying to leverage the reverence that certain titles have accrued over decades. "A League of Their Own," another beloved baseball movie, relaunched this week in the form of a streaming TV series on Amazon Prime Video.

There's something more to "Field of Dreams" than intellectual property. The plot is sentimental, slow and doesn't fully make sense. Yet the tale of a baseball lover who conjures a team of ghostly players from his cornfield taps directly into the sport's lifeblood of nostalgia. Which is why the MLB—working to shore up America's pastime—licensed the movie's title, borrowed its setting and recreated its imagery with star players emerging from the rows.

"Field of Dreams" consistently ranks in the top 10% of on-demand titles in the Universal movie library, which numbers franchises like "Jurassic Park" and "Fast & Furious." Fans treat the

former set in Dyersville like a pilgrimage site. More than 300,000 visitors are expected this year. Some stay overnight in the white farmhouse nestled above the ballfield (fully booked through November). Weekend packages with exclusive ballfield access go for \$900.

People pop the question and get married at home plate. Some sprinkle the ashes of deceased loved ones.

“More than I’d like to know,” says Dan Evans of Go the Distance Baseball, LLC, the firm that owns the site and is named for, what else, a “Field of Dreams” quote.

‘If you build it...’

In the late 1980s, Hollywood didn’t want another baseball movie. When producer Larry Gordon shopped director Phil Alden Robinson’s script to studios, he emphasized the emotional hook instead: a tale of spectral players helping a man reconcile with his estranged and long dead father.

“We talked about how everyone has someone they miss and would like to see one more time,” says Mr. Gordon, recalling pitch meetings with his younger brother, Chuck, his producing partner. “And we talked about our daddy.”

The siblings’ father never saw them succeed. Before dying of a heart attack at 56, he fought with Larry, pushing him to give up on the film business and take over the family furniture store in Belzoni, Miss.

Every studio rejected the Gordons’ movie, but eventually the producers dragged a yes out of Tom Pollock, then chairman of Universal Pictures (and Larry’s former lawyer). The brothers promised to deliver Kevin Costner and a budget under \$15 million.

“Field of Dreams” came out after baseball’s opening day in 1989. It landed in the year’s box office top 20 and earned a best picture nomination, plus Oscar nods for Mr. Robinson’s screenplay and James Horner’s score.

The bigger payoff was longevity. “Field of Dreams” joined the baseball movie canon, and with each new home-video format—from VHS to LaserDisc, DVD to download—Universal pushed fresh editions of the film.

Mr. Gordon’s cut of the movie’s net profits last year was enough to cover the lease on his Lexus SUV, and then some, he says. The producer is now 86 years old and doing a documentary about the late Bill Russell for Netflix. He helped make hits (“48 Hrs.,” “Predator,” “Die Hard”), disappointments (“Waterworld,” also featuring Mr. Costner), plus other Oscar nominees (“Boogie Nights”) and cult favorites (“The Warriors”). “Field of Dreams” is the only movie he has devoted a wall of his home office to for memorabilia.

“It’s the Old Man River of movies. It just keeps rolling,” Mr. Gordon says.

He cries every time he watches it and thinks of his late father and “my baby brother,” who died at 73 in 2020. Chuck’s daughter scattered some of his ashes at second base in Dyersville.

The intellectual property game

Staying power made “Field of Dreams” ripe for a TV adaptation, as did the I.P. business model. One company, NBCUniversal, would retain end-to-end ownership as the project moved from Universal Pictures library to Universal Television studio to Peacock streaming platform.

In recent years, Universal Television rebooted numerous back catalog titles, including “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,” for Peacock. The studio saved “Field of Dreams” for Michael Schur, a producer of shows from “The Office” to “Hacks.” Mr. Schur is a baseball fanatic signed to a long-term production contract with Universal.

“They pinned it for him in the building. They were just hoping he would want it because they valued it as massive I.P.,” a person involved in the show said.

But this plan got derailed on the way to streaming. Shortly before shooting on Mr. Schur’s TV show was set to begin this month in Polk City, Peacock reversed course. The streamer canceled its order for the seven-episode limited series, budgeted at roughly \$10 million per episode, according to people familiar with the project. NBCUniversal parent company Comcast Corp. recently announced that Peacock lost \$467 million in the second quarter with paid subscribers flat at 13 million.

Peacock says the decision not to go forward on the limited series was due to multiple factors including costs and timing.

Producers are in talks with other platforms about getting the show picked up, in hopes it can be shot in Polk City next summer instead. With the project in limbo, the Moecklys are like Mr. Costner’s character, who plowed out several acres of corn for a ballfield where nothing might happen. Still, the farmers say they’re delighted to own a potential “Dreams” field, and they have 2,400 acres to spare for their corn, soybeans and cattle.

A Baseball Mecca

On a sunny July weekday in Dyersville, trucks rumble in as crews set up for the MLB game. On the movie field itself, however, reality seems distant. An old timer wearing an old timey uniform spends an hour on the mound pitching to strangers who take turns at home plate. People play catch, duck hardballs hit by fellow visitors and wander into the corn around the outfield.

James Earl Jones's climactic monologue in the movie ("People will come...") set the stage for a real-life tourist magnet. Two farmers originally owned the land that the ballfield straddled. They had a fence cutting along the infield and competing souvenir shops on either side. In the 2010s, the property's next owner envisioned a mecca for youth baseball teams but didn't get enough zoning clearance and buy-in from neighbors to break ground.

Today, Universal receives licensing fees from sales of "Field of Dreams"-branded merchandise sold in the barn-shaped gift shop, but the studio doesn't have a financial stake in the movie site itself, according to Go the Distance Baseball. Mr. Thomas, the Hall of Fame slugger, is the company's CEO.

Mr. Evans, its chief operating officer and a former general manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, points to the sea of corn and a distant ridgeline that he says will hide construction of the new tournament complex. Like fans quoting lines from the movie, the site's owners repeat promises to preserve its vibe.

"We've got to make sure that this doesn't change, because if it does, the reverberation will not be fun," Mr. Evans says. "That visual will remain undisturbed."

HOW MLB'S NEW RULE LED TO A SLEW OF POSITION PLAYERS PITCHING—BUT COULD HELP FIX BASEBALL

Jayson Stark, The Athletic

It isn't often that any professional sports league changes its rules in the middle of a season. But it happened in baseball, a mere seven weeks ago. It's possible you never even noticed.

On June 20, Major League Baseball dropped its roster hammer on all 30 clubs by imposing a rule that placed a 13-pitcher limit on every team. That news didn't quite lead "SportsCenter," but here's the important thing the rule accomplished:

It pulled the plug (mercifully) on the nine-man (let alone 10-man) bullpens that had begun to proliferate across baseball after the pandemic. Hallelujah.

The long-term impact of this rule is momentous. If a team employs fewer relief pitchers, but still needs 27 outs a night, it seems obvious how that team *should* react, right?

Just push those starting pitchers a little deeper every night, and *voila!* If the starter goes six-plus innings and the relievers have to get only eight or nine outs a game, instead of 12 to 14, then who even misses that ninth dude in the 'pen?

Restoring the prominence of the starting pitcher in this sport would be — and should be — good for everybody. So why not get that restoration started!

But is that what happened? C'mon, it's baseball. Of course that's not what happened.

Oh, innings pitched per start *are* up slightly since the 13-pitcher rule kicked in (from 5.11 to 5.33). But we can sum up the three biggest things that happened this way:

1. MANAGERS HATE THIS RULE (OBVIOUSLY)

You know what managers think about? Winning! But also: How to orchestrate their pitching staff every night so the right pitcher is matching up with the right hitter in pretty much every moment of every game. So if you gave them a 17-man bullpen, they'd all say: *Cool!*

You know what managers don't have the bandwidth to care about? How to make baseball a more watchable, compelling entertainment product. So guess what most of them think of a rule like this — even though they knew it was coming (since it had been announced more than a year ago but then delayed because of pandemic ripple effects)?

"I don't like it," Dodgers manager **Dave Roberts** said. "It just doesn't make sense. I think that once you have a roster number, they're all players. They're all members of the Major League (Baseball) Players Association. So you should be able to put your roster together in the best way you see fit. I don't think that they should dictate the number of pitchers *or* hitters. That's a strategy."

2. FRONT OFFICES HATE THIS RULE (OBVIOUSLY)

You know what modern front offices think about? Winning! But also: How to maximize roster construction in a way that gives them even a microscopic edge on all those other teams, because that adds up over 162 games.

So guess what modern front offices would rather not worry about? Right. Any rule that gets in the way of that, no matter how thoughtful the reasoning behind it.

"I haven't found one person who likes or understands this rule," one AL exec complained after the 13-pitcher limit arrived on his doorstep. "Everyone hates it. No one likes it. And the result is a ton of position players pitching, a ton of pitchers being (designated for assignment) and a bunch of pitchers changing teams constantly — because you run out of healthy pitchers you can use, so you have to make a move to bring one in. So I just do not understand the rule."

3. YOUR BACKUP SHORTSTOP IS WORKING ON HIS SLIDER

Me to an executive of one club recently: *"It seems like the biggest effect of this 13-pitcher rule is that two or three position players pitch every day."*

This exec's pithy response: *"Get used to it."*

Hoo, boy. The concept here is so simple. The long-term goal of limiting relievers is to incentivize teams to get more innings out of their starting pitchers. That's still true. Unfortunately, the short-term impact seems to be that teams are getting more innings out of their backup shortstop.

Position players pitching

2016 — 26 all season

2022 — 34* just since this rule took effect on June 20

(*through Aug. 9 games)

Me to Dave Roberts: *"The idea of this was to incentivize more innings from starting pitchers. Why is that not happening?"*

Roberts' response: *"It's not gonna happen."*

So a typical day in baseball now features an average of nearly one position player pitching for somebody's team. But we've had 10 days, in barely the month and a half since this rule became official, in which *multiple* position players have pitched. We even had one day (July 5) when *five* of them pitched.

So is that good? We'll discuss shortly. But first ...

Here's why baseball is doing this

We don't understand this rule, front offices say? OK, then let's explain this rule, why it matters and why it will continue to matter (since there's a good chance it won't be going away).

Maybe someone has mentioned this to those front offices at a meeting somewhere, but *baseball is an important form of entertainment to millions of Americans*. According to Nielsen (via the Sports Business Journal), baseball's ratings on Regional Sports Networks this season have been more than double the best rating of any prime-time show on any major network.

So in a related development, the entertainment value of this sport is emerging as a massive priority for everyone in charge of charting a course toward the future. That should make people happy, shouldn't it?

All right, don't answer that. Our world is filled with citizens who believe the Rules of Baseball were once delivered to Abner Doubleday on a stone tablet, never to be messed with. But guess what? That's ridiculous.

Every other professional sport routinely tweaks its rules in the name of making its product more entertaining. And what's the definition they all use for "more entertaining"?

What fans tell them they want.

They all poll their fans constantly. Baseball is no different. And what baseball fans say they want is:

- More action.
- Less dead time.
- More great athletes doing that awesome athletic stuff they do.
- More doubles, triples, stolen bases, runners in motion, etc.

And now here's the important part, at least as it applies to this rule. They also want:

- Fewer pitching changes!
- More starting-pitching matchups fans can get excited about — in part because they can feel reasonably sure those starting pitchers will be out there for more than like, 12 outs.

So baseball is experimenting with numerous rule changes in the minor leagues and independent leagues, to address that first set of Things Fans Say They Want. But getting that second part accomplished — pushing back on the procession of three-out relievers who all throw 99 mph and turn the end of games into a giant swing-and-miss festival — that's trickier.

Which brings us back to our original question: Why is baseball imposing this rule? That's why!

Why is this even a problem?

I know it seems hard to leave your air-conditioned TV cave, when it's 106 degrees out, to go watch a baseball game. But this just in: Those games are more air conditioned than ever — thanks to all that whiffing going on!

MLB strikeout percentage

	Overall	Vs. Relievers
2022	22.4%	23.5%
10 years ago	19.8%	21.9%
20 years ago	16.8%	18.5%

(Source: FanGraphs)

So if What Fans Say They Want is more action, then here's what *isn't* the solution:

A sport where nearly one of every four hitters in the late innings is spewing out strikeouts against the spin-rate kings marching out of every bullpen.

So why is baseball attacking this problem with the 13-pitcher roster limit? Because this is getting out of control.

- The average team used 35.6 pitchers last season. Ten years ago, it was 24.1.
- The two World Series teams last October — the Braves and Astros — ripped through 61 pitchers over the course of the season. As recently as 2010, the team that won the World Series (the Giants) used 19 pitchers all year.
- Relief pitchers faced more than 78,000 hitters last season. Yes, 78,000. That's up *nearly 16,000* just over the last 10 years.

Meanwhile, what teams have asked from starting pitchers has been (you guessed it) less and less and less.

- Fifty years ago, the average starting pitcher lasted more than seven innings per start.
- But just 10 years later, that number had dropped to 6.2 innings per start — and was still at 6.0 as recently as 2014. So why does that now seem more like 1814?
- Because, by the shortened season of 2020, that rate was down to (gulp) 4.8 innings per start ... then 5.1 last year and now 5.2 this year.

That has to change — for all sorts of reasons. The question is ...

Has anyone seen the six-inning starter factory?

When front offices grumble about rules like the 13-pitcher limit, they do that even though they've been told why that rule exists and why it's complicating their lives. But here's how they respond:

Maybe in a vacuum, in a meeting room, in a December Zoom session, it sounds totally logical to ask starters to go deeper into games. But in real life, how is that even possible?

"At our meetings, MLB talked about this," an exec said, "about how to incentivize starting pitchers to go three times through the order again. But I don't know how. They're not

programmed to do it. And the data tells you most of them have a hard time doing it. **Gerrit Cole** can do it, but not everybody is Gerrit Cole.”

Here’s another exec’s similar view:

“The honest truth is,” he said, “that there is no one in any front office, and no manager, who would say, ‘If I had Gerrit Cole and **Justin Verlander**, I’m still going to take him out of the game because I like using my ‘pen.’ Literally no one thinks that. That’s the flaw in the rule.

“This rule doesn’t create more starters who can go deeper into games,” he went on. “So the result is you have position players pitching because the alternative is pitching a reliever who you’d rather not pitch and then you have to go make more roster moves.”

It’s all very rational. It’s all very true. There once was a time when starting pitchers were developed and trained to go three or four times through a lineup. That time isn’t this time. So of course teams rebel at the idea of asking pitchers to do a thing they’ve stopped being asked (or trained) to do. But ...

Some teams have gotten the memo. Since the 13-pitcher rule dropped, Astros starters have averaged an additional two-thirds of an inning per start. Mets and Dodgers starters have averaged nearly an extra half-inning per start. And Phillies, Mariners and Guardians starters have averaged at least 5.5 innings per start. So there’s that.

But here’s what should be happening beyond big-league mounds and coaches’ meetings: Inside the most savvy front offices’ think tanks and player-development planning rooms, shouldn’t it be sinking in by now that this rule is here to stay? And if it is, isn’t it time to make a dramatic shift in how pitchers are developed?

That happens by changing scouting priorities. That happens by changing development plans. That happens by making innings and volume the priority again, as opposed to mph and rpm. We’ll revisit those changes shortly, too. But first ...

Is the position-player pitching schtick still fun?

For the last couple of decades, I can guarantee that nobody loved a rollicking pitching appearance by the backup catcher more than I did. For a while there, I even used to take pride in calling (and writing about) every single position player who went to the mound.

Good thing I’m not trying to do that anymore. I’d be talking to those guys more than I talk to my family.

Position-player pitching appearances used to be a hilarious little novelty. They’re now an epidemic.

Year-by-year position-player pitching appearances

“Olden days”

2005 — 1

2006 — 0

2007 — 7

2008 — 3

“Nowadays”

2022 — 76 (through Aug. 9 games)

2021 — 89

2020 — 95*

2019 — 90

(*prorated over 162 games)

(Source: *Baseball-Reference/Stathead*)

But this pace has gotten even more out of hand over the last month and a half. Since the 13-pitcher rule arrived, here is just some of what has ensued:

- Since June 20, MLB has averaged five position players trotting to the mound per week. Before that, it was 3.9 per week. But as recently as six years ago, it was once a week. And 10 years ago, it was two per *month*.
- Also since June 20, MLB has had four position players pitch in nine-inning games *that their team won*, which turned those into previously unheard of games in which position players pitched *for both teams*.
- Before this rule, there had been one game in the expansion era — all 62 seasons of it — in which a position player pitched and finished a nine-inning game in which his team threw a shutout. That’s now happened twice just in the last month, with **Luis González** (Giants) and **Hanser Alberto** (Dodgers) doing those honors.
- And finally, there was July 5 — the first day in history when position players pitched *for five different teams*. For the record, I didn’t call all of them (or any of them).

So is this still fun? At the All-Star Game in Los Angeles, *The Athletic* asked a bunch of players. Here’s a sampling — first from guys who remain fans of it.

Brewers reliever Devin Williams: “I like seeing them get on the mound. I feel like they think that it’s so easy — and then they get out there. Like, for instance, (Mike) Brosseau pitched (for

the Brewers), and I've never seen him sweating so much. ... He's always talking crap to me. But now he's had to get on the mound a few times. He knows how hard it is."

Braves catcher Travis d'Arnaud: "It makes it fun. Like, the game is out of hand, obviously. And it just brings back a little fun dynamic back into it when the score is out of hand, instead of it kind of being boring and everybody just wants to get (the game) over."

White Sox closer Liam Hendriks: "I want to see them pitch because that means a pitcher might get an opportunity to hit, like David Robertson did earlier. I haven't gotten a hit in the big leagues yet. So that's all I'm looking for."

But then there were the realists.

Pirates closer David Bednar: "Personally, I don't really like it, just because it means we're losing. It was fun, you know, whenever it was every now and again."

Blue Jays closer Jordan Romano: "If I see it once a season, that's enough. ... Like (then) it's kind of funny. It's kind of unique. You could have a laugh about it. But if you're seeing it once a month, that's way too much."

Yankees closer Clay Holmes: "It's definitely not ideal. I don't think it's great. When it's every once in a while, I understand it. But I don't know. It's not something I want to see continuing."

So what's the solution? Here's a shocker. Holmes thinks the 13-pitcher roster cap *is* the solution.

"I do think there needs to be a cap to the pitching staff," he said. "I mean, you can't just kind of go crazy with a pitcher, about the way they're used. I don't know. It's definitely not going to be easy. But like I said, I don't like to see it a ton. It's going to take some good brainpower."

Well, if we're in need of brainpower, I'm happy to help. So here's my take.

I know there's an argument that even at this rate, the average team is running a position player to the mound only three or four times a year, so what's the big deal? But if even I've reached the point where the position-player pitching yuks don't seem quite as yuk-ified, I think baseball should tighten its (obviously) lax rules on when these guys can pitch. So maybe ...

- Only when their team is losing by 10 runs or more?
- No more than twice per team per season?
- Impose some sort of roster penalty every time a team does it?

I'm open to anything. Have an idea of your own? Let me know in the comments section. If it's good enough, I'll make you famous. But it's time to try something.

"It can be a nice novelty, every once in a while, to see a position player pitching at the end of a blowout," said one of the executives quoted earlier. "But I don't think anybody thinks it's good for baseball to have five of them pitching in one day."

So where is it all leading?

Before we gaze into the future, let's review. What is baseball trying to accomplish, not simply with this rule but in its vision of delivering more of What Fans Say They Want?

A game with better rhythm and pace? The pitch clock, coming to a big-league park near you, could solve that issue all by itself.

More great athletes doing their great-athlete stuff? Turn up the efforts to keep attracting those sorts of athletes to play your sport. Then figure out ways to nudge the strikeout rate downward so the ball might actually be in play a few times an inning.

Fewer pitching changes? It might take a while. But you'd figure that eventually, the caps on how many relievers are hanging out in any given bullpen would help with that.

More starting-pitching matchups to get stoked about? Hmmm. Tough one. But ideally, these last three categories would all be tied together.

There is no magic potion that can create more action, more balls in play and less swinging-and-missing. So what baseball ought to do is what it's already aspiring to do:

Tweak various rules, as subtly as possible, to see if they can have an impact on what I like to call the One True Outcome: a strikeout rate that is gobbling up — and covering up — way too many of the best parts of this sport.

Case in point: The All-Star Game. On Monday, the most magnetic hitters in baseball captivate and energize the masses with a Home Run Derby fireworks display that shows off just how gifted they are. Then on Tuesday, put those same magnetic hitters up against a procession of untouchable pitchers — and nobody on the National League team even gets a hit *for three hours*.

So this sport needs to restore its balance. And that's where this 13-pitcher limit comes in. It's part of the balancing act — to *force* teams to go back to an age when starting pitchers were dueling with the cleanup hitter four times a game, and not just maxing out until it was time for the fire-breathing bullpen onslaught to begin.

But clearly, there needs to be more. ... More incentives for teams to lean on starters longer. (Did anyone say *the Double Hook*?) ... Evolving shift limits that open up the field and (gasp) bring back the line drive and the ground-ball single. ... A clearly stated long-term vision that allows managers and general managers to plan for the changes ahead. ... A deal with the union that gets players on board with all of it.

I hear people say all the time: *Leave the game alone! Everyone will adjust in time!* Really? How's that working out? Modern front offices are too good. They're the ones who have pushed this sport through more change in the last 10 years than it had seen organically in the previous 100 years.

That means it's time for baseball to push back. So welcome to the world of 13-pitcher roster limits. A month and a half in, it hasn't accomplished much besides elevating **Hanser Alberto's** Cy Young Award credentials. But give it a few years — and maybe it can be part of baseball's path to delivering more of What Fans Say They Want.

By which we all mean: A more entertaining tomorrow.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWER

He led the AL in HRs leading off a game in 2003 with 13, then led the NL in HRs leading off a game in 2006 with 12.

7x All-Star, hit 412 career HRs and stole 289 bases.

Finished 3rd in AL rookie of the year vote in 2001, then in 2002 led the majors in at bats, hits, runs scored. His HR high was in the NL in 2006 with 46.

16 years, 4 teams (2 AL, 2 NL)

Who is he?

Alfonso Soriano

Yankees, Rangers, Cubs, Nationals

HOUSEKEEPING

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