

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

8.28.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

My mood has brightened—off to 4 year-old grandson's birthday party and the Yankees have awakened. Fun to think that **Paul Goldschmidt** has a legit shot at the triple crown. Grab a coffee and dive into Peter Gammons on baserunning, an early look at the 2023 balanced schedule, part 1 of a list from Baseball Egg that is your Sunday morning history lesson, **David Ortiz** and steroids, miscellaneous stuff and trivia. 35 games to go. Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Color commentary last night from **John Smoltz** during Cards-Braves game when asked about Braves chances to make it back-to-back World Series wins, "you don't see National League teams winning back-to-back, it's been a long time."

Name the last NL to win back-to-back World Series, and the 3 AL teams that won back-to-back since.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

You can't make this stuff up-- The Yankees have placed reliever **Aroldis Chapman** on the injured list with a leg infection caused from a recent tattoo, retroactive to Aug. 24.

Most games at shortstop in Minnesota Twins history (since 1961)? You have to go back to **Zoilo Versalles** (1,043 games from 1961-67). **Roy Smalley** and **Greg Gagne** played more total games than Versalles but not games at ss. Versalles had a huge year in 1965. Gold Glove Award defense at shortstop with an AL-leading 126 runs, 45 doubles, 12 triples and 308 total bases to become the first Latin-American player in Major League history to win an MVP Award. He led the Twins with eight hits in their World Series loss to the Dodgers.

Nice of the Mets to retire **Willie Mays** 24 but was he an "all time" Met? Mays played in 135 games with the Mets to finish his career, hitting 14 home runs and tallying 96 hits while making

an All-Star game in his final season at the age of 42 thanks to a special invitation from National League president Chub Feeney.

Last week we highlighted Pirates monster shortstop **Oneil Cruz**. This week Cruz lined a single clocked at 122.4, hardest hit ball since Statcast began. Cruz saw a first-pitch slider in his second at-bat of the game vs. Kyle Wright, who had not allowed a hit the first time through the order. He lined it to right field at a 17-degree launch angle, and it clanged off the top of the Clemente Wall.

Per Statcast, Cruz's single would have been a home run in 26 ballparks. The previous hardest-hit ball since Statcast began tracking in 2015 -- and eight of the previous 10 hardest hits -- belonged to **Giancarlo Stanton**, who managed exit velocities of 122.2 mph on two occasions: Aug. 9, 2021, and Oct. 1, 2017. Before Cruz's drive, Stanton was responsible for 16 of the top 20 exit velocities tracked by Statcast.

Only three players other than Cruz have hit a batted ball tracked by Statcast with an exit velocity of 120 mph or greater: Stanton (14), **Aaron Judge** (one) and **Gary Sánchez** (one).

Cruz now owns the Pirates' three hardest-hit balls in the Statcast era. He hit a 118.4 mph grounder for a single through the shift vs. Milwaukee on Aug. 4, and he also lined a 118.2 mph single against the Reds in his MLB debut on Oct. 2.

Earlier this season, Cruz set the mark for the fastest infield assist tracked by Statcast with a 98.7 mph dart to throw out Marlins speedster **Luke Williams** at first base.

Three Cy Young Award winners who hit 20 or more career home runs -- **Warren Spahn** (35), **Don Drysdale** (29), and **Bob Gibson** (24). **Cy Young**, who never won the Cy Young, hit 18 career homers.

The Brewers lost 13 of 21 games after trading **Josh Hader** to the Padres. President of baseball operations David Stearns said the move was necessary for future success, but the decision landed with a thud in the clubhouse. Meanwhile, Hader lost the closer's job with the Padres after a series of bad outings.

Oakland's current 26-man roster has a payroll of \$17.3 million. There are 51 individual players making at least \$20 million. The Dodgers have the highest team payroll at \$207 million.

The Mariners' standout center fielder **Julio Rodríguez** crushed his 20th homer of the season in their 3-1 loss on Wednesday afternoon at T-Mobile Park, a 400-foot, game-tying solo homer in the eighth inning. Paired with his 23 stolen bases, it put him into more historical territory in his bid for the AL Rookie of the Year Award.

A breakdown on the historical context of Rodríguez joining the 20-20 club:

- It's just the 10th 20-20 season in Mariners history, which has been achieved by only five other players: **Ruppert Jones** (1979), **Phil Bradley** ('85), **Alex Rodríguez** ('97-99), **Ken Griffey Jr.** ('98-99) and **Mike Cameron** (2001-02).
- Getting there in 107 games, Rodríguez passed **Mike Trout** (112 games) as the fastest player in AL history to achieve the feat.
- Only three other AL/NL rookies have achieved a 20-20 season in their first year in the big leagues: **Mitchell Page** (1977 A's), **Ellis Burks** ('87 Red Sox) and **Marty Cordova** ('85 Twins).
- Rodríguez is just the ninth player 21 or younger to have a 20-20 season, joining **Vada Pinson** (twice, 1959-60), **Orlando Cepeda** ('59), **César Cedeño** ('72), **Alex Rodríguez** ('97), **Andruw Jones** ('98), **Justin Upton** (2009), Mike Trout (twice, '12-13) and **Ronald Acuña Jr.** ('19).
- Only one other player has done so this season: Rangers outfielder **Adolis García**, who got there one night prior in Denver.

More from Seattle-- It takes a certain amount of luck to win one-run games, right? Well, the Mariners led the majors with 33 one-run victories last season. They lead with 27 this season. Since naming Scott Servais manager in 2016, their .578 winning percentage in one-run games is also the best in baseball.

Houston's **Justin Verlander**, the ageless wonder, has the option to walk after this season. but here's something even more impressive: The Astros have six potential starters — **Framber Valdez**, **Cristian Javier**, **José Urquidy**, **Luis Garcia**, **Lance McCullers Jr.** and top prospect **Hunter Brown** — all are under club control for at least the next three seasons. And remember, the

Astros had an even greater surplus of starting pitching at the deadline, and traded right-hander **Jake Odorizzi** to the Braves for lefty reliever **Will Smith**.

Virtually all the scouting reports, commentary from coaches and even a self-reflective description from Mariners pitcher **George Kirby** entering his rookie season centered on one theme: He throws a lot of strikes.

Yet Kirby took that skill to another level on Wednesday afternoon against the Nationals, thrusting himself into the MLB record books by beginning the matinee at T-Mobile Park with 24 straight strikes.

According to STATS, Kirby set a new high-water mark to begin a game dating back to 1988, when pitch tracking first began. The previous record was 21, achieved by the Pirates' Joe Musgrove on Aug. 30, 2018. Before that, only the Braves' **Ervin Santana** had reached 20, doing so on April 9, 2014.

Of Kirby's 24 strikes, only one was out of the zone -- a low-and-away changeup to CJ Abrams -- but it kept the streak going since Abrams swung and hit an infield single. Pitches that result in hits or outs, regardless of where they are located, are considered strikes. Only balls called as such by the home-plate umpire are balls, and Kirby's first was via a four-seam fastball to **Joey Meneses** with one out in the third inning, which elicited a collective sigh of disappointment from the ticketed crowd of 21,035 at T-Mobile Park.

Cards outfielder **Corey Dickerson** joined **Freddie Freeman** as the only MLB players this season with consecutive four-hit games after doing so on Tuesday and Wednesday. Then, in his first two at-bats on Thursday, Dickerson took his hot streak a couple steps further by singling in the first and third innings off Cubs starter **Marcus Stroman**. Those singles gave Dickerson 10 hits in his last 10 at-bats, marking the longest such streak by any Cardinals hitters in the expansion era (since 1961).

It was Dickerson's ninth straight hit that pushed him past **Curt Flood** (1964 and '68), **Felix Jose** (1991) and **Fernando Tatis** (1998), who shared the previous record with eight straight hits. Dickerson's streak ended in the fourth when he grounded into a fielder's choice.

Dickerson's 10 straight hits are the most by any player since Jose Altuve did the same for the Astros from May 25-27, 2018. Dickerson is the 13th player with a hit in at least 10 straight at-bats during the expansion era, and the first to do it since Astros second baseman **Jose Altuve** in

2018. Former Red Sox second baseman **Dustin Pedroia** and Yankees outfielder **Bernie Williams** sit atop the list with 11 consecutive hits.

Walt Dropo (1952), **Pinky Higgins** ('38) and **Johnny King** ('02) hold the MLB record with a hit in 12 consecutive at bats.

Speaking of hot Cardinal hitters:

The Cardinals have been an offensive juggernaut this month, hitting more homers (36) than any other team through Wednesday.

It certainly has been fun watching the Cardinals of late, with **Paul Goldschmidt** making a run at the NL MVP Award and possibly the Triple Crown, **Albert Pujols** turning back the clock in pursuit of his 700th home run and **Nolan Arenado** doing Nolan Arenado things. All three made the top five in this week's mlb.com top power hitters rankings, with Goldschmidt grabbing the top spot for the first time this season.

Paul Goldschmidt, Cardinals

DraftKings MVP odds: -400 (Bet \$400 to win \$100)

As good as Goldschmidt was before the All-Star break, he's somehow been even better in the second half, recording 11 homers with a 1.153 OPS in 27 games. He leads MLB in batting average (.339) and on-base percentage (.420) and OPS (1.057), and he has already reached the 30-homer and 100-RBI plateaus, giving him a shot at the NL Triple Crown.

Nolan Arenado, Cardinals

DraftKings MVP odds: 12-1

While Arenado has been a bit overshadowed by Goldschmidt this season, he's neck and neck with his teammate in wins above replacement -- 6.7 to 6.6, per Baseball-Reference. The third baseman's glove work is a big part of his value, but he put up an OPS over 1.000 in two of the first four months this season and is on track to do it again in August (1.088 OPS).

Albert Pujols, Cardinals

With his legendary career drawing to a close, Pujols has looked like his old self (or, rather, his younger self) of late, recording an eye-popping .487 average with seven homers, 14 RBIs and a 1.626 OPS in his past 13 games (nine starts). The 42-year-old slugger is now just seven home runs from 700.

These rankings take into account both season-long excellence and recent performance, along with compelling storylines and a bit of "fun factor."

Mike Trout homered against the Rays for his 1500th career hit. Trout tied **Garret Anderson** for the most runs scored in Angels history with 1,024. It took Anderson 15 seasons and 2,013 games with the club to accomplish the feat, while Trout has played in 12 seasons and 1,373 games with the Angels.

Then on Friday night Trout homered again. He took the historic runs scored lead in usual Trout fashion, driving himself in with a two-run blast off **Yusei Kikuchi** of the Jays in the eighth inning.

Trout, a three-time AL MVP and 10-time All-Star, has still been productive when healthy this season. The 30-year-old is slashing .272/.366/.597 with 26 homers and 54 RBIs in 85 games.

Chicago White Sox:

In 2022: 63-63 (.500)

First half 2022: 46-46 (.500)

Second half 202: 17-17 (.500)

Last 18,028 games (since 8/16/1906) 9,014-9,014 (.500)

The Guardians have had 14 players make their MLB debut in 2022, and they are baseball's youngest club among both position players (26.0 years old) and pitchers (26.4 years old), according to Baseball-Reference.com. Yet they lead the AL Central.

Through Monday, **Albert Pujols** had homered off 449 different pitchers. That's as many home runs as **Jeff Bagwell** and **Vladimir Guerrero** hit in their careers. Pujols's eighth home run came off **John Franco**, who turns 62 next month. No. 688 came off **Aaron Ashby**, who is 24

Rob Thomson's record as manager of the Phillies was 47-26 through Wednesday, and he reached 40 victories in only 59 games, the fastest for any manager in the franchise's 140-year history.

Excellent subscriber submission—Mets/Yankees broadcast last week. **Pete Alonso** struck out and broke his bat over his knee. **Keith Hernandez and Ron Darling** started talking about famous bat breaks over the years and of course, **Bo Jackson** breaking his bat over his head (with helmet on) came up. Then came a trivia fact that I did not know, with a baseball/football connection:

The year Bo Jackson won the Heisman at Auburn, who was his blocking tight end? **Frank Thomas**

August 25, 2011. First time in MLB history a team hit 3 grand slams in a game. **Robinson Cano, Russell Martin and Curtis Granderson** all connected in Yanks 22-9 rout of the A's at Yankee Stadium.

Braves right hander **Spencer Strider** was called up in late May. The 23 year old already has 158 strikeouts and regularly tops 100 mph. I watched him pitch against St. Louis this week. Strider struck out five of the first six batters he faced. He has now allowed one earned run or fewer over at least five innings nine times this year.

He has allowed three runs over the 17 innings he has totaled while making his past three starts against the Mets, Astros and Cardinals, three current division leaders.

Pete Alonso drove in his 105th run for the Mets on Friday with a walk off base hit against the Rockies. Alonso gained sole possession of the franchise record with 25 game-winning RBIs in a season. The previous record holder was **Keith Hernandez** (24 in 1985).

Alonso leads the Mets with 31 homers and 54 extra-base hits, is batting a career high .273 with a career-low 19.4% strikeout rate.

Alonso's 25 game-winning RBIs rank fourth-most in the Majors since 1954, only two away from the mark of 27 shared by **Willie Mays** ('62) and **Joe Torre** ('71). Alonso is on pace for 134 RBIs,

which would shatter the franchise record of 124 that **Mike Piazza** set in '99 and **David Wright** matched in 2008.

The first pitcher to strikeout 200+ batters in a season when he pitched fewer than 200 innings was **Sandy Koufax** (216 K's in 184 1/3 innings in 1962).

Five pitchers in MLB history to strike out 11 or more batters in a game at age 42 or older--**Nolan Ryan** (26 times), **Randy Johnson** (twice), **Gaylord Perry** (twice), **Roger Clemens** and **Rich Hill**.

MLB record for consecutive quality starts within a single season--**Jacob deGrom** (24 straight quality starts in 2018)

Jackie Bradley Jr. returned to Fenway Park with the Blue Jays this week. He played parts of nine seasons with the Red Sox – a tenure that featured 462 games in the outfield at Fenway, 12th most in team history.

The Yankees pounded Oakland Thursday night. Your fearless editor stayed up to watch the west coast action (after watching the Red Sox lose to Toronto in 10). In Giancarlo Stanton's first game in more than a month, the Yankees won their fourth straight game, beating the last-place A's, 13-4, in a 20-hit barrage. While the good news was **Giancarlo Stanton** returned from injury to drive in 3 runs, the A's scored three runs off **Greg Weissert** in the right-hander's MLB debut.

Let us Consider Weissert's first inning in the big leagues as it unfolded in front of my own eyes-- the right-hander from Long Island who pitched at Fordham University was called up by the Yankees on Thursday. **He hit Jonah Bride with his first pitch, then before he threw another pitch a balk sent Bride to second, before Weissert drilled Skye Bolt with his second pitch.**

After a visit from pitching coach **Matt Blake**, Weissert got **Nick Allen** to fly to center, but it was the only out he recorded, as **he then walked Tony Kemp to load the bases and Vimal Machin to force in a run.**

Weissert is part of a bullpen that's missing **Scott Effross** (shoulder), **Albert Abreu** (elbow) and **Clay Holmes** (back).

He thrived at Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre this season, with 67 strikeouts in 46 innings, as well as a WHIP of 0.891 in 40 appearances.

Braves rookie CF **Michael Harris II** is 15 for 15 in stolen base attempts. **J.T. Realmuto** of the Phillies is also 15-for-15 this year.

Top 'bases stolen without getting caught' seasons since 1920:

Chase Utley	2009 Phillies	23-0
Alcides Escobar	2013 Royals	22-0
Kevin McReynolds	1988 Mets	21-0
Paul Molitor	1994 Blue Jays	20-0

2023 SCHEDULE

Mlb.com (so know where the positive spin is coming from)

The 2023 schedule released by Major League Baseball on Wednesday might look the same in some ways. There are still 162 games per team, spread from spring to fall, with a brief pause for the All-Star break, and October, as always, the goal.

But make no mistake: The new, more balanced [2023 schedule](#), which will begin with Opening Day on March 30, is a massive change for the sport.

No longer is each team's slate significantly skewed toward division opponents. Instead, the schedules will feature more variety. For the first time in modern MLB history, every team will play every other team at some point.

Why has MLB moved to a balanced schedule?

With the postseason format having already been expanded in 2022 to include three Wild Card spots in each league, it is more important for teams across each league to play more similar schedules. All wins and losses are counted the same, so a more balanced schedule conceivably

limits the advantage a team from a weak division has over a team from a deep division in the Wild Card race.

But there is also entertainment value to having all teams face each other at least once, as opposed to loading up the schedule with division matchups. That means 29 fan bases getting to watch their clubs face **Shohei Ohtani, Aaron Judge, Juan Soto, Mookie Betts** and the other great stars of the sport.

“This new format creates more consistent opponent matchups as Clubs compete for Postseason berths,” MLB chief operations and strategy officer Chris Marinak said in a release, “particularly in the recently expanded Wild Card round. Additionally, this fan-friendly format provides fans with the opportunity to see more opponent matchups, with a particular focus on dramatically expanding our most exciting Interleague matchups, and offers more national exposure to the star players throughout our game.”

Is the 2023 schedule truly “balanced”?

Not in the strictest sense, no. Teams will still play more series against individual division opponents than any individual opponent from another division. But the schedule is nowhere near as weighted toward division play as it was previously.

How many games will each team play against division opponents?

Each team will play 52 games against division opponents, decreased from 76 under the previous schedule structure.

This will include 13 games (across four total series) against each division opponent, decreased from 19 (across six series). That’s seven home games and six away games (or vice versa) against each opponent for a total of 26 home games and 26 away games.

How many games will each team play against non-division league opponents?

Each team will play 64 intraleague games (32 home games and 32 away games), decreased from 66.

Teams will play six games against six league opponents and seven games against four other league opponents. This is the reverse of the previous format, in which teams played six games against four league opponents and seven against six league opponents.

How many Interleague games will each team play?

This is the biggest change, with 46 total Interleague games for each team (AL vs. NL and vice versa), an increase from 20.

Teams will play a home-and-home series (four games total) against their natural Interleague rivals (Yankees vs. Mets, Dodgers vs. Angels, Cubs vs. White Sox, etc.) and another 42 games against other Interleague opponents, including seven series (21 games) at home and seven series (21 games) on the road.

How long was the schedule “unbalanced”?

The unbalanced schedule we are familiar with today was first introduced in 2001. That year, teams began playing anywhere from 16 to 20 games against each division rival. Prior to that, the AL had played under a more balanced schedule since its 1977 expansion from 12 to 14 teams, while the NL had played under a more balanced schedule since its 1993 expansion from 12 to 14 teams.

Interleague Play, however, had never been balanced the way it will be with the 2023 schedule.

What impact will the balanced schedule have?

Though the travel will be quite a bit different under the more balanced schedule and rescheduling postponements against non-division opponents can be more challenging, this arrangement should be a fairer one in terms of settling both division and Wild Card races. As a result of the adjusted schedule, teams within the same division and within the same league will have more common opponents.

The new schedule could also impact how front offices approach roster construction. With fewer division games, there might be less emphasis on acquisitions targeted specifically because of how they match up with particular division rivals or how they play in particular ballparks within the division.

What are some other notable aspects of the 2023 schedule?

- The 2023 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard will be held on July 11 at T-Mobile Park -- the first Midsummer Classic in Seattle since 2001.
- If weather permits, Opening Day on March 30 would be the first in which every MLB team opens on the same day since 1968.
- All 30 clubs are also scheduled to be in action on the Fourth of July.
- The Cardinals and Cubs will play a two-game series at London Stadium on June 24-25 as part of the MLB World Tour, which will bring MLB teams and players to the league's global base over the next four seasons.
- The Phillies and Nationals will meet in the 2023 Little League Classic at Muncy Bank Ballpark at Historic Bowman Field in Williamsport, Pa., on Aug. 20.

Some highlights

The stars will all get to play each other right before Labor Day 2023 in Philadelphia its Trout vs Harper when the Angels come to town. (Trout can even see the stadium of his beloved Eagles just down the street.) We'll see **Paul Goldschmidt vs. Shohei Ohtani, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. vs. Juan Soto, Pete Alonso vs. Julio Rodríguez.**

You'll get a far more balanced Wild Card raceWe've always baked in certain inequalities in our Wild Card races. The Orioles and Rays, for example, are usually going to have a harder time getting a Wild Card spot than the Twins or the Guardians because the AL East is generally deeper than the Central. But that issue will soon be mitigated. Every team will play 24 fewer games against their divisional opponents than they did previously, 52 rather than 76. Before, teams played more games against their divisional opponents (76) than they did the rest of their league (66). Now they'll play 64 against the rest of the league and 52 against their division. The Cardinals and Brewers can't get fat off the Pirates, Reds and Cubs anymore. Everybody's a lot closer to playing the same schedule now.

You can now schedule a different road trip every year and not repeat one for a while If you're a fan who gets together with your friends to see your team play at a ballpark you haven't been to before, you were at the mercy of which division happened to be the crossover for your team's schedule. (This was why it took **Albert Pujols** eight years to visit Busch Stadium for the first time as an Angel.) That's not a problem anymore. If the White Sox don't make a trip to, say, Miami this year, don't sweat it: They'll be there next year. No matter what, at least every two years, your team will visit every ballpark in baseball.

MOOKIE BETTS BASERUNNING HELPED WIN A WORLD SERIES, WHY DON'T MORE TEAMS STRESS IT?

Peter Gammons in The Athletic

"Three inches. The difference in a World Series." — Mike Roberts, Longtime coach, organizational baserunning coach and author of two books on baserunning.

"It was a World Series-winning play." — **Dave Roberts**, manager of the 2020 world champion Los Angeles Dodgers (and owner of 243 regular-season steals in his 10-year career, plus one in Game 4 of the 2004 ALCS that landed him in the Red Sox Hall of Fame.).

Re-run that play — **Mookie Betts** on third base, **Corey Seager** at bat, one out, from the sixth inning of Game 6 of the 2020 World Series — on YouTube. Two batters earlier, the Dodgers had been losing 1-0 to **Blake Snell** and the Rays. Then **Austin Barnes** hit a single, reliever **Nick Anderson** replaced Snell, and Betts doubled to move Barnes to third, where he would score on a wild pitch — tying the game and setting the stage for Betts to deliver that "World Series-winning play."

It happened fast: Betts took off for home as Seager hit an easy hopper to drawn-in Rays first baseman **Ji-Man Choi**, who backhanded it and made the short throw to catcher **Mike Zunino**. Zunino caught the throw and moved to slap the tag on the sliding Betts coming down the line from third.

But Betts beat the throw, and the Dodgers had a 2-1 lead that would hold up thanks to three shutout relief innings from **Brusdar Graterol** and **Julio Urías**, plus an add-on home run by Betts that would leave the final score 3-1 and give the Dodgers their first championship since the Reagan administration. For many, the story of the game was Tampa Bay manager **Kevin Cash**'s decision to remove Snell with the 1-0 lead after Barnes' one-out single in that pivotal bottom of the sixth. But two years later, in an era when baserunning has become a lost art and the game's basepaths often look as clogged and stagnant as the will-I-ever-get-off-it L.A. Freeway, it is Betts' dash home that resonates as a model and a teaching moment. It is a reference point as **Mike Roberts** works with Pirates minor leaguers in Bradenton, Florida in the August heat, and a reminder to major leaguers around the game of what great baserunning can really do.

"Watch that Betts play and what you see is the result of great concentration and anticipation."
— Hall of Famer **Jeff Bagwell**, one of the best baserunners of his era.

"It was the product of visualization." — George Lombard, baserunning coach on the 2020 Dodgers, bench coach of the 2021-22 Tigers.

Lombard credits his experience with Mike Roberts for his understanding of many of the nuances of baserunning. Mike Roberts credits his own learning to his time at the Kansas City Royals Baseball Academy in the 1970s, where he once roomed with Ron Washington. Dave Roberts often quotes **Maury Wills** from Roberts' time in the Dodgers organization.

Lombard would be the last person to claim Betts' instinctive dash to the championship was the direct result of things the Dodgers taught him after Betts was acquired from the Red Sox the previous February for **Alex Verdugo** and others. No, there are YouTube clips of years' worth of Betts' running exploits with the Red Sox, signature moments of the sort that would lead Boston to the 2018 World Series title and earned Betts an MVP award. One clip shows him hitting a bouncing ball up the middle against the White Sox on which shortstop **Alexei Ramírez** fielded the ball going toward center field, threw late — to first — and Betts turned the first base bag and kept running to second, where no one was covering. Another showed him taking off on a hit-and-run, **Dustin Pedroia** slapping a groundball off the second baseman's glove, and when Orioles right fielder Steve Pearce — later the World Series MVP as Betts' Red Sox teammate in 2018 — slowly lobbed the ball into the infield, Betts raced around third base and scored without a throw. When shifts were not as widespread across the major leagues, and their practice still a bit uncertain, Betts and Dustin Pedroia would check the coverage at the next base as they ran, and if the novelty created uncertainty that led to no one covering that base, they would pop up out of their slides and take off for the next base.

Great baserunners don't have to have great speed. Dave Roberts this season has watched first baseman **Freddie Freeman** and marvels "at his constant intent to get every base he can. Great baserunners hit what they know is a single, and think double. They hit what they know is a double and they think getting to third. That's Freddie."

But not everyone thinks that way. We can look at a 1-0 Nationals-Padres game on August 21 when the Nats' last two outs in the ninth came on the same play, when Padres first baseman **Brandon Drury** intentionally dropped a soft line drive and the two confused runners allowed themselves to be tagged out. Or the series of cartoonishly bad Yankee baserunning mistakes in extra innings that likely cost them a victory on August 10 against the Mariners. Many of us still laugh at the 2003 call of HOF broadcaster Jon Miller as the San Francisco Giants' **Ruben Rivera** rounded second on a fly to deep center, thought the ball was caught, went back around second trying to get back to first, realized the ball was not caught, turned around and rounded second and was thrown out at third — as Miller said, "that was the worst baserunning you will ever see."

Hey, as several baseball folk mentioned, even a highly intelligent player like **Kolten Wong** can get picked off first base by **Koji Uehara** to end the fourth game of the 2013 World Series. If you want a little fun, go back to the ninth inning of the fourth game of the 1974 World Series to see the Dodgers' **Mike Marshall** pick off Charlie Finley's designated runner, world-class sprinter **Herb Washington**. But the problems endemic in the game today when it comes to baserunning are real, and they are not likely to change anytime soon, what with the player development system focused on launch angle and exit velocity, and on the physical traits they believe will maximize those.

To the extent many youth coaches and some professional organizations care about running the bases, they think it's all about steals. As Dave Roberts points out, baserunning is not merely about those exciting stolen bases, although **Rickey Henderson** was a *great* baserunner. And it's not about sprint speed. Bagwell wasn't a sprinter; for all the years I covered the Red Sox, **Tony Armas** may have been the most instinctive, intelligent baserunner I witnessed, and he was hardly a **Vince Coleman**. "It is," says the Dodger manager, "the measure of a great teammate."

Several scouts who follow the Cape Cod Baseball League say Mike Roberts, who coaches the Cotuit Kettleers, is "the best teacher in the league in the modern era, especially when it comes to baserunning," which is a strong strong statement when one remembers that among his peers is Yarmouth-Dennis manager Scott Pickler, who also coaches the very successful Cypress Community College program and is now the winningest manager in Cape League history. Roberts — father of two-time All-Star and 50-steal man Brian Roberts — coordinated baserunning and outfield defense in the Cubs organization for several years, then this season was hired by John Baker to oversee their organizational running, from the Complex League to Triple A, with what is an endorsement matching the reviews from the summer league.

At the major league level, **Terry Francona** utilizes his entire staff to constantly focus on fundamentals, especially baserunning, part of the reason that in the 10 years since he took over as manager of the Cleveland franchise the only team that has won more games is the Yankees.

Ask the Royals about their baserunning, which is important in their huge ballpark, and Dayton Moore says “there is no way we win the World Series in 2015 without what **Rusty Kuntz** did with our defense and baserunning. From the time he gets up every morning to when he goes to sleep at night, he’s thinking that defense and baserunning are the most important things in the game.”

Every day for years, Kuntz, the longtime first base and outfield coach who is now a special assistant in the front office, worked on aspects of baserunning — dirt balls, leads, checking defenders’ positioning, hop jumps, etc. There are Royals people who believe that when Alex Gordon hit that fateful line drive off **Madison Bumgarner** with two out in the bottom of the ninth inning in Game 7 of the 2014 World Series — the single that went past Giants center fielder **Gregor Blanco** and rolled to the fence, allowing Gordon to reach third — that Gordon might have tried for an inside-the-parker if it hadn’t been for the presence of shortstop **Brandon Crawford**. Crawford is one of the best infielders at relays because he worked so hard at the craft and once said “I love practicing relays” — a reason he was so good at the art. All that practice might have kept the Royals from tying that Game 7 and secured the championship for the Giants.

But perhaps the modern managers who focused most on the details and work on the running aspect of the game have been **Felipe Alou and Gene Mauch**. Even in the replacement spring of 1995 when Alou — a very important figure in the building of the MLB Players Association — was forced to manage replacement players paid to break the union, he spent time every day working on baserunning drills. Standing on a hot, dusty, bug-ridden field at the Expos’ minor league spring complex one day, he said “This is about winning games. Good baserunning has to be practiced, to build anticipation, increase the understanding of so many things that can happen. It is worth one or two runs a game. How many games a season is that worth? Think about how many one-run games there are.”

In the 2022 season, through August 20, 22.2 percent of nine-inning major league games were decided by one run, and another 8.5 percent were decided in extra innings, which means around 30 percent were essentially one-run games. “How many of those games can be decided by running down the line on a groundball at sprint speed?” asks **Sandy Alomar Jr.**, who Francona has in charge of the Guardians’ baserunning.

“We’re a baserunning team,” says Sandy Alomar Jr., whose father Sandy Sr. was a great teacher and impacted his Hall of Fame son Roberto as well as Red Sox manager **Alex Cora**, and was long considered a surefire major league manager who somehow was passed over for a major league managerial opportunity. “We do a lot of conditioning running the bases. We always try to be on the move, in go-mode on the bases. All our coaches are in on everything in the game that we teach, emphasizing the communication between coaches and players — and it’s important to

talk, player to player, coaches to players. We're also the youngest team in the league, so it's vital to us that the team's star (and highest paid player) **José Ramírez** is the hardest worker and best teammate on the team. We've got some very good young players, and they follow his leadership."

The only Guardians position players older than the 29-year-old Ramírez are 31-year-old **Luke Malle** and 30-year-old **Austin Hedges**. "Terry Francona preaches practicing and playing with full speed baserunning," says Alomar Jr. "Take batting practice? You're expected to run hard around the bases. Practice at full speed, turn bases at full speed." A scout who recently took in the Guardians' Arizona Complex League team says their younger farmhands have to run base to base after their turns in the cage, at top speed.

That kind of "full speed baserunning" is what Mike Roberts teaches. "Sprint down the first-base line, and from there think right turn, first to second, second third, and on," says Roberts. "Jump, jump out into the baseline and sprint the 38 to 52 feet to the bag."

Obviously not everyone can get to full speed in a couple of steps like Rickey Henderson, and while **Lou Brock** maintained that Rickey accelerated into the bag more violently than any player in any era, one of the reasons Henderson was almost always banged up is that he accelerated and dove into bags head-first, jamming his hands, fingers, elbows and shoulders. In a late-night discussion at the Smithsonian Institute during the 1981 strike, Brock said "I don't know how anyone can do what he does." High praise from a high source.

But for all these examples of fundamental focus and baserunning excellence — the Dodgers, the Guardians, the coaches and players working to instill these disciplines on the Cape — they stand out as more of exceptions than rules. Every one of the more than 20 general managers, managers, coaches and scouts interviewed on baserunning traced that to the way young players are brought up today.

"It's all about home runs, exit velocity and swinging as hard as you can in the programs and showcases, travel teams, even the minor leagues," says **Buck Showalter**.

"We'd better get **Tony Gwynn, Wade Boggs and Rod Carew** out of the Hall of Fame," **Don Mattingly** once joked. "They didn't have the big exit velocity numbers." Mattingly had no part of the player acquisition and scouting parts of the Marlins after the sale to the Bruce Sherman-**Derek Jeter** ownership, but while Jeter ran the business side of the operation, baseball ops were handed to former Yankee coach Gary Denbo. His young, mainly analytics-focused aides were tools/exit velo enthusiasts rather than scouting eye disciples. They do not have one position player remaining from dealing off **Giancarlo Stanton, J.T. Realmuto and Christian Yelich**. One of the players the Braves had on the table for Yelich was **Austin Riley**.

"The gap between the analytics-heavy general managers and those, like the Dodgers, who have very good analytics but the personnel and development decisions are made by baseball people" is significant, says one American League general manager. In the Andrew Freedman-Brandon

Gomes regime in Los Angeles, there is a circle of a dozen respected baseball people who gather for trade deadline meetings, and every one of them has a voice. They meticulously scout their own organization, major and minor leagues and all parts international. One of their top scouts was sent to Spain for a tournament last winter.

Dave Roberts, Bagwell and **Chase Utley** will talk endlessly about the unselfishness involved in baserunning. Utley always played at breakneck speed, but he always talked of the importance of going hard from base to base. "If I'm on first with a runner on second and one out," Utley used to say, "I have to go as hard as possible into second to break up the double play — that's a run. It may force an errant throw so I'm safe, or the batter can get to second. It's all about winning. If the infielder in the middle of the play doesn't know the speed of the runner, that's not the runner's fault." Bagwell, who played the game like Utley, says the new rules around the second base bag "make it easier to be bad."

But showcase baseball makes it a selfish game, "all about me" baseball. When Dayton Moore was with the Braves, he remembers **Brian McCann's** first major league at-bat, with no one out and a runner at third in a scoreless game. McCann pulled the ball to the right side and got the runner over. Today, the good at-bat would be a 101 mph liner, out or no out. Five years ago, a touted Cape League player with severe defensive deficiencies was in the lineup for his team's playoff opener at first, rather than his preferred third base. He refused to play first. The first inning was played with the sound of his hitting in the cage as his teammates played the game.

Bagwell believes baserunning has to include intense concentration. "When you're on base, you have to be aware of where the infielders and outfielders are playing," he says. "You have to think, 'my job is to score a run, I have to try to eliminate an out.' Baserunners have to try to force the pitcher to get 29 or 30 outs. If the shortstop's playing towards the hole and I'm on first base, can I beat him to the bag? It gives your teammate a hit, may produce a run for the team. Run with anger, like **Hal McRae** and **George Brett** back in their time." Or **Kirk Gibson** anytime he stepped on a field.

Showcases exist to make profits off the dreams of kids — dreams of baseball and big money, as well as some fathers' dreams of a son getting that recognition and cash. MLB has instituted a televised combine prior to the draft, presumably to create interest in the baseball draft and the Futures Game showcase and make it all similar to the NBA's All-Star Weekend. Many of the top players in the draft don't go, and it's about individual skills, like a long jump. One player whose agent felt he should go to the combine came back to the Cape and said, "I missed five or six games here; we played no games. I had to do a long jump. Wouldn't they (rather) have seen me in games? Why in the world would I do the long jump?"

Someone watched the NFL Combine and presumed baseball is the same as football, which, of course, it is not. Moving the draft to the middle of July messes with high school, college and summer leagues, where players play games and are thought to be playing to win.

There may be positive changes looming, things that could counter some of this atrophy in baserunning and fundamentals. Showalter and others believe the pitch clocks will help to encourage the running game. “When a pitcher is taking 20 seconds between pitches, and then going ‘ball one ... ball two,’ both teams grind to a halt, and there’s no rhythm to the way the game is played,” the Mets manager says.

But the people who run baseball have to look at the development system they have encouraged to grow, where the game is exit velocity and distance, with little encouragement to make contact with a runner on third and less than two out or use baserunning to create defensive mistakes or force the opposition — and its pitchers — to get outs beyond the analytical 27 needed in nine innings. Brewster teammates of Utley recall that he often was at the ballpark at 1 p.m. working on defense, baserunning and every aspect of his game before the game started at 7 p.m.

When Utley reached Triple A, one club’s analytics staff predicted he would never start 100 games in the majors. Instead Utley is going to Cooperstown in due time. The largest chunk of his pregame routine each night was “to work on things that might help us win that night.”

Mookie Betts was a fifth-round draft choice in 2011, did not hit a home run in his first full professional season in 2012, started playing the outfield in Portland in 2014, won a World Series and an MVP award in 2018 and was dumped in February 2020 so the Red Sox could avoid the luxury tax. As of this writing, the Red Sox are on their way to their second losing record in three seasons since the trade and have won six postseason games. The Dodgers were 24 games better than the Red Sox on Carl Yastrzemski’s Aug. 22 birthday, and since Betts was acquired they have won 17 postseason games. One of them was the sixth and final game of the 2020 World Series.

They won it by three inches.

The Dodgers watched Betts, appreciated his baserunning, his pregame defensive preparation and in-game defense, and have won the most games in baseball since the deal. The entirely analytical Red Sox are 26th among the 30 teams in stolen bases; they are far more likely than not to be sitting at home this October.

Like Betts, Bagwell was one of the best baserunners of his generation, and as Betts will be, a Hall of Famer.

The way baseball is trending, we will see fewer and fewer like him as time goes on.

EXAMINING AN AMAZING STATEMENT BY DAVID ORTIZ

Dan Shaughnessy of the Boston Globe writes what many of us have been thinking

After becoming the first MLB player elected to the Hall of Fame despite a positive steroid test — a test that baseball commissioner Rob Manfred suggested might have been a false positive — **David Ortiz** went on the offensive in the wake of **Fernando Tatis Jr.** testing positive for clostebol in mid-August.

“MLB needs to have some sort of regulations before they make public news like the one that happened to Tatis Jr.,” Ortiz told Dominican reporter Hector Gomez. “I think they haven’t handled this situation the right way. We can’t kill our product, we’re talking about an amazing player.”

It sounds like Ortiz is saying, *“Sure, Tatis is using, but fans love him and he’s got great numbers, so let’s pretend nothing happened.”*

Swell. So where’s the forgiveness for Messrs. **Bonds, Clemens, Sosa, Ramirez, McGwire, Palmeiro, Sheffield, A-Rod** and the rest of the “amazing players” with links to PEDs who’ve thus far been kept out of Cooperstown? (A cynic might suggest that the PEDs explain why some of the offenders are so “amazing.”)

In the words of the New York Post’s Jon Heyman, “Manfred’s continuing support of Big Papi after he was revealed by the New York Times to have failed the 2003 survey steroid test clearly has gone unappreciated.”

Ortiz’s provocative statement inspired me to connect with Gomez, a respected reporter who lives in Santo Domingo and identifies as “MLB Insider and Sports Editor of Z101 and El Show del Mediodía.”

“I interviewed David by phone call on a TV program called ‘El Show del Mediodía,’ ” e-mailed Gomez. “I did the interview in Spanish. I just posted what you saw on my Twitter account. Neither David, nor anyone responded to what I posted on Twitter.”

Evidently, Ortiz believes positive steroid tests should be broomed, and that offenders should be left alone if they are amazing players.

Maybe this is how most fans feel these days. Sox fans have always been comfortable embracing Big Papi. Perhaps it’s time we got behind Bonds, Clemens, and the rest.

David Ortiz is a Hall of Famer and a Red Sox “special assistant” listed near the very top of the team’s front office directory. The Sox have made him the face of their franchise.

Is Big Papi right? Is baseball killing its own product by punishing cheaters? Is it time to give up the outrage and look the other way on Tatis and other “amazing players”?

THE BEST PLAYER BORN EACH YEAR SINCE THE U.S. CIVIL WAR

(Part I) baseballegg.com

Pete Browning, 1861

There are two lasting legacies from the 19th century career of outfielder Pete Browning. Born in Kentucky, Browning was dubbed “The Louisville Slugger.” When two friends in that state decided to start their own baseball bat company, they used “Louisville Slugger” as the name, and Browning was their first company.

In 1891, Browning broke his contract and signed a deal with Pittsburgh. It was the team’s decision to “steal” Browning that led to the name “Pirates” for that franchise.

Dummy Hoy, 1862

Yeah so, we would never let anyone get away with calling a deaf mute “Dummy” today, but it was common in the 19th century. Hoy lost his hearing after a bout of meningitis when he was three years old. He was always the fastest kid around, and his athleticism brought him to professional baseball, where he briefly held the record for most stolen bases. He is sometimes credited with promoting the use of hand signals by umpires, but that’s probably not completely accurate.

Jimmy Ryan, 1863

In the 1800s, train accidents were a n unfortunate fact of transportation. While rails and cars were seen as a new-fangled method for getting people and products around the country, it was also dangerous. In 1893, when he was with the Chicago Colts (later renamed Cubs), Ryan was on a train with his teammates when a sleeper car derailed in Ohio and collided with an oncoming freight car. Ryan was severely injured, with almost all of the bones in both of his legs broken. He missed nearly a year but made a miraculous recovery and batted .357 in 1892. He retired in 1903 having played more games than any outfielder in professional baseball history.

Bob Caruthers, 1864

For most of the 1880s, there was only one real major league: the National League. If you had Bob Caruthers on your pitching staff, you were probably going to win. “Parisian Bob” was the ace of five pennant-winning teams, logging 298 complete games among his 310 career starts, including 24 shutouts.

Bobby Lowe, 1865

Lowe was the first player in Major League history to hit four home runs in a game, which he accomplished in May of 1894 thanks to a very favorable ballpark. The Boston Beaneaters, as they were known then, played home games in a few different parks, one of which was Congress Street Grounds, a tiny little spot in Boston. The left field fence was apparently only 265 feet away, which helped Bobby pull four balls into the stands on May 30, 1894. That spot, where Congress Street's left field wall had been, served as a shooting location in the 2006 film "The Departed," in the scene where Martin Sheen's character is pushed to his death from a window.

Sliding Billy Hamilton, 1866

The original Billy Hamilton was a daring ballplayer with a tremendous ego. He stole 100 bases in a season four times, and still holds the major league record for runs scored in a season with 198.

Ed Delahanty, 1867

Early in the morning hours of July 2, 1903, Ed Delahanty was asked to get off a train that was on tracks near the Niagara River. He was drunk, and he'd been acting erratic on the train, which is why the conductor ordered him to exit. It was dark and Delahanty was last seen walking on the rail bridge that went across the rapids of the Niagara. He had reportedly gotten into a physical altercation with the watchman.

Delahanty's mangled, naked body was found at the bottom of Niagara Falls on the Canadian side seven days after he was last seen on the tracks. He was 35 years old and left behind a wife and a daughter. His death was ruled an accident, though some speculated that he had jumped into the water. His death was front page news in two countries because he was one of baseball's most famous players.

At the time of his tragic demise, Delahanty was the defending American League batting champion. He was batting .333 for the 1903 season, and his career mark was a lofty .346, which at the time was the highest in baseball history. He wasn't just a great player, he was a superstar. His death shook the sport.

Others of note born in 1867: **Cy Young**

Jesse Burkett, 1868

Played his first major league game in 1890, but Burkett still holds the record for the most inside-the-park home runs in MLB history, with 55. Back then, some parks didn't even have outfield fences, so every home run was "inside the park."

Like Delahanty and Hamilton, Burkett is a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Kid Nichols, 1869

Baseball fans know Cy Young because of the award, but you could argue that Nichols was the best pitcher who debuted before 1900. In an era when most teams used a two-man rotation, Nichols was a rugged workhorse, despite being a little on the small side. He recorded a major league record seven 30-win seasons, and won 362 games in all.

Bad Bill Dahlen, 1870

How great a nickname is “Bad Bill”? He got it for the wrong reasons: Dahlen had a ferocious temper. You know all those fights and controversies that **Billy Martin** got into? Bad Bill Dahlen did all of that first. One year he punched a loudmouth heckler in the middle of a game. Another time, on an afternoon when an umpire was making a lot of calls that went against his team, Dahlen hit a single. On the ensuing play, instead of sliding into second base, Dahlen slid into the umpire several feet away. That incident earned him a fine.

Iron Joe McGinnity, 1871

Another one of the great baseball nicknames. McGinnity was a wonder: he frequently started both ends of a doubleheader on the mound. He holds two records that were never broken: complete games (48) and innings pitched (434) in a single season.

His nickname actually came from his off-season job: Joe was a foundry worker in an iron works in Illinois. He was an underhand or sidearm pitcher, and his fastball was terrifying because it rose as it approached the batter.

“It was difficult for a batter to get [McGinnity’s] measure,” said longtime manager **Connie Mack**. “Sometimes his fingers would almost scrape the ground as he hurled the ball. He knew all the tricks for putting a batter on the spot.”

Wee Willie Keeler, 1872

Simplicity can pay off, and Keeler believed in keeping his job simple. He famously explained his hitting philosophy as “Hit ’em where they ain’t.” Keeler was probably the best bunter in baseball in the late 1800s.

Harry Davis, 1873

Largely forgotten today, but Davis was a premier power hitter in the first decade of the 20th century. The Philadelphia native is one of only five players to lead their league in home runs in four consecutive seasons.

Honus Wagner, 1874

Wagner was a freak, one of those athletes who seemed genetically a generation ahead of his time. Like Wilt Chamberlain and Jim Brown, Joe Louis and Gordie Howe, and of course **Babe Ruth** a decade or so later, Wagner was just better than everyone else. He could throw harder, run faster, hit the ball farther than anyone else. The game came easy to him, and he could outthink the other players on the diamond too. **John McGraw** said that no shortstop he ever saw could go as deep in the hole to get the ball like Honus. His fielding statistics are strange because we look at them through the lens of modern times, but remember he was playing with basically an oven mitt on his left hand on fields littered with rocks. In comparison to his league, Wagner's statistics are more impressive than anyone other than the Bambino.

Eddie Plank, 1875

Plank was a professional fidgeter. He was famous for his tedious mannerisms on the mound. A thin southpaw from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania with a long, pointy nose, Plank liked to examine the baseball between pitches, tug at the bill of his cap, and hitch at his pants. In an era when games frequently took only 90 minutes to play, "Gettysburg Eddie" would add 10-15 minutes to the contest with his mound habits. But the stalling wasn't for lack of courage: Plank was one of the best pitchers in baseball in the first decade of the twentieth century. He won 20 games eight times and led the league in shutouts twice, once throwing eight in one season.

Frank Chance, 1876

"Chance is of prepossessing appearance and decidedly of athletic build, of more than medium height with square shoulders, and weighs 188 pounds. In manner he is unassuming but speaks with a quiet confidence of his own ability to keep up with the fast company in the National league. There is no braggadocio." — Harvey T. Woodruff

Chance was recruited and signed by **Cap Anson**, the patriarch of the Chicago franchise in the 19th century, a towering figure. Anson was fired before Chance's first game with the club, which by that time was being called the "Orphans" because of Cap's absence. Later, the team was nicknamed the Cubs by a sports writer who noted that the roster was filled with young players.

Tommy Leach, 1877

Leach hit four triples for Pittsburgh in the first modern World Series in 1903. How long ago was that? At that time it was called the "World's Series," and the city was actually spelled "Pittburg" without the H.

Jimmy Sheckard, 1878

After all these years, more than 140 years after his birth, Sheckard is one of the greatest outfielders to ever wear the Cubs uniform. Jimmy was the leadoff man for the great Chicago teams that won pennants in 1906, 1907, 1908, and again in 1910. He walked 147 times in 1911—the major league record until broken by Babe Ruth in 1920.

Roger Bresnahan, 1879

John McGraw loved versatile players, and Bresnahan was one of his favorite toys: swift enough to play the outfield and strong-armed and smart enough to play behind the plate. By 1905 he was catching the stellar pitching staff of the Giants, and in the World Series that fall he caught every pitch of the 44 innings tossed by aces **Christy Mathewson** and **Iron Joe McGinnity**.

Bresnahan was a fierce competitor, and he was the first backstop to appear in as many as 130 games. For those reasons, and his famous versatility for a popular team, he was elected to the Hall of Fame.

Christy Mathewson, 1880

Bresnahan's batterymate in the 1905 World Series, Mathewson was the most famous pitcher of the pre-1920 era. He was handsome, intelligent, and a majestic athlete. His life was shortened after he inhaled poison gas in the First World War in Europe.

Others born that year: **Wahoo Sam Crawford**

Johnny Evers, 1881

Despite his size, Evers was a good athlete and an even smarter ballplayer. Evers had a baseball lineage: his father and several uncles were ballplayers in the 19th century. He was quick and had an accurate throwing arm, which was strong enough for shortstop, which is where he played his first big league game. Three days later, 20-year old Evers played second and 21-year old **Joe Tinker** played short together for the first time. They learned to play as rookies for the Cubs. They eventually came to anticipate where the other man would be, how hard he would toss a relay throw, what his footwork was like. They played 11 seasons together, though they were unfriendly with each other off the field. They were catalysts on four pennant-winning Chicago teams, including the 1906 squad that won 116 games.

Others born in 1881: **Ed Walsh**

Wildfire Schulte, 1882

Yet another great Cubs player from the early 20th century, Schulte was a fast outfielder who also had good power. In 1911 when he won the first modern MVP Award, Schulte became the

first of only four players in history to join the 20–20–20–20 club (30 doubles, 21 triples, and 21 home runs, and stealing 23 bases).

Others born in 1882: **Babe Adams**

Hal Chase, 1883

“Prince Hal” was reportedly the best defensive first baseman of his time, known for charging bunts (sometimes even on the third base side of the mound) and having a strong arm. But he was banned from organized baseball when it was ruled he has accepted bribes to fix games. Otherwise, Chase would probably have a plaque in Cooperstown.

Others born in 1883: **Jack Quinn**

Sherry Magee, 1884

Few people remember Magee (pronounced Mu-Gee), but he was a superstar. Magee could hit, hit for power, run, and throw. He was a quality player when he debuted at the age of 19, and Magee was still playing well in his 30s after leaving the Phillies for other National league teams.

Other notables born in 1884: **Jake Daubert, Eddie Cicotte, Chief Bender**

Ed Konetchy, 1885

Art Fletcher may have been a more valuable player, so you could pick him here if you wanted. The well-respected Konetchy was one of the best defensive first basemen in the National League during the deadball era. His career was basically split between seven years with the Cardinals and three years each with the Braves and Dodgers. Because those teams were terrible at that time, Konetchy was often the subject of trade rumors. He briefly jumped to the rival Federal League to cash in, but came back to play out his career that ended in 1921 with more than 2,100 hits and 182 triples, the latter of which still rates in the top 15 in baseball history.

Others born in 1885: **Art Fletcher**

Ty Cobb, 1886

His career batting mark of .367 (not .366 as is erroneously reported by many sources) is still a record almost a century after Cobb played his final game.

Some folks make the mistake of thinking Cobb was a speedy singles hitter, because of his nearly 900 stolen bases and less than 150 home runs. But in his era, Ty was one of the best sluggers, finishing in the top ten in slugging, total bases, extra-base hits, and home runs, many, many times.

In 1925, fed up with hearing about the home run exploits of Babe Ruth, Cobb told reporters he would “try for home runs for the first time in my career” during a series in St. Louis. In two consecutive games, Cobb hit five home runs and a double and drove in 11 runs. He then went back to hitting for average.

Other notable baseball player born in 1886: **Home Run Baker, Rube Marquard**

Walter Johnson, 1887

“From the first time I held a ball, it settled in the palm of my right hand as though it belonged there and, when I threw it, ball, hand and wrist, and arm and shoulder and back seemed to all work together.” — Walter Johnson

Johnson’s statistical record is so overwhelming, that even more than 100 years after his debut, he can legit be considered in the conversation as the best pitcher ever. Others came along who threw as hard or harder. But Johnson was the first to throw as hard as he did frequently. Others had great control and mastery of all their pitches, but until Johnson, no pitcher who made batters afraid with his speed also had such great off-speed pitches.

Also born in 1887: **Eddie Collins, Grover Cleveland Alexander**

Tris Speaker, 1888

Tris Speaker has the best defensive statistics of any outfielder in history. He led the league in putouts seven times, in double plays ten times, and in assists by a center fielder eight times. Which is to say he caught more balls and made more great plays than any outfielder ever did.

“Spoke” played extremely shallow, almost like a “rover” in short center field, shifting to either side of second base depending on the batter. Dozens of times in his career, Speaker served as the pivot man on double plays in the infield. He was sort of a one-man defensive shift. He also made far fewer errors than outfielders of his era, and he could go back to catch a flyball as well as anyone.

Others born in 1888: **Zack Wheat, Red Faber**

Stan Coveleskie, 1889

Coveleskie was the best pitcher in the Tri-State League with Lancaster immediately. Having practiced as a youngster by throwing rocks at tin cans, the task of putting a baseball inside a strike zone 17 inches wide seemed much easier. Throwing with a dead ball, Coveleskie kept the ball low and didn’t mind if the batter made contact. He had last-second movement on his fastball, but his best pitch was the spitball, which he applied with an alum that he kept in his cheek.

Others born in 1889: **Wally Schang, Heinie Groh**

Sam Rice, 1890

Rice was at the center of one of the most controversial plays in history. In Game Three of the 1925 World Series, at Griffith Stadium in Washington D.C., the Senators were leading the Pirates by one run. Rice was in right field when Earl Smith hit a deep fly over his head. Rice sped back and leapt for the ball, but tumbled into the stands and out of view. When he emerged the baseball was in his glove and Smith was ruled out. The Pirates cried over the call, but the umpires held firm and Washington won the game. For years, Rice was cryptic about the play. Frequently when asked if he caught the ball, he would say "The umpire said I did." He wrote a letter and sealed it, with instructions to his family to release it only after his death. In 1974, after he died at the age of 84, Rice's letter was opened. It read:

It was a cold and windy day; the right field bleachers were crowded with people in overcoats and wrapped in blankets, the ball was a line drive headed for the bleachers towards right center, I turned slightly to my right and had the ball in view all the way. Going at top speed and about 15 feet from [the] bleachers jumped as high as I could and back handed and the ball hit the center of pocket in glove (I had a death grip on it). I hit the ground above five feet from a barrier about four feet high in front of the bleachers with all my breaks on but couldn't stop so I tried to jump it to land in the crowd but my feet hit the barrier about a foot from top and I toppled over on my stomach into first row of bleachers, I hit my Adams apple on something which sort of knocked me out for a few seconds but McNeely arrived about that time and grabbed me by the shirt and pulled me out. I remember trotting back toward the infield still carrying the ball for about halfway and then tossed it towards the pitcher's mound. (How I have wished many times I had kept it).

At no time did I lose possession of the ball.

Sam Rice.

Others born this year: **Max Carey, Ken Williams, Urban Shocker**

Dazzy Vance, 1891

Vance pitched with pain for more than a decade, bounced around professional baseball, never stuck anywhere very long. One night he was playing poker when he banged his right elbow on the top of the table. The pain felt different and he went to a doctor. The physician performed an operation on Vance's elbow, most likely to remove bone chips. The random incident turned his career around.

That was 1920, Dazzy was 29 years old. The following year he pitched without pain for the first time and had a good season for New Orleans. The Dodgers bought his contract and in 1922 the 31-year old won 18 games and led the National League in strikeouts. He led the league in

strikeouts the next year too, and the year after that. He led the NL in K's for seven straight seasons, and in 1924 when he was 34, Dazzy won the MVP Award when he won 28 games and captured the pitching triple crown. He used an over-the-top fastball that appeared, some batters said, as if it came "from out of the sky." He used a similar motion for his breaking pitch. Several years he nearly single-handedly kept the Dodgers in the pennant race. Vance pitched until he was 44 years old and won all of his 197 games after his 30th birthday. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1955. His is one of the most peculiar careers in baseball history.

Other players born in 1891: **Rabbit Maranville, Eppa Rixey**

Ray Schalk, 1892

One of the clean players for the White Sox in the 1919 World Series. That is: Ray was playing to win. He was never a very tough out, but Schalk was a fantastic catcher, and worthy of his status as a Hall of Famer.

Cristóbal Torriente, 1893

There are still some people in Havana, and even in Tampa, who insist that Cristóbal Torriente was the best ballplayer there ever was. Those folks never saw him play, but the legend of Torriente, whom fans called "Carlos," and opposing pitchers cursed for his power and handy use of a bat, has been passed down from generation to generation. On the island of Cuba, Torriente, who died more than eight decades ago, is remembered by that baseball-mad nation as "The Babe Ruth of Cuba."

How great was "Carlos" Torriente? A few years into his tenure in the negro leagues in America, an opposing manager reportedly said of him: "If I see Torriente walking up the other side of the street, I would say, 'There walks a ballclub.' "

In parts of ten seasons in the negro leagues, Torriente was a superstar. He batted .340, a mark that ranks eighth all-time in negro league history. His on-base percentage of .427 is fifth all-time in the history of those leagues. Among all players in major league history, now that the negro leagues are included in that status, Torriente rates 16th in on-base percentage.

Others born this year: **Bullet Joe Rogan, George Sisler, Edd Roush, Burleigh Grimes**

Harry Heilmann, 1894

Deserves to be remembered more. Heilmann won four batting titles in the 1920s, flirting with .400 each time, and topping that magic figure once. He remains one of the best right-handed batters the game has ever known.

Late in the evening on July 25, 1916, Heilmann was driving when he witnessed an automobile back off a dock and fall into the Detroit River. Heilmann jumped from his car and into the river,

saving the lives of three of the five passengers. Sadly, a young woman and her daughter drowned. We can't be sure if Harry was thinking of his brother Walter when he went into the Detroit River to save those strangers, but it's likely that the tragic loss of his sibling was on his mind. The next afternoon at Navin Field, Heilmann received a standing ovation as he took his position in the outfield.

Babe Ruth, 1895

The Babe was not only larger than life, he seemed to be larger than death. At his funeral on a searing August day in 1948, former teammates **Joe Dugan** and **Waite Hoyt** suffered in the humidity, clawing at their neckties. "I sure could go for a cold beer," Hoyt said. "So could the Babe," Dugan replied.

Rogers Hornsby, 1896

Hornsby batted .382 in the 1920s, and from 1921 to 1925, "The Rajah" batted an amazing .402, averaging 41 doubles, 13 triples, and 29 home runs per season. He was not a slap-hitting .300 hitter. All of that damage came in the National League, where Hornsby won two Most Valuable Player awards and seven batting titles in the Roaring Twenties. He led two different teams to the pennant as a player-manager, the only man to do that.

Others born in 1896: **Oscar Charleston**

Frank Frisch, 1897

Was traded straight-up for Hornsby once, which tells you how highly regarded Frisch was.

Bill Terry, 1898

He was the first player whose relationship with the media negatively impacted his Hall of Fame chances. Terry frequently banned reporters from his office or refused to give interviews. The baseball writers pondered his name on 14 ballots before they elected Terry, 18 years after his last game as a player. When the phone call came to inform him of his election, Terry coldly told a reporter, "I have nothing to say."

Others of note: **Joe Sewell**

Earle Combs, 1899

When Combs first came to the Yankees, manager Miller Huggins called him into his office. "I hear you're pretty fast," Huggins said. "Yep," Combs replied, "they called me The Mail Carrier in Louisville." "Well, they are going to call you The Waiter here," Huggins said, "because we've got a couple guys named Ruth and **[Bob] Meusel** who hit the ball out of the park, and if you get on base, you just wait for them *to knock you in*."

Others born in 1899: **Judy Johnson, Waite Hoyt**

Lefty Grove, 1900

If we constructed a list of the worst tempers in baseball history, Grove would be among the leaders. The stories of his temper were legend. Once after a bad day on the mound he destroyed every bat in the bat rack, leaving only a few that were lying in front of the dugout. Another time he popped every button on his jersey when he was pulled from a game by Connie Mack. There were countless arguments with teammates who had the misfortune of making an error behind Lefty.

Others born in 1900: **Goose Goslin, Gabby Hartnett, Hack Wilson, Ted Lyons**

Turkey Stearnes, 1901

The official record of baseball in the negro leagues is not as complete as that of the segregated white major leagues, unfortunately. But in the nearly 1,000 league games Norman “Turkey” Stearnes appeared in for which we have boxscores, he batted .349 with a slugging percentage over .600, both of which rate in the top ten all-time for major league baseball.

There are probably three men who have a serious claim to being the best hitter in the history of the negro leagues: Stearnes, Oscar Charleston, and Josh Gibson. Of those, Stearnes is the least-remembered, though all three are in the Hall of Fame.

Others born in 1901: **Mule Suttles, Heinie Manush**

Al Simmons, 1902

When he played with the Athletics, Simmons rented a room in a home that sat across the street from Shibe Park. According to journalist William Nack, Simmons was a late sleeper, and frequently a kid from the neighborhood would be dispatched to wake Al for batting practice. Groggy or not, Simmons was so good, he usually hit the hell out of the ball. He batted .356 in 12 seasons with Philadelphia, and .334 for his Hall of Fame career. He’s on the short list of greatest right-handed hitters in history, but rarely gets mentioned.

Also born in 1902: **Earl Averill**

Lou Gehrig, 1903

One of many great ballplayers born in 1903, Gehrig is clearly the greatest. He retired with more home runs and RBI than anyone other than his gregarious teammate, Babe Ruth, whom he called “George.”

Others born in 1903: **Charlie Gehringer, Cool Papa Bell, Paul Waner, and Mickey Cochrane**

Willie Wells, 1904

Probably the greatest shortstop in the history of the organized black professional leagues. He was a fantastic gloveman who could also hit for power.

Others born in 1904: **Chuck Klein, Willie Foster**

Martín Dihigo, 1905

A long-legged right-handed batter somewhat like Frank Robinson (but even larger), Dihigo won batting titles in Cuba, the U.S., and in Mexico. He won the home run title in all three countries too, and in 1938 he tossed the first no-hitter in the history of the Mexican League. That season, Dihigo went 18-2 for Aguila, batted .387, and was also their manager as they won the pennant.

“He was,” said Buck Leonard, “the best ballplayer of all time, black or white.”

Satchel Paige, 1906

While it’s difficult to separate reality from myth when it comes to Satchel Paige, it’s generally understood that the rail-thin right-hander was the best pitcher in the history of the negro leagues. At least the most prolific great pitcher. When he was 58 years old(!), Satch pitched brilliantly in a relief appearance for the A’s. He was still able to baffle batters with his knee-high fastball, gangly-limbed delivery, and hesitation offspeed pitches.

Jimmie Foxx, 1907

The man they called “Double-X” was very strong, probably the strongest man in baseball prior to the Second World War (outside of maybe Josh Gibson). Foxx once hit a home run over the roof and out of the original Comiskey Park. He hit a ball out of Shibe Park straight down the left line. He reportedly hit a ball deep into the upper deck(!) in left field at old Yankee Stadium.

Wes Ferrell, 1908

Maybe the worst sore loser in baseball history. Ferrell was known to destroy dugouts, clubhouses, and uniforms when things didn’t go his way. Several times in his career, Ferrell refused to leave the mound when his manager tried to remove him from the game. You’d need a word beyond intense to describe his attitude. One time, when he allowed six runs in less than two innings, Ferrell punched himself in the face repeatedly on the bench and banged his head into the water cooler before teammates halted his self-abuse.

Mel Ott, 1909

Vastly underrated power hitter for the New York Giants. Ott had a short stroke and used a high leg kick and an unusual batting stance to pull pitches down the line at mammoth Polo Grounds

in New York. He retired as the most prolific home run hitter in National League history, a record he held for more than two decades until **Willie Mays** surpassed him.

Dizzy Dean, 1910

Probably the most fun ballplayer on this list.

"I was born with a weak mind, a strong back and a strong arm. I only went as far as the third grade and then I quit, because if I had went to the fourth I would have passed my father," Dizzy said.

He's the last NL pitcher to win 30 games, and at his peak he was possibly as good as **Sandy Koufax or Tom Seaver** ever were.

Josh Gibson, 1911

It's clear from the statistical record that Gibson is the greatest hitter in negro leagues history. He played 12 full seasons and led the league in homers 11 times. He won three batting titles. In nearly 600 games we have statistics for, Gibson had a slugging percentage over .700 and a .374 batting average. He wasn't just a right-handed power hitter, he was the best right-handed hitter in the history of the black leagues.

Monte Irvin, who played with Willie Mays and against **Henry Aaron**, spent nine years in the negro leagues where he witnessed Gibson in his prime. Irvin said of Mays and Aaron, "They were tremendous players, but they were no Josh Gibson."

Arky Vaughan, 1912

An underrated Hall of Fame shortstop, Vaughan was a left-handed batter somewhat like Tony Gwynn, hitting the ball the opposite way a lot. He was very patient, he led the league in walks three times, and his career walk-to-strikeout ratio was an impressive 3-to-1. Among players with at least 2,000 hits, that ranks third behind only **Joe Sewell and Tris Speaker**.

Johnny Mize, 1913

As a young first baseman with the Cardinals, Mize was an incredible hitter. He won a batting title, two home run titles, and led the NL in slugging three straight years. He was traded to the Giants for three players and \$50,000 four days after Pearl Harbor was attacked. He missed a few years in the war, but came back to the States and hit more than 50 homers one year for the Giants. He was a tremendously powerful, but patient and skilled batter.

Joe DiMaggio, 1914

What would a perfect ballplayer accomplish?

He might lead the league in home runs while hitting more home runs than he has strikeouts. He might lead the league in triples and home runs and runs scored and runs batted in, as well as hitting and slugging and total bases in the same season. He might glide to the warning track to take away triples, and throw out runners trying to stretch a gapper into a double. He might help his team win more championships than anyone ever had. He might get at least one hit every game for two months. DiMaggio did all those things.

Joe Gordon, 1915

Somehow, Gordon wasn't elected to the Hall of Fame until 2009, 58 years after his last game and 31 years after his death. The second baseman received MVP votes in eight of his 11 seasons, was an All-Star nine times, retired as the all-time home run leader at his position(!), and during his career he was generally acclaimed as the best defender at second. He missed two prime seasons due to service in World War II or his numbers would have been better. Through his first five seasons, Gordon was a better player than Rogers Hornsby at the same juncture of his career, that's how good he was.

Enos Slaughter, 1916

Slaughter was a very good player. He was one of the best outfielders in baseball when he was called for duty in WWII. He missed his age 27-28-29 seasons, the best seasons of most careers. He came back and played very well: for the ten years after he returned from the war, Enos posted an OPS+ of 122 with a 302/388/447 slashline. Then he spent five years serving as a spare outfielder for the Yankees. When he was 42 he posted an OPS+ of 133 and had a .396 on-base percentage for the Yankees in 160 plate appearances. His home run won Game Three of the 1956 World Series against his nemesis, the Dodgers. He won two titles as a Yankee, to go along with the two he got in St. Louis.

Lou Boudreau, 1917

Boudreau may have had the most valuable season in history. In 1948 he was the best player in the American League: he hit .355 and got on base more than 45 percent of the time. He batted in the middle of the order and he hit for more power than ever, hitting a career-high 18 home runs. He walked 98 times and he struck out only nine times all season. Nine times? Nine times. He was also the best defensive shortstop in the league.

Did I mention he was also the manager of the team, at just 30 years of age?

In a special playoff for the pennant, Boudreau hit two home runs and had four hits to help Cleveland defeat the Red Sox for the flag. It was the Indians first pennant in 28 years. In the World Series victory over the Braves, Lou had four doubles. He remains the last player-manager to win a pennant or a World Series.

Ted Williams, 1918

There may have never been a smarter hitter than Ted Williams. Cobb was calculating, Ruth was a masher, and Hornsby was a machine. But Williams trained his intellect on the craft of hitting like no one ever had. When his epic book “The Science of Hitting” was published, it included a chart showing what Williams thought he would hit based on pitch location. He espoused a savvy theory on hitting and he never budged. He revolutionized the art of hitting by using a small, light bat, introducing the notion of bat speed to the broad masses. He steadfastly refused to swing at a bad pitch, he would not embarrass himself by flailing. He hit .327 and led the league in runs batted in when he was a 20-year old rookie. He batted .388 when he was 38 years old. He won his sixth batting title when he was 39. Williams was one of the five best hitters in the league in his last season when he was 41 years old.

Jackie Robinson, 1919

Robinson ran pigeon-toed with his chest out and his arms pumping away from his body. It was an unusual gait, but eyewitnesses insist that watching Robinson go from first to third was one of the joys of being a baseball fan. In Brooklyn, black fans would congregate in one section and when Robinson got on base, they would chant “Go Jackie Go!”, and if he successfully stole a base, they would taunt the opposing team with “Yes Jackie did!”

Stan Musial, 1920

Two amazing facts about Stan Musial: (1) as of 2022, more than 55 years after he played his final game, Musial still ranks second all-time in total bases, behind only Henry Aaron, and (2) Musial played 3,026 games, but he was never thrown out of a game in the big leagues

Warren Spahn, 1921

Spahn nearly missed his chance to win his first big league game. As a soldier in the Army’s 9th Armored Division in World War II, Spahn fought across Europe and at the Battle of the Bulge he took two bullets, one grazing his head. He lived through hell, missing three-plus years. The war understandably had a lasting impact on him. A teammate would say of a still 20-something Spahn: “He was born old.”

Old was when Spahn was at his best: he didn’t win his first game until he was 25, won an incredible 255 games after his 30th birthday, and 75 games in his 40s. He won a total of 404 games in professional baseball and threw his last pitch for money when he was 46 years old.

Hoyt Wilhelm, 1922

Teams have no idea how to handle a knuckleball pitcher. The Indians released Hoyt Wilhelm in August of 1958 after the right-hander posted a 2.49 ERA in 24 relief appearances and six starts. He’s the only Hall of Famer ever released twice in the middle of his career. Orioles manager

Paul Richards couldn't believe his luck and quickly plucked Wilhelm off the waiver wire. After the embarrassment of being released twice, Wilhelm pitched in 670 games and had a 2.25 ERA on his way to more than 1,000 games and 228 saves. Wilhelm threw his last knuckleball in the major leagues when he was 49 years old.

Also born in 1922: **Ralph Kiner**

Larry Doby, 1923

He was a lot like **Dale Murphy** as a player, but an even better hitter. Doby was a good base stealer too, but the Indians under Al Lopez didn't like to steal, in fact no one really liked to steal bases in the 1950s. For the first few years of the 1950s, Doby was the best player in the American League, before Ted Williams got rolling again and **Mickey Mantle** emerged. He had tremendous power, was solid in center field, and he did everything you wanted offensively: he hit for average, hit some doubles, homers, and drew bases on balls. He deserved to win the MVP in 1952, but they always gave it to a Yankee as long as they were winning pennants.

Other great player born in 1923: **Minnie Minoso**

Gil Hodges, 1924

Now in the Baseball Hall of Fame, where he deserves to be.

Yogi Berra, 1925

"He seldom misses a trick. He knows exactly what his pitchers can throw, and when they're not throwing what he expects, he reacts quickly. It's sort of a sixth sense." — Casey Stengel

Still probably the greatest catcher in Yankees history, and a unique player who always seemed to have things go his way.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWER

Color commentary last night from **John Smoltz** during Cards-Braves game when asked about Braves chances to make it back-to-back World Series wins, "you don't see National League teams winning back-to-back, it's been a long time."

Name the last NL to win back-to-back World Series, and the 3 AL teams that won back-to-back since.

Cincinnati Reds 1975-1976

Yankees 1998-1999-2000

Blue Jays 1992-1993

Yankees 1977-1978

HOUSEKEEPING

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