

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

9.11.2022

Good morning baseball fans. I had the pleasure of golfing with three Wesleyan baseball teammates this week. Some great stories.

Grab a coffee and enjoy this week's issue—lots of Aaron Judge. Plus rule changes, dominating Dodgers, lost no-hitters, a Maine history lesson and of course, trivia.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Back-to-back Cy Young awards—same team, different pitchers. It has happened eight times—name the pitchers:

2008 and 2007 Cleveland Indians (two left-handed starters).

1997 and 1996 Toronto Blue Jays (two right-handed starters)

1996 and 1995 Atlanta Braves (two right-handed starters)

1983 and 1982 Philadelphia Phillies (two left-handed starters)

1982 and 1981 Brewers (right-handed starter and right-handed reliever)

1980 and 1979 Orioles (right-handed starter and left-handed starter)

1978 and 1979 New York Yankees (left-handed starter and left-handed reliever)

1963 and 1962 Los Angeles Dodgers (left-handed starter and right-handed starter)

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Note to **Aaron Judge**--The years **Babe Ruth** hit 60 HRs and **Roger Maris** hit 61 the Yankees won the world Series.

It has been an ugly stretch but worth noting, The Yankees have officially clinched ... their 30th consecutive winning season, dating back to 1993. OK, while the bar is set much higher than simply finishing above .500, it is a remarkable achievement worthy of recognition.

Consider this: in the four major North American professional sports, only the 1926-64 Yankees (39 seasons) and the 1952-83 Montreal Canadiens (32 seasons) can compare with the sustained run of success, spanning the managerial tenures of **Buck Showalter**, **Joe Torre**, **Joe Girardi** and now **Aaron Boone**. The 1968-96 Boston Bruins had 29 straight seasons without a losing record.

Last week we mentioned 20 HR/20 SB seasons for rookies Bobby Witt Jr. and Julio Rodriguez. Only five rookies have done it—**Marty Cordova 1995**, **Ellis Burks 1987** and **Mitchell Page 1977**.

Ellis Burks had 352 home runs and 181 stolen bases in his career. He's one of 21 players to reach those levels and 10 are in the Hall of Fame.

Zac Gallen of the D'backs ran his scoreless streak to 41 1/3 innings, leading Arizona to a 5-1 win and a series victory.

Gallen's streak is the eighth longest in the Live Ball Era (since 1920). He is the fourth AL/NL pitcher in the Modern Era (since 1900) to throw six or more scoreless innings in six straight starts, joining **Don Drysdale (1968)**, **Orel Hershisier (1988)** and **Zack Greinke (2015)**.

The D-backs' record for consecutive scoreless innings is owned by right-hander **Brandon Webb**, who tossed 42 straight in 2007. The Major League record of 59 belongs to Hershisier, who accomplished the feat in 1988.

You are pretty good if you knew the last American League player before Aaron Judge to reach 54 home runs in a season was **José Bautista**, Toronto (2010).

It's been a while—last White Sox pitcher to win a Cy Young--**Jack McDowell** (1993). Other White Sox winners **LaMar Hoyt** 1983, **Early Wynn** 1959.

There are reasons top teams stay on top. The Dodgers draft of 2016 yielded 14 major leaguers including **Gavin Lux, Will Smith, Dustin May and Tony Gonsolin**.

In the sixth inning of the Cardinals' 7-5 win over the Pirates, **Albert Pujols** hit the 696th home run of his career to move into a tie for fourth place with **Alex Rodriguez** on the all-time list.

Now, only **Barry Bonds (762), Hank Aaron (755) and Babe Ruth (714)** have more home runs than Pujols over the course of his brilliant 22-year MLB career.

Pujols, who has 17 home runs this season for the Cardinals, also extended his MLB record for hitting a home run off 452 different pitchers. Former Cub **Ryan Dempster** surrendered the most Pujols home runs of any pitcher by yielding eight.

On a day when **Yadier Molina** and **Adam Wainwright** tied the AL/NL record for starts made by a battery at 324, the veteran catcher hit his first home run in nearly four months and added a second in the fourth inning.

Molina, teammates with Wainwright for the past 18 seasons, came into Thursday with 333 hits in games started by Wainwright -- the most hits in MLB history by a catcher in games started by one pitcher. Also, Molina's 19 game-winning RBIs are the third most in MLB history by a catcher in games thrown by one pitcher.

Wainwright and Molina equaled the AL/NL record of 324 starts set by Mickey Lolich and Bill Freehan, accomplished from 1963-75 with the Tigers. Wainwright, 41, and Molina, 40, made their first start together on April 6, 2007, in Houston against the Astros, and Thursday's outing was their 20th start of the season. Coincidentally, on the same Sept. 8 date that their record was tied by Wainwright and Molina, **Mickey Lolich and Bill Freehan** made their final start for the Tigers 47 years earlier.

Wainwright and Molina came into Thursday as the winningest battery in MLB history with 212 victories in their starts together. **Warren Spahn and Del Crandall**, stars with the Braves from 1949-63, are second with 202 victories in their starts.

Molina recently passed **Carlton Fisk** for second-most games started at catcher. Molina went into the weekend with 2,100. Fisk had 2,097. Another Pudge, **Ivan Rodriguez**, holds the record with 2,346

Christian Yelich of the Brewers can still connect. This week he blasted a 499 foot HR to the third deck at Coors Field.

It's the longest dinger of the 2022 season so far. It's also the third-longest tracked by Statcast (since 2015), surpassed by only Nomar Mazara (505 feet) and Giancarlo Stanton (504).

The towering blast was Yelich's 12th of the year and first since Aug. 28 against Chicago. The previous longest home run of the season was by the Marlins' **Jesús Sánchez**, who went 496 feet also at Coors Field.

Two days later...

The Rockies **CJ Cron**'s massive homer off D-backs right-hander **Keynan Middleton**, which landed well above the seats and near that white promotional truck, was projected at 504 feet, matching the longest home run hit at Coors Field since Statcast began tracking in 2015.

Giancarlo Stanton also hit a 504-foot homer here on Aug. 6, 2016, when he was with the Marlins.

Cron's home run was one foot shorter than a 505-footer hit by **Nomar Mazara** (then with the Rangers) on June 21, 2019, the longest tracked by Statcast.

The homer was Cron's 27th of the season.

Speaking of Colorado, four Rockies players have led the National League in home runs--**Nolan Arenado (2015, '16 and '18)**, **Larry Walker (1997)**, **Andres Galarraga (1996)** and **Dante Bichette (1995)**

Framber Valdez of the Astros has worked at least six innings in 24 of his 26 starts and allowed two or fewer earned runs 18 times.

Kody Clemens of the Tigers leads the family with three home runs. Dad Roger Clemens had 31 hits in his career but never homered.

Shohei Ohtani is the first player to strike out 100 batters and hit 30 home runs in the same season. He has 188 K's and 32 homers.

And he has a real chance at striking out 200 batters and hitting 35 homers in the same season. I don't know if he will get there, but if he does that would be — get this — more strikeouts than

Jim Palmer ever had in a season and more home runs than **Al Kaline, Roberto Clemente** or **George Brett** ever had in a season.

Ohtani has been intentionally walked 13 times as a hitter and he has issued zero intentional walks as a pitcher.

Ohtani, who typically touches the upper 90s with his fastball, emphatically kicked things up a notch when he threw a 101.4 mph fastball to strike out **Kyle Tucker** in the third inning of a 6-1 win over the Astros Saturday. It was the fastest strikeout pitch by an Angels pitcher in the pitch-tracking era (since 2008). Ohtani allowed just one run on six hits with seven strikeouts over five innings, en-route to his 12th win of the season.

Ohtani has been on an impressive run on both sides of the ball as of late. He entered Saturday batting .323 with nine homers and 21 RBIs in 27 games as a hitter since Aug. 9, while posting a 1.74 ERA with 27 strikeouts over that same span.

Mike Trout has accomplished many impressive feats in his career, and now, he can add hitting a homer in six straight games to that list. Not a bad week.

Facing Astros right-hander **Lance McCullers Jr.** in the sixth inning on Friday night at Minute Maid Park, Trout knocked a two-run blast, coming on the heels of homers in his previous four games at home. The long ball, No. 33 on the season, tied Shohei Ohtani for the Angels team lead.

Trout's homer tied the Angels franchise record for homers in consecutive games, set by **Bobby Bonds** from Aug. 2-7, 1977.

Then on Saturday - Trout's second-inning homer in the 6-1 win over the Astros on Saturday night at Minute Maid Park put the three-time MVP in the record books, making him the first player in Angels history to homer in six consecutive games.

Trout is the first Major Leaguer to homer in six straight since **Joey Votto** homered in seven straight last season, and he's now two games shy of the all-time record held by **Ken Griffey Jr., Don Mattingly** and **Dale Long**.

Entering Saturday as the active Major League career leader in OBP (.416) and slugging (.585), Trout holds numerous Angels franchise records, including the club's all-time home run lead (344).

Trout had homered in four straight games twice (May 12-15, 2017, and April 4-7, 2019) before this recent run.

Did you know the Modern Era record for most consecutive strikeouts to begin a game is held by Marlins' **Pablo López** (9 vs. the Braves in 2021)?

Since the first All-Star Game in 1933, only 14 teams have reached the playoffs after posting a sub-.500 record in the second half. Five of these teams made it to the Fall Classic, while three won it all. No team has won a championship with a second-half winning percentage as low as these Yankees currently have.

There is hope--**2006 Cardinals: .473**

Finish: Won World Series

After going 105-57 in 2004 and 100-62 in 2005 but falling short of a World Series title both years, the Cardinals stumbled into the 2006 postseason with an 83-79 record (35-39 in the second half). However, St. Louis knocked off the 88-win Padres in the NLDS and the 97-win Mets in a seven-game thriller of an NLCS to clinch the pennant, then made quick work of the Tigers in the World Series to win its first title since 1982. No World Series champion has posted a worse overall record, and the same goes for their second-half record.

1990 Reds: .494

Finish: Won World Series

The Reds led the NL West wire to wire, as they played .733 baseball over their first 45 games (33-12) and weathered a mediocre second half (41-42) to win the division. With help from the “Nasty Boys” bullpen trio of **Norm Charlton, Rob Dibble and Randy Myers**, Cincinnati got past the Pirates in the NLCS, then rode the right arm of **Jose Rijo** and a strong showing from its offense to a Fall Classic sweep over the defending World Series-champion A’s.

1987 Twins: .493

Finish: Won World Series

While the Twins had an up-and-down season in 1987 and actually finished the year with a negative run differential (-20), they took advantage of a weak AL West and won the division with an 85-77 record (36-37 second-half record), just the fifth-best overall mark in the AL. The Tigers had a 13-win advantage entering their ALCS matchup, but Minnesota put up 34 runs in a five-game drubbing of Detroit, then topped the Cardinals in seven games to win the first World Series championship in Twins history (second in franchise history). Thus, they became the first team to win a World Series after getting outscored in the regular season, as well as the first to go all the way after posting a sub-.500 second-half record.

And let's not think about

1981 Yankees: .490

Finish: Lost in World Series

We can pin an asterisk on this one given the unique postseason structure in the 1981 strike-shortened season. Teams that were in first place when the strike commenced in June were granted an automatic playoff berth, so the Yankees (the first-half AL East winner) were already assured a spot when play resumed in August. After going 25-26 in the second half, New York eked out a win over the Brewers in the ALDS and swept the A's in the ALCS to reach the World Series, where it lost to the Dodgers in six games. The Yanks wouldn't make it to the Fall Classic again until 1996.

RULE CHANGES FOR 2023

A pitch timer, limits on defensive shifts and bigger bases are coming to Major League Baseball in 2023.

Following recent experiments in the Minor Leagues, the recently formed Joint Competition Committee voted Friday in favor of three rule changes aimed at improving pace of play, action and safety at the MLB level.

The pitch timer, defensive shift limits and bigger bases were the only three rules proposed by MLB to the Joint Competition Committee -- a voting body consisting of four active players, six members appointed by MLB and one umpire, that was created as part of the 2022-26 Collective Bargaining Agreement. Though the automatic ball-strike system (AKA "robot umps") -- and, alternatively, an ABS challenge system -- has been experimented with in select Minor Leagues this season, a formal rule change proposal related to the ABS has not been made to the committee and is not expected for the 2023 season.

PITCH TIMER

In an effort to create a quicker pace of play, there will be a 30-second timer between batters. Between pitches, there will be a 15-second timer with the bases empty and a 20-second timer with runners on base. At last check, the pitch timer had reduced the average time of game in MiLB by about 26 minutes. This rule, which includes limits on throws to first base, has also increased stolen-base attempts. With this rule in place in the Minors this season, steal attempts per game have increased from 2.23 in 2019, at a 68% success rate, to 2.83 in 2022, at a 77% success rate.

- The pitcher must begin his motion to deliver the pitch before the expiration of the pitch timer.

- Pitchers who violate the timer are charged with an automatic ball. Batters who violate the timer are charged with an automatic strike.
- Batters must be in the box and alert to the pitcher by the 8-second mark or else be charged with an automatic strike.
- With runners on base, the timer resets if the pitcher attempts a pickoff or steps off the rubber.
- Pitchers are limited to two disengagements (pickoff attempts or step-offs) per plate appearance. However, this limit is reset if a runner or runners advance during the plate appearance.
- If a third pickoff attempt is made, the runner automatically advances one base if the pickoff attempt is not successful.
- Mound visits, injury timeouts and offensive team timeouts do not count as a disengagement.
- If a team has used up all five of its allotted mound visits prior to the ninth inning, that team will receive an additional mound visit in the ninth inning. This effectively serves as an additional disengagement.
- Umpires may provide extra time if warranted by special circumstances. (So if, as an example, a catcher were to be thrown out on the bases to end the previous half-inning and needed additional time to put on his catching gear, the umpire could allow it.)

Note that the rule that will be used in MLB is slightly altered from the rule that was used in MiLB this year. In MiLB in 2022, it was a 14-second timer with the bases empty and 18 seconds (Double-A and lower) or 19 seconds (Triple-A) with runners on, with batters required to be in the box by the 9-second mark and a strict limit of two disengagements per plate appearance (that did not reset if the runner advanced). In its most recent week of play, the Minors have seen an average of .45 violations per game.

DEFENSIVE SHIFT LIMITS

The defensive team must have a minimum of four players on the infield, with at least two infielders completely on either side of second base. These restrictions are intended to increase the batting average on balls in play, to allow infielders to better showcase their athleticism and to restore more traditional outcomes on batted balls. As of this writing, the league-wide batting average on balls in play of .291 in 2022 is six points lower than in 2012 and 10 points lower than in 2006.

- The four infielders must be within the outer boundary of the infield (i.e. cleats in the dirt) when the pitcher is on the rubber.
- Infielders may not switch sides. In other words, a team cannot reposition its best defender on the side of the infield the batter is more likely to hit the ball.
- If the infielders are not aligned properly at the time of the pitch, the offense can choose an automatic ball or the result of the play.

- This rule does not preclude a team from positioning an outfielder in the infield or in the shallow outfield grass in certain situations. But it does prohibit four-outfielder alignments.
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- **BIGGER BASES**
- The bases, which traditionally have been 15 inches square, will instead be 18 inches square. Home plate is unchanged.
- Though this can have a modest impact on stolen-base success rate, the primary goal of this change is to give players more room to operate and to avoid collisions. This is especially important at first base, where fielders have an extra 3-inch advantage to stay out of harm's way from the baserunner while receiving throws.
- This change will create a 4 1/2-inch reduction in the distance between first and second base and between second base and third, which encourages more stolen-base attempts. The bigger bases could also have the effect of reducing oversliding in which a player loses contact with the bag while sliding through it.

ZAC GALLEN CONTINUES TO CHASE HISTORY

Dan Szmborski, Fan Graphs

The Arizona Diamondbacks don't generate a lot of national headlines these days, but the team's ace, **Zac Gallen**, is trying his best to change that. Since a **Luke Maile** double knocked him out of a game against the Guardians on August 2, Gallen has racked up six consecutive scoreless games, covering 41 1/3 innings. Gallen's run has gone on long enough to have historical significance: He currently ranks 17th in baseball history, at least the history during which usable game logs exist (since around the start of the 20th century). He's two outs from catching **Brandon Webb's** 2007 streak to set a new Diamondbacks franchise record, and another 3 2/3 innings will slot him into the top 10, tying his with the streaks of **Cy Young, Sal Maglie, and Doc White**.

Naturally, most streaks of this nature involve a player playing well above their established level of ability, and Gallen is no exception. But every pitcher with a scoreless innings streak this long was at least solid, with nary an incompetent journeyman in sight. Gallen is again no exception and was having a solid season even before the streak started. Entering play on August 2, he had an ERA of 3.24 and a FIP of 3.69 in 19 starts, above-average numbers, though not good enough to force his way into the Cy Young conversation.

HOW BAD IS IT IN BOSTON?

Mercifully, the Red Sox left Tropicana Field for the final time this season Wednesday night, once again swept by the Rays. The 1-0 defeat ran their losing streak in the Trop to nine games — the

longest by any visiting team in a season in the 25-year history of Major League Baseball in Tampa Bay — and further cemented their status as American League East roadkill.

The Red Sox are 18-39 against AL East opponents, a .316 winning percentage that would be far and away their worst in the division since its formation in 1969. The current standard for futility — and the only time they had a sub-.400 record in division play over a full season — is 26-46 (.361) by the yearlong dumpster fire that was the 2012 team under **Bobby Valentine**.

The Red Sox have to go at least 10-9 over their remaining 19 games against the AL East to ensure that they don't set a new unsavory mark.

(The Sox went 14-26 against the AL East during the pandemic-compressed 2020 campaign, a .350 winning percentage. They have to go at least 9-10 to surpass that.)

The .316 would be tied with the 2019 Orioles for the eighth-worst in-division mark by an AL East team in a full season.

Worst in-division records by AL East teams, 1969-2022 (minimum 50 games)

Team	AL East record	Win percentage	Overall record	Win percentage
1987 Orioles	18-60	.231	67-95	.414
2021 Orioles	20-56	.263	52-110	.321
1996 Tigers	14-38	.269	53-109	.327
1979 Blue Jays	22-56	.282	53-109	.327
2018 Orioles	23-53	.303	47-115	.290
2008 Orioles	22-50	.306	68-93	.422
1978 Blue Jays	28-61	.315	59-102	.366
2019 Orioles	24-52	.316	54-108	.333
2022 Red Sox	18-39	.316	67-71	.486
1975 Tigers	28-60	.318	57-102	.358
1988 Orioles	25-53	.321	54-107	.335
2009 Orioles	24-48	.333	64-98	.395
2010 Orioles	24-48	.333	66-96	.407
2002 Devil Rays	25-50	.333	55-106	.342

SOURCE: STATS

Of the 13 full-season AL East teams to lose at least two out of three games (.333 winning percentage or worse) in divisional competition, all 13 finished with at least 93 losses. Nine finished with at least 100, and seven had at least 105.

The Sox have a better record in close games against the AL East — 11-18 (.379) in games decided by two or fewer runs, and 9-15 (.375) in one-run games — than they do overall in the division. Mostly, they have simply been flattened, going 7-21 in games decided by three or more runs.

It's hard to pin blame on one particular area of the roster. The Sox are averaging just 3.81 runs per game against the AL East (down from 5.02 outside the division) while hitting .250/.302/.395 (down from .264/.331/.421). The pitching staff and defense have permitted a jarring 5.77 runs per game in the division, compared with a respectable 4.21 outside of it.

JOE POSNANSKI ON AARON JUDGE

We should not underestimate just how incredible a season **Aaron Judge** is having. Everybody's looking to see if he can pass **Roger Maris'** 61, but either way he's having a much, much better season than Maris had in 1961.

Judge's OPS is almost 100 points higher than Maris' was that season — Judge is leading the league in OPS by a wide margin; Maris didn't even come close to leading the league in OPS in 1961 (he finished fifth). Maris was considered a good right fielder in his day, but Judge is better, and Judge has played about half his games in centerfield. Judge has stolen 15 bases while getting caught just twice. Maris stole 0.

Because Judge is a much more conventional player than **Shohei Ohtani**, we can do a better job of calculating his value. And if he finishes off this season, his value will be roughly as a 10-WAR player. There have only been nine players since 1969 who have had 10-WAR seasons — **Barry Bonds** had three of them, **Mike Trout** and **Cal Ripken Jr.** had two. When a player has a 10-WAR season, unless there's a bizarre circumstance or people somehow miss it, that player wins the MVP. Going backward:

2018: **Mookie Betts** (10.7 WAR): Won MVP

2016: **Mike Trout** (10.5 WAR): Won MVP.

2012: *Mike Trout (10.5 WAR): Lost MVP to Miggy Cabrera, who won the Triple Crown.*

2004: **Barry Bonds** (10.6 WAR): Won MVP.

2002: **Barry Bonds** (11.8 WAR) Won MVP.

2001: **Barry Bonds** (11.9 WAR): Won MVP.

2001: **Sammy Sosa** (10.3 WAR): Lost MVP to Bonds.

2000: **Alex Rodriguez** (10.4 WAR): Lost MVP to **Jason Giambi** because people did not value A-Rod's shortstop defense. Anyway, **Pedro Martinez** should have won that year.

1991: **Cal Ripken Jr.** (11.5 WAR): Won MVP.

1984: **Cal Ripken Jr.** (10.0 WAR): Didn't come close to winning the MVP because he'd won it already in 1983 and the Orioles finished fifth.

1982: **Robin Yount** (10.6 WAR): Won MVP.

1975: **Joe Morgan** (11.0 WAR): Won MVP.

1969: **Rico Petrocelli** (10.0 WAR): Finished seventh in MVP balloting because people did not value his shortstop defense and the Red Sox were not a factor in the pennant race.

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS BEING TOO BIG FOR BASEBALL?

Aaron Judge is in line for a massive payday when he reaches free agency this off-season. The \$300 million (or more) question is whether a player his size can stay healthy as he ages.

James Wagner, NYT

By several measures, Aaron Judge, the superstar outfielder for the Yankees, has been the best player in Major League Baseball this season. After Friday's loss to Tampa Bay, he had a .294 batting average with a major league-leading 51 home runs and a 1.059 on-base plus slugging percentage. The closest hitter to him in the home run race, Philadelphia's **Kyle Schwarber**, had 36.

At 6 feet 7 inches — and 282 pounds — Judge is the tallest person in baseball history to have a 50-homer season, and he has done it twice. In fairness, fewer than 150 players of that height have reached the major leagues, the vast majority of whom were pitchers.

After finishing second in the American League Most Valuable Player Award race in 2017, Judge may finally claim the prize this year if he can hold off **Shohei Ohtani**, the two-way star of the Los Angeles Angels.

How long Judge, 30, will continue to shine in a Yankees uniform is unclear. In spring training, he placed a bet on himself, turning down a contract extension that would have guaranteed him \$213.5 million over seven years. The bet will likely pay off, as he is expected to get an even larger deal this off-season. Both the Yankees and Judge have said they want the relationship to continue, but negotiations are paused until after the World Series, when the 29 other teams will pursue him as well.

As front offices weigh how much it will take to sign Judge, they must ask themselves how much he is worth and for how long. He turns 31 next season, around the age when players traditionally begin to decline. (Superstars, though, are often the exception to this.) With Judge, there is the added complication of his size.

A prevalent belief around the game is that large players break down faster than their smaller peers. But it is worth asking: Is that true?

“This is such a complicated question,” said Jimmy Buffi, a former Los Angeles Dodgers analyst who has a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering and who is now the chief executive officer and co-founder of Reboot Motion, a sports biomechanics company. “I don’t think there is an easy yes or no.”

First, some context. Baseball players come in all sizes. Jose Altuve, the Houston Astros second baseman who beat Judge for the 2017 A.L. M.V.P., is listed, perhaps generously, at 5-foot-6 and 166 pounds. **Daniel Vogelbach**, a designated hitter for the Mets, stands 6 feet tall and weighs 270 pounds. And **Oneil Cruz**, a rookie shortstop for the Pittsburgh Pirates, is 6-foot-7 and weighs only 220 pounds.

Judge is as tall as Cruz, heavier than Vogelbach and better than both. Pictures of Judge next to Altuve are one of baseball’s longest running sight gags.

Granted, heights and weights have been embellished in either direction over the years, but according to Baseball Reference, only seven position players have been listed at 6-foot-6 or taller and 250 pounds or heavier. They are **Adam Dunn**, the former slugger known as the “Big Donkey,” who amassed 462 career home runs; **Frank Howard**, the former Washington Senators star, who smashed 382; Judge; and the former outfielders **Kyle Blanks**, **Brad Eldred**, **Steven Moya** and **Val Pascucci**.

(Judge’s teammate **Giancarlo Stanton**, a former M.V.P. who has dealt with his fair share of injuries, just missed the cut at 6-foot-6 and 245 pounds.)

The reasons for baseball having so few players of Judge’s size are debatable.

“Maybe there haven’t been so many guys this size is not only because of the injury stuff but also because of performance,” said Glenn Fleisig, the research director at the American Sports Medicine Institute in Birmingham, Ala. “Hitting a baseball and throwing a pitch, this takes perfect or excellent coordination to do these things. And the bigger your body parts are, the more potential you have, but the more challenging it is.”

Judge thinks it might be something else.

The reason there aren’t “100 more of me” in M.L.B. “is because they’re either playing basketball or football,” Judge said.

A large, skilled basketball player can get drafted into the N.B.A. after one year of college and quickly earn seven figures. A football player, he said, can go to a university that has better facilities than some major league teams and can play in the N.F.L. immediately after getting drafted. Baseball, where eligibility is more complicated and making the majors typically involves years of low pay in the minor leagues, is “a tougher draw for some kids, especially my height,” he said.

Putting aside the reasons for the smaller amount of massive M.L.B. position players, biomechanics experts said those people could theoretically be at greater risk of some types of injuries. Of the seven supersize position players, only three have appeared in more than 300 career games: Dunn (2,001), Howard (1,895) and Judge (699).

“It’s hard to stay healthy,” said Blanks, who is 6-foot-6 and was listed at 265 pounds while playing 278 games over seven seasons. He dealt with a range of injuries (elbow, shoulder, Achilles, calf) and suggested that both his style of play and a switch to the outfield from first base were possible factors. “And I personally wouldn’t argue it’s harder as a big guy, but that’s because I’m not anybody other than myself.”

Smaller players certainly get hurt, too. Altuve, for example, has been on the injured list five times since 2018. So wouldn’t the wear and tear of playing baseball be relative to the person’s height, weight and strength? Not exactly.

Although Buffi said much more remained to be studied about the movement of the human body, he pointed to a 2019 study published in the American Journal of Human Biology that found that the skeletons of taller people were not simply proportionally expanded versions of shorter people. In taller people, researchers found “a significant increase” in the percentage of body mass that was bone, especially in the limbs, and thus a possible explanation for the correlation between height and fracture risks.

“There’s theoretical reasons why a bigger person might be more prone to injury, which is just that their bones are proportionately a little bit bigger,” he said. He added later, “It’s also theoretically possible that a bigger person, because they’re using the same or similar sized bat as a smaller person, they’re exerting less effort to swing that bat and to make contact with that same size baseball. There’s just competing factors in both directions.”

Fleisig divided baseball injuries into three groups: impact, traumatic movement and chronic movement.

As far as impact injuries — getting hit by a pitch or colliding with an outfield fence, for example — he said he didn’t see how being larger would increase the chance of injury. Regarding traumatic movement injuries — pulling a hamstring while running to first base, say, or tearing an oblique muscle on an awkward swing — Fleisig said “those are less related to your body size and more related to being in proper conditioning, including warming up and also hydration and nutrition.”

But size, he said, can be a factor in chronic movement injuries, sustained from a repeated motion such as throwing from the mound or outfield. While an advantage of longer levers — forearms, in this case — can be the creation of more force and thus more velocity at the hand, a disadvantage can be more tension on ligaments and tendons, which could cause them to tear.

“Bigger people as a group can have stronger muscles,” he said, “but what’s weird is your ligaments and tendons don’t strengthen proportionally with the muscles.”

Several experts said that one of the biggest predictors of future injury was past injury, whether those injuries were a result of a lack of training or if they indicated a predisposition to a certain type of ailment. After playing 155 games in his rookie season, Judge appeared in only 63 percent of the Yankees’ games from 2018 to 2020 because of a wrist fractured by a hit-by-pitch, a strained oblique and a twice-strained calf.

Since then, Judge has been relatively healthy. He played in 148 games in 2021 and had missed only four of the Yankees’ 132 games this season, through Friday.

Judge believes his size is an asset, he said. Asked if any parts of the game were harder, he smiled and said, “I got to bend a little farther for ground balls, but that’s about it. Fly balls are a little easier.” In fact, he has used the doubts about his height as fuel.

“It has kind of motivated me throughout the years,” he said. “People are like, ‘Oh, you’re 6-7, and you can’t do what this 5-10 guy does.’ Why can’t I? He can play shortstop, so why can’t I play shortstop? He can play the outfield, so why can’t I play the outfield? That’s just an easy thing people can just go to at times.”

Judge continued, later referencing amphetamines, a stimulant that was banned in M.L.B. starting in 2005: “The game has changed, and there is so much more information on the body, recovery and taking care of your body. This isn’t the ’80s where I’m going out drinking every night and take some greenies and roll out to play. I think it’s the emphasis on the recovery process and me learning my body over the years kind of gives me an advantage.”

JAYSON STARK AND LOTS OF WILD AND WEIRD STUFF

The Athletic

So what did you miss this week? Here’s what:

Albert Pujols did it again. ... We had a strikeout by a Clemens and two home runs by a Sosa, and feel free to ask: *What year is it?* ... And a team famous for its iconic one-digit uniform numbers ran a lineup out there more befitting of a Rams-Bills game.

But that's not the big news here at Weird and Wild World HQ, because if you listen closely, you can hear the Maris family chanting: "Here comes the Judge!"

1. The Judge rules!

It was back in The Strike Year of 1994. There was no real baseball to keep us diehards going, and that stunk. There was only Ken Burns and the documentary that filled a void we couldn't have been more desperate to fill.

For those of us trying to keep the baseball candle burning, Ken Burns' "Baseball" doc was what "The Last Dance" was to American sports fans in the pandemic. It was all we had. So there I was one evening, watching Burns spin his tales about the 1920s, when I saw something that gave me goosebumps — and still does.

It was **Babe Ruth's** 60th home run, swatted into history way back in 1927, suddenly flashing across my TV screen, in all its blurry black-and-white glory. I had never seen it before. It was magic. (worth a look)

<https://youtu.be/hsQJ-KSaxuM>

So I grabbed my phone and called the great Peter Gammons, all so I could pretty much scream: "Peter, I just watched Babe Ruth's 60th home run. I hope you got to see that."

But of course he did. That was what the number, 60, used to mean. The performance-enhancing drugs era has done its best to pulverize that meaning. But it hasn't quite finished the job. We know that now because we get to watch Aaron Judge chase that number, 60, all over again, in a different time, in a different world.

He hit Nos. 52, 53, 54 and 55 this week. He has nearly four more weeks to hunt all of the magic numbers ahead. The Babe is just five away. **Roger Maris' 61** is only six away. American League history is somewhere just beyond that horizon. It's a very cool thing to behold. Which means, naturally, it's Weird and Wild material!

THERE GOES THE JUDGE! Judge has homered against 50 different pitchers this year ... in 14 different ballparks ... against 17 different teams. He has homered in every inning, from the first to the 10th. He has homered in every possible count except 3-and-0.

He has hit 19 with two strikes and 18 with two outs. He has hit nine on the first pitch and eight with a full count. He has even smoked six as the world's most humongous leadoff hitter. The Babe and Maris would have a hard time comprehending that. They launched almost every one of their historic homers from the No. 3 spot because that's where home run hitters resided.

MAKING MARIS MEMORIES: This week I've been caught up in how closely Judge's month is mirroring Maris in September 1961. Take a look.

HR	MARIS	JUDGE
52	Sept 2	Sept 3
53	Sept 2	Sept 4
54	Sept 6	Sept 5
55	Sept 7	Sept 7
56	Sept 9	??

But Maris' season ran only through Oct. 1. Judge gets to keep going until Oct. 5. No asterisks please!

HE'S FOUNDING THE 60-40 CLUB! This makes my brain cells rattle every day. It's possible Judge is going to hit 60 home runs this year — *and nobody else is going to hit 40*. How can that be happening? The ball is dead, right? Except when he hits.

How many times in baseball history has that happened, you ask? That would be none. Closest anyone has ever come? In 1927, of course. Ruth whopped 60. Only one other man (**Lou Gehrig**) had more than 30. But Gehrig hit 47 that year, and the Babe couldn't miss it, since Gehrig followed him to the plate from the 4-hole, in virtually every at-bat of every game.

HE'S RUTHIAN! Now let's get a little more specific. Incredibly, Judge has hit 19 more home runs than anyone else in the sport. (Judge: 55, **Kyle Schwarber** 36.) There are just two words that sum up everyone else in history who has ever outhomered the field by that much:

"Babe" and "Ruth."

The Bambino led the major leagues by margins ranging from 19 to 35 in five different seasons. The biggest margin by anyone not named Babe Ruth: 17, by **Jimmie Foxx** — *90 years ago*, in 1932.

20 IS PLENTY! Meanwhile, just in his league, Judge went into Thursday night leading the next closest masher in the AL *by 22 home runs* (Judge 55, **Shohei Ohtani** 33). Try to comprehend that. Eight teams haven't had anyone hit 22 home runs, period. And Aaron Judge *leads the league by 22*.

So who else has ever led his league by 20 or more — non-Ruthian division? It won't take long to call the roll of this club.

1956 AL **Mickey Mantle 52 Vic Wertz 32**

2017 NL **Giancarlo Stanton 59 Cody Bellinger 39**

HE'S A ONE-MAN TEAM! OK, so this isn't technically true. But it gets real if you look at it this way:

Judge versus the Tigers — No Tiger has hit 13 home runs all season. Judge has hit 13 just since we flipped our calendars to August. That's not even six weeks ago!

Judge versus his friends in Pittsburgh, D.C., and the Bay Area — Nobody on the Giants, A's, Pirates or Nationals has hit 22 home runs all season. Judge has hit 22 just since the All-Star break. That was only seven weeks ago!

Judge vs. the Fish — Down in South Florida, none of those Marlins thumpers have hit 16 home runs all year. Judge has hit 19 *after the count reached two strikes*. Just so you know, the average big-league hitter is slugging .265 after the count reaches two strikes.

Judge vs. Central Casting — No one on the Royals or Reds has hit 21 homers all season. That works out to one home run *every seven games*. Judge has hit 21 merely against the divisions those two juggernauts play in, the AL Central and NL Central. That works out to one home run *every two games* he's played against them.

So it's Judge against the world. And the world isn't faring well.

CECIL FIELDER, COVER YOUR EYES! A tip of the hat to loyal reader Jim Passon for this one:

Judge has hit at least two home runs against 18 different teams this year.

The Tigers (all of them) have hit at least two home runs against 16 different teams.

HE'S THE PLAYER OF THE MONTH — EVERY MONTH! Let's look at Judge's home runs by month, starting with May:

May — 12

June — 11

July — 13

August — 9

How many players in baseball have outhomered him in *any* of those months? If you guessed none, you win!

Then Judge kicked off September by homering in four games in a row. So if he goes on to join the 60-Homer Club, he'll become only the fourth player to homer at least nine times in five

consecutive months in the same season. And here's a surprise: That list includes *nobody* from the PED era, only ...

Roger Maris, 1961

Hank Greenberg, 1938

Babe Ruth, 1921 and '27

HE'S THE ULTIMATE BRONX BOMBER! We could go on for pretty much ever here, but one more point we should probably make: It's a good thing for Judge's team that he's doing what he's doing!

SECOND HALF HR

Judge — 22

Next-closest Yankee — 8*

(*-Anthony Rizzo)

So how wild is that? There have been only three seasons in Yankees history in which anybody hit at least 22 second-half homers and nobody else on the roster hit 10:

1924: Ruth 22, Bob Meusel 8

1928: Ruth 22, Gehrig 9

1934: Gehrig 25, Ruth 9

(Source: Baseball-Reference/Stathead)

But now here comes Aaron Judge in the year 2022, re-enacting stuff that was supposed to happen 100 years ago. I'm not even sure how to explain it. But maybe Ken Burns can!

2. Five things I loved this week

THE ACE IN THE PUJOLS — Another week, another epic Albert Pujols moment. Sunday at Busch Stadium. 0-0 game in the eighth. Albert stomps up there to pinch hit. And this happens. A pinch hit HR.

What's up with that? It was Albert's third pinch home run of the season — *and he's 42!* The only players in history to hit at least three pinch homers in a season at that age or older: **Willie Stargell (1982)**, **Graig Nettles (1987)**, **Jason Giambi (2013)** and the pinch-hit bombardier himself, **Matt Stairs** (*four* of them, in 2010).

ARRAEZ CON NO-NO — Poor **Dylan Cease**. He spun off 8 2/3 spectacular, no-hit innings last Saturday, only to have the AL batting leader, **Luis Arraez**, step in and break it up.

What's up with that? Hey, you think it's every night the guy leading the league in hitting breaks up a no-hitter in the ninth? I ran this past my friends from STATS Perform. And over the last 49 seasons, they found only one other game that featured the aspiring batting champ foiling a no-no in the ninth: **Lenny Dykstra**, off **John Smoltz**, on May 27, 1990 (one out in the ninth). I was there!

THE UPPER HANSER — I know you depend on this column to keep you updated on all those position players stampeding to the mound these days. So this just in: We just saw *11 of them* pitch in one weekend — five last Saturday, six last Sunday. And no, we've never seen *that* before (thankfully).

But the highlight was our man, **Hanser Alberto**, who pitched *in back-to-back games* — for the second time in two weeks. (The Dodgers' record when he pitches: 7-1. Unbelievable.)

What's up with that? Hey, Alberto has now officially made history. He's the first true position player in the expansion era (1961-2022) to pitch eight times in one season. The old record was six, by **Chris Gimenez** in 2017 and **Sandy León** last year. And I guarantee you those guys weren't finishing off games their team won pretty much every time out.

A "K" FOR KODY — Also in this week's Adventures in Position Player Pitching was a golden moment for the Clemens family ... as in Kody miraculously striking out Shohei Ohtani on Labor Day, with this unhittable little 68 mph something-or-other.

A) It was the first strikeout by a Clemens since a Roger Clemens K of **Jason Varitek** on Sept. 16, 2007.

And B) I'd advise Kody to keep the K line moving, since one whiff of an MVP isn't going to cut it. His world-famous father punched out 31 different MVPs at least twice. And yeah, I counted. That's what we do here.

THE FLYING SOSA — When he wasn't making the tag of the year this week, Phillies infielder Edmundo Sosa was doing stuff we haven't seen by a Sosa (or a shortstop) in a loonnnggg time. As in going 5-for-5 on Tuesday and Wednesday, with two homers and two doubles.

What's up with that? You have no idea. First off, according to STATS, Sosa is the first shortstop to bat 1.000 in back-to-back games, with multiple homers and doubles, since (better sit down now) ... **Honus Wagner** did it, in a doubleheader, on Aug. 22, 1910! But also ...

The last time anybody named Sosa homered in back-to-back games, it was ... yep, Sammy, who did that for the Rangers (off **Jason Marquis** and **Woody Williams**) on June 20 and 22, 2007. Baseball is beautiful, isn't it?

3. This week in useless info

THAT 90s SHOW — The Yankees are famous for their one-digit numbers. But not this week! They did something this week that you never, ever see, even in the Meadowlands:

They had *five* players on the field, at one time, wearing numbers *in the 90s*! Yeah, one of them was that Aaron Judge guy, but still ...

Four of those five players started Game 1 of their doubleheader Wednesday: Judge (99), **Oswald Peraza (91)**, **Oswaldo Cabrera (95)** and **Estevan Florial (90)**. Then the Yankees brought **Ron Marinaccio (97)** into the game. And I don't know about you, but I rubbed my eyes to make sure this wasn't Wednesday afternoon in Bradenton, Fla., in March. Nope, this was Wednesday at Yankee Stadium.

The first thing you should know: In the last game played by the New York Football Giants, in January, they started only *three* players with numbers in the 90s. Seriously.

Second thing you should know: *Obviously*, I tried my best to figure out if any baseball team had ever done this.

So I turned to the amazing Kenny Jackelen of Baseball-Reference. And the answer is:

Of course it's a record!

Jackelen couldn't find any other team in the Baseball-Reference database that even had four players with numbers in the 90s, let alone five ... let alone five on the field *at the same time*. And the Yankees have had five of those 90s warriors in the game simultaneously twice this week — on Wednesday and Sunday. They've also had four other games when four members of that We Love the 90s Club were out there together.

If this isn't a reason for the Yankees to hold a '90s night, and give away "Good Will Hunting" DVDs and Smashing Pumpkins T-shirts, somebody in the Bronx is taking this sport way too seriously.

NAME OF THE GAME — Don't ask me why I pay so much attention to this. I obviously need professional help. But I just thought you needed to know that ...

- Julio Rodríguez homered off of Eduardo Rodríguez last weekend.
- And we had a Tucker-versus-Tucker homer — featuring Kyle Tucker homering off Tucker Davidson.
- But it doesn't get any better than the first home run in baseball history by a Steer (Spencer). Of course, I then researched home runs by "Bulls" (307 for **Greg "The Bull" Luzinski** and 147 by

Leon “Bull” Durham). And I looked into homers by “Cows” — most notably those 108 by **Al Cowens** and 12 by **Collin Cowgill**. But I decided to draw the line at “Moo”-kies. Hopefully, nobody has a beef with that!

THE STEERING COMMITTEE — But hey, speaking of **Spencer Steer**, his first game with the Reds last Friday will go down as one of the great big-league debuts of all time.

- In his first plate appearance, he drew a 10-pitch walk. The pitch-count era only goes back to 1988. But friend of the column and brilliant Reds statsmaster Joel Luckhaupt reports that Steer was the first player to see at least 10 pitches in his first career plate appearance *and reach base* since ... *a pitcher*: That would be **Cole Irvin**, who somehow drew a 10-pitch walk for the Phillies on May 17, 2019.
- But Steer was just getting rolling after that walk. His next three trips to the dish went: homer, walk, double. Which gave him an OPS, after one game, of 4.000! According to STATS, that’s the highest OPS any player in history has amassed in his big-league debut (with at least three plate appearances). So that seems good.
- Except it still gets better, because this dude then scored the winning run on a walk-off. And according to Luckhaupt, you’d have to go back almost a century to find a debut that featured all of that. On April 14, 1925, **Jim Poole** had a homer, three singles and a walk for the Philadelphia A’s — and he, too, scored the winning run on a walk-off.

Well, I don’t know how we just connected the dots from Bull Durham to Cole Irvin to Jim Poole. But as I love to remind you, that’s why there’s such a thing as a Weird and Wild column!

JUST JOSH-IN — Remember back in the olden days, like a month or so ago, when **Josh Hader** was a Brewer, and leading the major leagues in saves? Think hard now. It’ll come back to you.

Then, on Aug. 1, he got traded to the Padres — which, as you might have heard, hasn’t gone that smoothly. But finally, on Aug. 31, Hader saved a game for his new team. And that got me thinking, which also doesn’t always go that smoothly.

The question I then posed to Jackelen was: Has any reliever ever been leading his league in saves, gotten traded in midseason and taken that long to save a game for his new team?

Luckily for all involved, it isn’t often that the league leader in saves gets traded. But it turned out this was *not* a record.

Kenny started the clock with these pitchers’ first appearance with their new team. He included only pitchers who saved at least one game for both teams. And this is the leaderboard that emerged, since the dawn of the modern save rule (1969):

41 games	Ugueth Urbina	2003	Rangers/Marlins
26 games	Josh Hader	2022	Brewers/Padres
7 games	Lee Smith	1993	Cards/Yankees

If it's any consolation to Hader, Ugueth Urbina wound up as the closer for the team that won the World Series. (*WARNING: Past results are not a guarantee of future performance.*)

HAIL CÉSAR — We have witnesses who tell us that **César Hernández** hit 21 home runs last season. We believe them, too, because that's how we roll. But then came this year in Washington, when five months *and 544 plate appearances* zoomed by — all of which had this one thing in common:

Hernández launched zero home runs in any of them.

But then, Sunday, just when he was a few weeks away from becoming the first man ever to go from 20-plus homers to *nada* in a season featuring enough at-bats to qualify for the batting title, this happened. Boom, home run.

Well, I needed some help putting that home run in perspective. And luckily for us Weird and Wild fans, Jackelen had forgotten to block my emails. So he then went to work on this all-important question: *Was this the deepest any 20-homer guy had ever gone into the following season without a home run?*

And once again, that answer was: Of course!

It wasn't even close, in fact. The previous record: 265 plate appearances, by the Orioles' **J.J. Hardy**, on June 21, 2014. For some reason, Buck Showalter didn't look that grateful that he got to observe both of them!

CATCH-22 — Here's a little tale of two Cy Young Award winners. Take a look. It won't take long.

Jacob deGrom in 2021-22:

Starts — 22

Runs — 22

Dallas Keuchel's three weeks as a Diamondback this year:

Starts — 4

Runs — 22

So the moral of the story is: If you're collecting former Cy Youngs, be sure to collect the right one!

BOX SCORE GEM OF THE WEEK — If you'd asked me on Opening Day, I wouldn't have guessed that **Wil Myers** would make more relief appearances for the Padres this season than **Ryan Weathers**. But hey, here we are. Which brings us to last Sunday, when Myers made his third trip to the mound and did something that had never been done — at least by someone like him:

1 IP — 4 pitches

That's a fact. According to Baseball-Reference, since the arrival of the pitch-count era in 1988, no position player had zipped through a complete inning on that few pitches. The old record was five pitches, held by many.

So I got to thinking again. And I recalled that there was once a real late-inning relief force named Myers — as in **Randy Myers**. So I thought: I wonder if Randy Myers ever had one of those outings, with one inning on four pitches (or fewer). And that answer was ...never.

4. This week in Strange But Trueness

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE — Baseball is weird, but also wild. I know these things I'm about to report seem mathematically incorrect, but trust me.

• **Tuesday night in Philadelphia, the Marlins' Charles Leblanc got hit by a pitch *twice in the same at-bat*.** Wait. What the heck?

All right, so not really. It took a replay review to determine that he *didn't* get hit by the first pitch of his sixth-inning at-bat. Then, once that got sorted out, on the very next pitch, Phillies reliever **Brad Hand** wound, fired and hit him (again).

• **Last Friday on the South Side, José Abreu came up with a huge walk-off RBI *twice in the same at-bat*.** Huh? You're kidding, right?

No, I'm not. In fact, I probably should also mention that the White Sox and Twins crammed a bench-clearing brouhaha into that same at-bat, but I digress.

So ... first pitch of Abreu's bases-loaded ninth-inning at-bat: Ruled a game-winning hit by pitch. Pandemonium ensued. Celebrations erupted. And then ... the Twins also asked for a replay review ... which revealed that the pitch had hit the knob of the bat. So ...

We jump ahead to two pitches later, when ... Abreu merely walked this one off again — this time with a ground-ball fielder's choice. Let's try that celebration one more time. Two bursts of walk-off elation, but just one game won, because ...

IN THE CARDS — There are many innovative ways to win a baseball game. Ordinarily, this isn't one of them:

Aug. 31, Cardinals versus Reds, featuring 13 innings of true wackiness, but also ...

A team that went 0 for 17 with runners in scoring position ... but still scored five runs ... and actually won! That team would be your St. Louis Cardinals. And if that seems like quite the Strange But True formula for winning a game, it's because we've almost never seen it.

The great Katie Sharp dug through all the play-by-play files in the Baseball-Reference database and found ...

Exactly one other team in all those years that won any game in which it went 0 for 17 (or worse) with men in scoring position, but still scored that many runs and won. That team was **Felix Mantilla's** 1965 Red Sox, in a Tuesday night marathon at Fenway against Cleveland, featuring Bill Monbouquette versus **Sam McDowell**.

The Red Sox went 0 for 18 with runners in scoring position that night, left the bases loaded twice and still won 5-4, thanks to a **Carl Yastrzemski** walk-off homer off **Bobby Tiefenauer** in the 13th inning.

But hold on. We're not done with the Cardinals here, because they also mastered the art of ...

FLOODING THE ZONE — So what other Strange But True way did the Cardinals find to win that game when they weren't stranding runners of their own? How about stranding runners on the other side by rolling out the old five-man-infield ...

Twice!

Two innings in a row, the 11th and 12th, the Cardinals turned **Brendan Donovan** into a fifth infielder with the bases loaded. And. It. Worked.

So how often do you see any team go to that matchup zone in two innings, get two big zeroes on the board to show for it and go on to win? I posed that question to Statcast wizard Jason Bernard. Turns out it hadn't happened in nearly seven years to the day!

Last to pull that off: **Ned Yost's** 2015 Royals, who didn't even need extra innings to have Yost work his magic in a wacky 6-3 win on Aug. 29 at Tampa Bay. Don't you miss Ned Yost?

STRANGE BUT METS — I don't know how Mets fans survive their team sometimes. Take last week for instance.

Last Saturday's matchup: Mets (37 games over .500) vs. Nats (42 games under).

Final score: Nationals 7, Mets 1

Last Sunday's matchup: Mets (36 games over .500) vs. Nats (41 games under).

Final score: Nationals 7, Mets 1

Tuesday's matchup: Mets (35 games over .500) vs. Pirates (35 games under).

Final score: Pirates 8, Mets 2

Huh? What just happened? Here's what!

First team in MLB history to lose 3 straight games by 6+ runs to a team with 30+ less wins.

BO KNOWS TRIFECTAS — **Bo Bichette's** sweet-swinging dad, Dante, never had any three-homer games in his day. But his kid had one at Camden Yards on Tuesday — and that isn't even the Strange But True part.

The Strange But True part is this:

Bo HR vs. LHP all season before that game — 2

Bo HR vs. LHP *during* that game — 3

I don't know about you, but that struck me as kind of rare, considering this was a game played *in September*. So once again, Kenny Jackelen volunteered to look into just how rare it was.

He looked at all three-homer games, with every homer off a left-hander, in the Baseball-Reference play-by-play database. He matched that up with all hitters who had as many plate appearances against left-handers as Bichette (92). And he found ...

Just one other hitter in the last half-century has done what Bo Bichette did — a fellow named **Mookie Betts**.

Mookie headed into a July 26, 2019 game against the Yankees with one homer off left-handers in 125 trips to the plate that year. Then he homered off **James Paxton** in the first, third and fourth innings. He had one previous hit in his career off Paxton. He's gotten none since.

THE WILDEST TRIPLE PLAY EVER

Talk about a heads-up play

Michael Clair, mlb.com

Triple plays are always unexpected. One second the offense is threatening with a rally and the next the inning is over. Fielders look at each other quizzically as they leave the field, as if to ask, "Did that really just happen?" and, "How many outs are there?"

But while there have been 731 triple plays turned in history -- each bizarre little nuggets of their own -- nothing compares to the triple play that ended a Boston vs. Cleveland tilt on Sept. 7, 1935 (87 years ago Wednesday). Not only was this a walk-off triple play, but it started with a liner straight off third baseman **Odell Hale**'s head.

Hale -- who once hit 50 doubles in a season and was nicknamed "Bad News" for his prowess at the plate -- was manning the hot corner that day. He was considered a fine fielder, too, with the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph giving him plaudits for his performance after moving over from the keystone. But on this day, it wasn't his glove but his head that helped out Cleveland.

Cleveland held a 5-1 lead over the Red Sox heading into the bottom of the ninth inning, but the Red Sox got a rally going. They scratched two runs across and had loaded the bases with no one out. **Joe Cronin** then stepped to the plate and smashed a line drive down to third base.

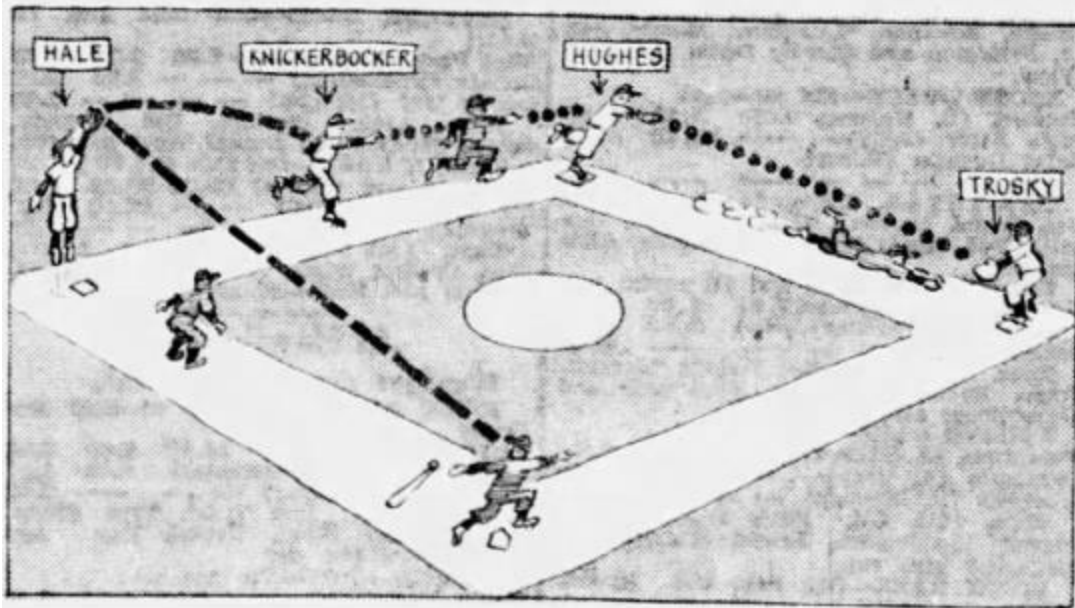
Cronin hit the ball too hard for Hale to get his glove up. Surely Cronin thought he had a base hit -- maybe extra bases -- and would be credited with a few RBIs. Instead, "Bad News" had some good news for the Indians.

The ball bounced off his head and, following the kind of bizarre physics that can only happen on a ballfield, popped up in the air emphatically enough that shortstop **Bill Knickerbocker** could race over and snag it before it dropped. Knickerbocker threw to **Roy Hughes** to double up the runner at second, and then Hughes threw to **Hal Trosky** to seal the game. That's right: It was a 5-6-4-3 walk-off triple play.

While there is sadly no video from the game, the infographic that ran in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch may almost be better than watching the real thing:

Sadly, if Hale ever commented on the play, it's lost to history. Right after the triple play, the teams had to play the second game of a doubleheader (it's as if the baseball gods knew there was a pun there), and Hale picked up two hits in another Cleveland victory.

Indians Use Lateral and Forward Pass in Turning a Triple Play Against Sox



PITCHERS WHO HAVE LOST NO-HITTERS ON THE FINAL OUT.

Pitchers who've lost no-hitters on the final out
Mlb.com

When the legendary **Yogi Berra** famously quipped, "It ain't over 'til it's over," he wasn't talking specifically about no-hitters. But the sentiment fits.

For a pitcher authoring a no-hit bid, the job isn't done until the final out is recorded, and every batter presents a dangerous obstacle on the way to making history. All it takes is a well-placed blooper or a ground ball with eyes to derail that quest at the last moment.

Over the years, many pitchers have experienced the agony of losing a no-hitter on the final out. Here is a breakdown of the last 10 times a pitcher has given up his first hit with two outs in the ninth inning, plus some other notable examples from baseball history.

Sept. 3, 2022: Dylan Cease, White Sox vs. Twins

*First hit: **Luis Arraez***

A no-hitter would have been the cherry on top of an incredible breakout season for Cease -- it also would have given the White Sox a no-no in three straight seasons. That this performance came against a division rival in a key moment of the 2022 season was just a bonus. Cease hadn't seemed to break a sweat tearing through the Twins' lineup, sitting at 96 pitches with two outs in the ninth. Unfortunately for the right-hander, the lineup then turned over for a fourth time, giving Arraez -- whose .318 batting average had him leading the American League -- another shot to end the bid. Arraez sent a 1-1 slider over the head of second baseman Romy Gonzalez and into shallow right field, and Cease ended up settling for a (still very impressive) one-hit shutout.

June 14, 2022: Miles Mikolas, Cardinals vs. Pirates

*First hit: **Cal Mitchell***

For 8 2/3 innings, it appeared that Mikolas was going to spin one of baseball's best narratives. Ten years after his debut, having spent three seasons pitching in Japan in the middle of his career and dealing with a series of arm injuries that severely limited his playing time from 2020-'21, he was poised to throw a no-hitter. It would have been just as meaningful for his club -- it had been nearly 21 years since a Cardinals pitcher had achieved such a feat. Mikolas had already put in a monumental effort and was just a strike away from history when he threw his 129th pitch, a well-placed curveball, to Pirates rookie **Cal Mitchell**, who sent a line drive over the head of Gold Glove center fielder **Harrison Bader** to stop the no-no in its tracks.

July 29, 2018: Sean Newcomb, Braves vs. Dodgers

*First hit: **Chris Taylor***

The Braves southpaw had retired 26 of the first 27 Dodgers hitters he faced, permitting only a walk while carrying a bid for the franchise's 15th no-hitter right to the precipice. Newcomb's effort was monumental; the 133 pitches he had thrown marked the most hurled by anyone since **Mike Fiers** tossed 134 while completing a no-hitter in 2015. Newcomb racked up eight strikeouts while challenging the Dodgers with a fastball on 76 percent of his pitches, but Taylor was just able to turn pitch No. 134 -- another heater -- into a ground-ball single through the left side of the infield, past diving third baseman **Johan Camargo**.

Sept. 17, 2017: Matthew Boyd, Tigers vs. White Sox

*First hit: **Tim Anderson***

At the time, Boyd didn't seem like a prime candidate to nearly throw a no-hitter; he entered his start at Comerica Park with a 5.75 ERA in 114 1/3 innings. The last pitcher to post a no-hitter with an ERA higher than that was Francisco Liriano, with a 9.13 ERA in April 2011.

Despite barreled balls off the bats of **Jose Abreu and Matt Davidson** during the start, Boyd kept the White Sox out of the hit column until Anderson stepped to the plate. Boyd fell behind 2-0, then threw a slider to the outside corner that Anderson belted into the right-center gap for a double.

Aug. 25, 2016: Matt Moore, Giants at Dodgers

*First hit: **Corey Seager***

Making just his fifth start with the Giants after being acquired from the Rays at the 2016 non-waiver Trade Deadline, Moore was one batter away from no-hitting the rival Dodgers at Dodger Stadium.

Unfortunately for Moore, that batter was Seager, on his bobblehead night. Moore was also likely gassed at that point, having thrown 130 pitches. While it wasn't the prettiest hit, Seager dropped a 1-1 fastball into right field for a bloop single and the crowd went wild.

July 1, 2015: Carlos Carrasco, Indians at Rays

*First hit: **Joey Butler***

Carrasco experienced double heartbreak at the hands of Butler that night, first losing his perfect game on a walk to Butler in the seventh inning, then yielding a two-strike single to him with an out to go in the ninth.

That wasn't the only difficulty Carrasco had run into during the ninth, as he had also walked and hit a batter. Carrasco would later call Butler his teammate when the Indians picked him up on waivers the following offseason.

May 17, 2015: Shelby Miller, Braves at Marlins

*First hit: **Justin Bour***

There was a reason the D-backs paid a premium in prospects to acquire Miller from the Braves after the 2015 season, and it was on full display when Miller faced the minimum through the game's first 26 batters. A leadoff walk in the second inning had been later erased on a double play.

Miller had been so dominant, he faced Bour for the game's final out with his pitch count at only 88. Unfortunately, Bour's first-pitch swing connected for a ground-ball single up the middle to end Miller's bid. Miller ended the game five pitches later, enough to register his second Maddux in three games.

Sept. 24, 2013: Michael Wacha, Cardinals vs. Nationals

*First hit: **Ryan Zimmerman***

Wacha rose to fame with his performance as a rookie in the 2013 playoffs, but his final start of the regular season that year wasn't too shabby either.

Fifteen months after being taken 19th overall in the '12 MLB Draft, Wacha dominated the Nationals for 8 2/3 innings. He was pretty dominant against Zimmerman as well, forcing a weak chopper up the middle.

Wacha reached for the ball, but his glove barely tipped it. Shortstop **Pete Kozma** barehanded the ball and made a strong throw to first, but not in time to take away Zimmerman's infield single.

Sept. 6, 2013: Yusmeiro Petit, Giants vs. D-backs (perfect game)

*First hit: **Eric Chavez***

Petit was recalled in August to replace an injured **Matt Cain** in the Giants' rotation and he came within inches of perfection in his third start, one year after Cain had done it in June 2012.

Petit cruised against the D-backs until Chavez came to the plate. After five pitches, including a 2-2 curveball that was close enough to a strike that AT&T Park started cheering, the veteran Chavez dropped a single into right field just out of the reach of **Hunter Pence**. Petit still recorded the only shutout of his career, but just missed his shot at history.

April 2, 2013: Yu Darvish, Rangers at Astros (perfect game)

*First hit: **Marwin Gonzalez***

In Darvish's first start of the year, he absolutely baffled Houston's lineup until meeting Gonzalez needing just one out to finish off the perfecto.

The Japanese right-hander had already beaten the Astros' shortstop a few times prior with his cutter, and so he went back to it again with his first pitch of the at-bat. This time, however, Gonzalez was ready for it, lacing a single back up the box to spoil Darvish's flawless day.

Darvish still earned the victory as the Rangers won, 7-0, and finished with a then career-high 14 strikeouts.

Other famous no-hit bids lost with two outs in the ninth

June 2, 2010: Armando Galarraga, Detroit vs. Cleveland (perfect game)

*First hit: **Jason Donald***

In perhaps the most controversial call ever in the regular season, Galarraga lost his perfect game on a missed call by umpire Jim Joyce, who ruled Donald beat **Miguel Cabrera's** throw to first base.

Sept. 2, 2001: Mike Mussina, Yankees at Red Sox

*First hit: **Carl Everett***

Moose was one pitch away from a perfect game, against the rival Red Sox, at Fenway Park. He had retired the first 26 batters he faced, and had a 1-2 count on Everett before Everett lined a single to left field.

Sept. 27, 1998: Roy Halladay, Blue Jays vs. Tigers

*First hit: **Bobby Higginson***

This was just Halladay's second career Major League start, and he gave fans a glimpse of the dominance that was to come, no-hitting the Tigers for 8 2/3 innings before allowing a two-out home run to Higginson. Halladay would, of course, get his no-hitter -- and a perfect game -- eventually.

Aug. 4, 1989: Dave Stieb, Blue Jays vs. Yankees

*First hit: **Roberto Kelly***

Sept. 30, 1988: Stieb, Blue Jays vs. Orioles

*First hit: **Jim Traber***

Sept. 24, 1988: Stieb, Blue Jays at Indians

*First hit: **Julio Franco***

Stieb actually threw a no-hitter on Sept. 2, 1990. But before that, no one was more snake-bitten than him -- Stieb lost a perfect game with two outs in the ninth in 1989, and lost no-hitters with two outs and two strikes in the ninth *in back-to-back starts* in 1988 (he also lost another no-hit bid opening the ninth inning in 1985).

June 12, 1988: Mike Scott, Astros vs. Braves

*First hit: **Ken Oberkfell***

Scott had thrown a no-hitter to clinch the NL West two years earlier in 1986, the year he won the Cy Young, but he also lost this one with two outs in the ninth, on a broken-bat single.

Sept. 24, 1975: Tom Seaver, Mets at Cubs

*First hit: **Joe Wallis***

Seaver's more famous near-no-hitter was lost with one out in the ninth -- his perfect-game bid on July 9, 1969, broken up by **Jimmy Qualls**. But the Hall of Famer also lost a no-hitter with two outs in the ninth in 1975 -- although it was actually a scoreless game, so Seaver would've had to keep going. Either way, the Mets had to wait until **Johan Santana** to get their first no-hitter.

June 5, 1915: Grover Cleveland Alexander, Phillies at Cardinals

*First hit: **Artie Butler***

The legendary Hall of Famer won 373 games in his Major League career -- but he never threw a no-hitter. This was the closest he came, one out away, before Butler singled up the middle.

July 23, 1896: Cy Young, Cleveland Spiders vs. Phillies

*First hit: **Ed Delahanty***

As long as Major League Baseball has been played, pitchers have been losing no-hit bids in the ninth inning. Even **Cy Young** himself fell victim in 1896, coming one out away from a no-hitter against the Phillies when fellow Hall of Famer Delahanty knocked a single.

THE DODGERS DON'T NEED TO PLAY THE PERCENTAGES

Despite the team's high payrolls, Los Angeles was known for platoons and creativity. With **Freddie Freeman, Mookie Betts and Trea Turner**, they embraced stability instead.

Tyler Kepner, NYT

There is a phrase in modern sports lingo that make no sense to Freddie Freeman: *load management*. The idea of sitting out now to stay strong later simply does not add up.

"You can be a five-tool player," Freeman said on Tuesday, in the Los Angeles Dodgers' dugout before a game at Citi Field. "But if you don't have the sixth tool of playing every day, what's the point of the first five tools?"

In the last five seasons, no major leaguer has played in as many games or collected as many hits as Freeman. The Dodgers were 50 games over .500, at 91-41, after Saturday's 12-1 win at home over San Diego, and Freeman has a perfect attendance record in his first season for the team.

"Just sitting there and making money and doing nothing — I don't understand that, and I will never wrap my mind around that," Freeman said. "I'm about to be 33 in two weeks. My career is getting toward the end. Soon I'm not going to ever be able to play again. Why would I just take a day off now? I don't comprehend that."

Freeman's presence and philosophy highlight an evolution in a franchise trying to win its fourth National League pennant in the last six seasons. The Dodgers have a steady lineup headed by superstar imports: Mookie Betts, Trea Turner and Freeman. It was not always this way.

The Dodgers once chased matchup advantages with the fervor of Homer Simpson's softball manager, Mr. Burns, who sat **Darryl Strawberry** against a lefty — "*It's called playing the percentages*" — in a famous episode of "The Simpsons." This is a team that gave every position player on the roster at least one start in the 2018 World Series, and batted **Kiké Hernández** third in the final game, even though he had not hit there since April.

Now the Dodgers have eight players with at least 400 plate appearances; no other division-leading team has as many. Freeman leads the N.L. in plate appearances for the second year in a row and brings quality to his quantity: a .326 average with a .908 on-base plus slugging percentage through Saturday.

"In the past we've had more platoons and matching up, and I think at times it's a good thing," Manager **Dave Roberts** said. "Other times, you have guys that know their roles but they're not playing consistently, so sometimes I've seen that as a cost."

“But when you can run out guys every day that are consistent — they have routines, they know they’re playing — there’s some benefit to that. And I guess we won’t know which one’s better ’til after this postseason.”

Betts, Turner and Freeman have all played for teams that beat the Dodgers in the postseason. Betts did it with Boston in 2018, Turner with Washington in 2019 and Freeman with Atlanta last fall. The Dodgers won the World Series in 2020, the year they acquired Betts in a trade with the Red Sox.

Until then, the Dodgers had been prudent — for a powerhouse, anyway. Andrew Friedman, the team’s president of baseball operations, inherited the majors’ highest payroll after the 2014 season. But he needed several long-term deals to expire before making a seismic move of his own.

That came in July 2020, just before his first game with the Dodgers, when Betts signed a 12-year, \$365 million contract. It dwarfed the combined value of the three most lucrative deals the Dodgers had previously given under Friedman (about \$237 million in contract extensions for **Clayton Kershaw, Justin Turner and Kenley Jansen**), but the timing was right.

The talent was undeniable, too — as it was with Turner, who arrived in the 2021 trade that brought **Max Scherzer** for the stretch run, and Freeman, who signed a six-year, \$162 million deal after his contract talks fizzled with the Braves.

“We have talked a lot about how strongly we believe against trying to build a team in free agency — but supplementing a really good core, I think, is a very effective strategy,” Friedman said. “There are things we tried in ’15, ’16 and ’17 that didn’t line up, but our payroll was still in a very transitory spot. We had a lot of guys coming off and young guys coming up, and we got to the point where we had a core in place and the ability to be a little bit more aggressive.

“So it was after ’19 where it was a very concerted effort, and that’s when we ended up trading for Mookie. Trea kind of came out of us looking for pitching. And then with Freddie, we talk about being by the backboard whenever a star player is available. Just be around the backboard — you never know what’s going to happen, you don’t know which way it’s going to kick. As opposed to turning around and running back up the court, we’ll stay around the backboard.”

The deals, you might say, have been slam dunks. Freeman, Turner and Betts all rank among the top 10 in the majors this season in total bases, with Freeman leading the majors in hits (168) and doubles (43) through Saturday. Betts hit his career-high 33rd home run on Saturday, while Turner, who is eligible for free agency after the season, leads all N.L. shortstops in O.P.S., at .831.

The cost of all this is staggering. The Dodgers have the majors’ highest payroll, at \$265.6 million, according to Spotrac, and their players understand the mandate that comes with the spending.

“It shows the dedication to wanting to win a world championship,” said Will Smith, who has quietly become one of baseball’s most productive catchers. “That’s what we’re all here to do, and you can motivate yourself in the off-season knowing that the front office is putting together a team that’s going to be World Series-caliber.”

The Dodgers have clearly gotten what they paid for: the best record in the sport, the most runs scored, the fewest runs allowed (despite a rash of pitching injuries), and the most paying fans. The team crossed the 3 million mark in attendance this weekend, and averages more than 48,000 fans per game.

Of course, everything will reset before long, and the Dodgers will soon have to prove themselves all over again. They cannot admire their spellbinding season for long. As their everyday first baseman can tell you, another game is coming right up.

“When the regular season is done, you can probably say we can be one of the best regular season teams there is,” Freeman said. “But that’s the key: it’s the regular season. We try to win every game, every single night, that’s just who we are — but once October hits, no one cares what your record is.”

BASEBALL’S NEWEST MUST-HAVE SKILL: GETTING DRILLED BY PITCHES

In baseball’s era of maximum velocity, pitchers are plunking more batters than ever. The New York Mets team might win their division because of it.

Joshua Robinson, WSJ

When hotshot prospect **Brett Baty** finally reached the major leagues in August, he quickly learned what it meant to be a New York Met: he got drilled by an 83 mile-per-hour curveball.

Baty hit the deck with a sore foot and his first big-league bruise. His manager, **Buck Showalter**, looked on from the top step of the dugout and seethed that this was happening again. More than any manager in baseball this season, Showalter has watched his players get grazed, plunked and downright nailed by opposing pitchers. Not only do the Mets lead the league in this painful category, they’re on pace to have the most hit batsmen of any major league team since 1900.

“Certainly, they’re a nice bunch of guys,” says former Mets pitcher and SNY analyst **Ron Darling**. “So there’s not the ‘Bad Guy’ factor where you just can’t stand a team.”

If there’s any consolation for Showalter and his clubhouse of dinged up ballplayers, it’s that this isn’t personal. Players are getting plunked at historic rates across the league. The Mets are just making the most of the mayhem. Their league-leading 88 hit batsmen this season have led to

2.4 win probability added, according to Baseball Reference. And those two-plus wins could decide who takes the National League East—the Mets enter Labor Day in first place by just a single game.

Fittingly enough, getting pelted repeatedly by hard objects isn't too different from the modern experience of being a Mets fan. It can be painful and absurd. In 2022, though, the most painful way of getting to first base has been the Mets' advantage.

The Wall Street Journal reviewed footage of every Mets' hit by pitch this season and found that that the team is most commonly plunked in the arm, then the leg. Fortunately for the players, only a few have been in the head or helmet area.

Wherever the Mets are hit, that ball is usually coming in hot. Of all the 88 hit by pitches, 52 have come on either four-seam fastballs or sinkers. Seventeen of those have been at least 95 MPH—topping out at 101. It's all part of the sport's evolution: the speed gun reigns supreme, even if the trade-off in accuracy means pitchers could end up hurling the ball to LaGuardia Airport.

Baseball is comfortably on pace to exceed 2,000 hit-by-pitches for only the second year in history. The only other time was 2021. In fact, the five most bruising seasons since 1900, as measured in the average number of batters hit by pitches per game, happen to be the past five seasons, according to Baseball Reference.

"It's a problem we have in MLB in general," Showalter said earlier this year, before watching his Mets get hit several dozen more times. "It's just not good."

It's no coincidence that this is happening now. The past five seasons also saw the most strikeouts per nine innings in baseball history. Starters don't go as deep into games and spend all of their juice on fewer at-bats. Inconsistent flamethrowing pitchers are shuttled back and forth from Triple-A.

The reality is that major-league pitchers' priorities have shifted so much toward speed that hit batsmen are simply a byproduct. The Mets just happen to be the premier victims.

"Velocity is held pretty sacred right now," Darling said. "So you have a lot of guys throwing the ball a lot harder than anyone's ever thrown it and the control is not always there."

Mets outfielders **Brandon Nimmo** and **Mark Canha** are both among baseball's top seven in getting hit by pitches this season. And the Journal's review shows how the pair embodies two vastly different approaches to the art of getting thumped really hard by a flying ball of cork, leather and yarn.

Baseball's unwritten rules dictate that a hit batsman must not acknowledge the fact that it hurts—a lot—unless absolutely necessary. Whenever Nimmo is hit by a pitch, he absorbs the

blow and sprints to first base (even though the base is free). It didn't even faze him when he got hit by four balls in a span of five days in June.

Canha, meanwhile, meets the situation with uncanny calm. His routine is always the same: get hit, say nothing, bend to remove his leg protector, unfasten his elbow guard, and trot gently to claim his base. As far as he's concerned, it's another duel won.

In fact, Canha has been hit so often this season—he's up to 17 and counting—that he can now see it coming. During one game against the Texas Rangers in July, he turned to teammate **Taylor Megill** and said of the opposing pitcher, "He hit me last year one time, with a curveball though."

Then it happened. Fans heard exactly how Canha felt about it, because Canha happened to be wearing a microphone for TV. "Mic'd up and you get drilled, huh?" Texas first baseman **Nate Lowe** asked him. "You didn't swear, did you?"

Canha confirmed that he didn't—maybe because he had been bracing for it.

"He must not like the way you stand," his Mets teammate **Pete Alonso** told him.

Canha countered: "He's like, 'I don't like this guy's face.'"

Perhaps for Canha, this magnetism for whizzing projectiles is what made him a valuable offseason acquisition for the Mets. Last year in Oakland, he was tied for the MLB lead in hit by pitches with 27, along with the Seattle Mariners' **Ty France**.

His stoicism is also the trademark of a generation of players raised with a whole arsenal of protective gear, from elbow pads to ankle guards. Many hitters now enter the batter's box dressed if they'll be rollerblading to first base. The effect is that players are progressing from Little League to high school to the minors without fully knowing the greatest fear in the game: getting drilled by the ball.

"Guys have been wearing it for so long that I think there's an invincibility that they must feel when they're at the plate," Darling said. "Certainly guys are going to bail when it's in the head area. But anything from the chest down, guys are not moving."

When you get nailed by baseballs as often as the Mets do, it isn't always pleasant. At this point, it's routine for the Mets broadcast to immediately show Walter glowering after one happens. At times, frustration has boiled over. The Mets got hit three times by the Cardinals in a game in April. There was a brawl the next day.

Still, the Mets stand in there because these plays can be critical. They've contributed to more than two wins, six runs batted in and even other ways that don't quite show up in the box score. During a game in late August, the Mets entered the bottom of the ninth inning tied 6-6

with the Colorado Rockies when **Starling Marte** got dinged, moving Nimmo to second. Two batters later, Nimmo scored on a walk-off single by Alonso—which he was only in position to do because of the hit by pitch.

The flip side is that the braver attitude to getting hit by baseballs might have altered the course of Mets history—for the worse—had it been around in the 1980s. Remembering **Mookie Wilson**’s epic at-bat in Game 6 of the 1986 World Series, Darling pointed to the game-tying wild pitch, which was so far inside that Wilson leapt out of the way.

The 2022 Mets, he says, would have handled it differently.

“That is a hit-by-pitch today. One hundred percent.”

BASEBALL TRAVELED TO JAPAN 150 YEARS AGO, BY WAY OF MAINE

Japan is celebrating the sport’s introduction there in 1872. The living descendants of the American teacher who took the game to Tokyo only learned of his role in 2000.

By Brad Lefton

Sept. 5, 2022

GORHAM, Maine — This small town on the East Coast can make a claim of being one of baseball’s birthplaces. But Gorham, about a 30-minute drive inland from Portland, has no intention of picking a fight with Cooperstown, N.Y.

Gorham is content with its more modest and far more surprising claim of being the birthplace of Japanese baseball. As improbable as that seems, the evidence is convincing. Japan is celebrating 150 years of baseball this year, and the country credits a Mainer, **Horace Wilson**, for introducing the game there in 1872.

After leaving Maine to fight in the Civil War, Wilson became one of many outsiders recruited by Japan’s government under the Meiji Restoration to teach the ways of the West to the country as it emerged from two centuries of isolation.

Wilson is credited with teaching baseball in 1872 to his students at Kaisei Gakko, a forerunner to the University of Tokyo. That version of history was recognized as official when Wilson was inducted into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame in 2003, an honor that began with a phone call to Wilson’s descendants in Gorham in 2000, which left them flabbergasted.

“Of course, the family knew of Horace Wilson, but no one had any idea that he ever went to Japan,” said Scott Balcomb, whose wife, Abigail, is a great-granddaughter of Horace’s younger brother, Elbridge Wilson.



A portrait of Wilson and his family hangs in the farm house that his descendants still own. Wilson, standing, top right, a teacher, went to Japan to help the Japanese learn the ways of the West.

The Balcombs live in the white, two-story farmhouse where Horace was born and raised. Wilson Farm has been in the family continuously since Horace's father, Hubbard, purchased it in 1836.

"The real story to us," Balcomb continued, "was that somebody born on this farm ended up in Japan in 1871. That alone was surprising enough, but then the caller started explaining that Horace is considered the father of baseball in Japan and that they want to come to Maine and meet us and then invite us to Japan. We couldn't believe all the fuss."

Balcomb, along with three descendants of Wilson, were flown to Japan in 2000 and feted as part of a campaign to get Wilson inducted. Three years later, Wilson became the second American, and third foreigner with no Japanese heritage, to be elected.

The family received bronze replicas of the plaque and bust of Wilson that are displayed in the museum. They were carted back to Maine, where they now adorn the parlor room, near the room where Wilson was most likely born.

If Gorham has a challenge to its claim as the birthplace of Japanese baseball, it may be from Kents Hill, a town about 60 miles northeast of Gorham that is home to Kents Hill School, a boarding school founded in 1824. School records show Wilson most likely enrolled at the four-year institution in the fall of 1858, meaning he would have graduated in the spring of 1862. His living descendants believe it is most plausible that he first learned baseball as a student at the school.

Just like challenges over the years to Cooperstown's claim as the birthplace of American baseball, assertions have also been made that Yokohama was the site of Japan's first baseball game, a year before Wilson began teaching the sport to students. In 1871, a game was played between American sailors and local residents, according to English-language newspaper accounts.

Nevertheless, Wilson and 1872 are considered the symbolic start, as evidenced by celebrations in the United States and Japan this year. The Consulate General of Japan in New York commemorated the 150th anniversary with a ceremony before a recent Mets game at Citi Field.

Regardless of which version is historically accurate, baseball has had an outsized impact on Japanese culture and U.S.-Japan relations since the Meiji Restoration.

In 1915, with Wilson back in the United States, the National High School Baseball Championship was created. Today, it is entrenched as an annual summer extravaganza gripping the entire

country, with 3,782 high schools participating this year. Sendai Ikuei of Miyagi Prefecture was crowned the 104th champion in August.

While the game flourished almost immediately as an amateur sport, the formation of a professional league was still a decade away when Wilson died in San Francisco in 1927. The forerunner to today's Nippon Professional Baseball began play in 1936 with seven franchises, four of which are still in operation. N.P.B. has since grown to 12 teams divided into two leagues, the Central and Pacific, with franchises from the northern city of Sapporo to the southern city of Fukuoka.

The quality of play in Japan has steadily risen, with the country winning an Olympic gold medal in baseball in 2021 at the Tokyo Games. Japan also won the first two editions of the World Baseball Classic, in 2006 and 2009.

And top players from Japan have regularly made their way to the United States over the last few decades. This year, outfielder **Seiya Suzuki** became the 64th player from Japan to be signed by a major league team when he agreed to a five-year, \$85 million contract with the Chicago Cubs.

The first of those 64 players to win a Most Valuable Player Award in the United States was **Ichiro Suzuki**, who last month became the first player from Japan to be inducted into a major league team's hall of fame. At a pregame ceremony Aug. 27 in Seattle, Suzuki was honored as the eighth player to enter the Mariners Hall of Fame. He is considered a shoo-in to make the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown when he becomes eligible in 2025.

Suzuki reflected on why this imported game from the West has captivated Japan for 150 years.

"Japanese people appreciate using their mind," Suzuki said in Japanese. "Baseball is a sport that depends on more than just speed or strength. It also requires intellect. Undoubtedly, that's long been one of the main appeals of the game in Japan. I feel like today's game is getting away from that aspect and Japan tends to follow America, so I really hope that doesn't become the trend in Japan. It's my great hope that Japanese baseball can retain its uniqueness and remain a game that depends on each player thinking critically for himself."

With Suzuki's retirement in 2019, **Shohei Ohtani** of the Los Angeles Angels ascended to prominence as the most accomplished active Japanese player in American baseball. A two-way star, Ohtani was the American League's most valuable player last season and is a contender again this year.

Sitting in the dining room at Wilson Farm, Abigail Balcomb was asked what she thought her great-great-uncle Horace would think of Ohtani's ability to thrive as a batter and pitcher.

“Oh, I think he would be delighted,” she said. “My ancestors really loved when players could do everything. But what he’d really like to know is how is Shohei Ohtani in the classroom? More than anything, I think Horace would want to know if he was a good student.”

Yet another reminder that baseball’s beginnings in Japan are credited to an American teacher, who passed the sport along to his students 150 years ago.

THE TEN LONGEST SCORELESS-INNING STREAKS

Andrew Simon, mlb.com

Pitching a shutout is an impressive accomplishment. Yet for a select group of pitchers, nine scoreless innings has been nothing more than a starting point.

The best scoreless streaks in baseball have covered the equivalent of more than four consecutive shutouts. Each one has required an incredible combination of stuff, savvy, focus, good defensive support and good fortune.

Here is a breakdown of the 10 longest scoreless streaks produced during a single season in AL/NL history, going back to the start of the Live Ball Era in 1920. (For reference, we've also included a list of the 10 longest streaks of all time at the bottom of the page.) Note that in 1998, the Elias Sports Bureau adjusted the way it measures streaks so that a pitcher does not get credit for any outs recorded during an inning in which he is charged with an earned or unearned run.

1. Orel Hershiser, Dodgers, 59 IP, Aug. 30-Sept. 28, 1988

Hershiser began his streak by ending his outing at Montreal on Aug. 20 with four scoreless frames. The right-hander then held the opposition without a run in each of his six September starts, throwing five straight nine-inning shutouts before finishing with 10 innings in a game the Dodgers lost, 2-1, to the Padres in 16. Overall, Hershiser threw 41 of his 59 innings on the road, including the final 28, locking up the National League Cy Young Award in the process.

Though only regular-season innings count in the record books, Hershiser unofficially extended his streak to 67 in Game 1 of the NL Championship Series against the Mets on Oct. 4. That postseason, he posted a 1.05 ERA over 42 2/3 innings, threw two shutouts and was named Most Valuable Player of both the NLCS and World Series. The streak could have continued in 1989, but Hershiser allowed a run in the first inning of his season debut against the Reds.

2. Don Drysdale, Dodgers, 58 IP, May 14-June 8, 1968

Drysdale was 31 years old and in the 13th of his 14 seasons in 1968, the so-called "Year of the Pitcher." On May 14 against the Cubs at Dodger Stadium, the Hall of Fame righty tossed the first of six consecutive shutouts, which remains a Major League record. The streak finally ended with

a sacrifice fly by Phillies pinch-hitter **Howie Bedell** in the fifth inning of a game on June 8. Twenty years later, Drysdale was working as a broadcaster for the Dodgers and was on hand to see Hershiser eclipse his record.

Before Drysdale, **Walter Johnson** held the all-time scoreless innings record, with a 55 2/3-inning streak for the Washington Senators in 1913. That remains the third-best mark in history if the dead-ball era is included (see the list below).

3. Bob Gibson, Cardinals, 47 IP, June 2-26, 1968

With Drysdale's streak still going, Gibson began one of his own, over the final two innings of a complete-game victory against the Mets, in Game 1 of a doubleheader at Shea Stadium. He followed that up with five straight shutouts before allowing a run in the first inning on July 1 at Dodger Stadium. Coincidentally, Gibson defeated Drysdale that day, allowing only the one run. Gibson's streak was part of a longer run of 11 straight complete games (including eight shutouts), during which he allowed three runs over 99 innings, for a 0.27 ERA. That season, he recorded a live-ball era record 1.12 ERA, posting 28 complete games and 13 shutouts.

. Zack Greinke, Dodgers, 45 2/3 IP, June 18-July 26, 2015

On July 19 at Washington, Greinke joined Hershiser -- a current Dodgers broadcaster -- and Drysdale as the only pitchers since at least 1914 to put together six straight scoreless starts, and the first to do so while also surrendering four or fewer hits in each.

Greinke's streak ended in the third inning of his next start, against the Mets, just after his streak became the fourth-longest in history. Over his 45 2/3 innings, he struck out 43 batters while walking four. Opponents hit .124/.152/.144 against him while reaching third base only twice.

5. Carl Hubbell, Giants, 45 1/3 IP, July 13-Aug. 1, 1933

The Hall of Fame left-hander won the NL MVP Award in 1933, when he led the league in wins (23), ERA (1.66), innings (308 2/3) and shutouts (10). Three of those shutouts came during this streak, which actually included two relief appearances. On July 19 at Pittsburgh, Hubbell took over with two outs in the first inning and went the rest of the way with 8 1/3 scoreless frames. He also tossed two innings out of the bullpen on July 30, two days before his streak ended in the sixth inning of a start against the Giants. Hubbell, a screwball artist, didn't pull off this feat by overpowering hitters, logging just 10 strikeouts over 37 1/3 innings during the streak's five full outings.

6. Sal Maglie, Giants, 45 IP, Aug. 16-Sept. 13, 1950

Nicknamed "The Barber" for his tendency to throw up-and-in fastballs, Maglie debuted in the Majors as a 28-year-old in 1945, then didn't pitch at that level again until '50. Initially a reliever, he eventually worked his way into the rotation and wound up posting an NL-best 2.71 ERA over 47 games (16 starts). His streak included six starts and three relief appearances. During the streak's seven full outings, he posted a modest 12-to-8 strikeout-to-walk ratio but allowed only three extra-base hits, all doubles.

7. Brandon Webb, D-backs, 42 IP, July 20-Aug. 17, 2007

Webb was the NL's defending Cy Young Award winner in 2007, when he went 18-10 with a 3.01 ERA to finish as the runner-up. The righty began his streak in the final inning of his start at Wrigley Field on July 20, then racked up five straight scoreless outings after that. The last three of those were complete games, including a 1-0 Arizona win on Aug. 11 against Washington, and a two-hitter on Aug. 17 at Atlanta. Webb was the first pitcher since **Roger Clemens** in 1998 to record three consecutive shutouts. During his scoreless streak, Webb allowed 24 hits and a .162 average.

8. Zac Gallen, D-backs, 41 1/3 IP, Aug. 8-Sept. 4, 2022 (active)

Perhaps the most surprising name on this list, Gallen came seemingly out of nowhere to put together one of the best pitching stretches ever. The 27-year-old began his streak by throwing seven shutout innings against the Pirates at Chase Field on Aug. 8, and he hasn't looked back since. Including that start, Gallen has racked up six straight scoreless outings of six-plus innings, joining Drysdale, Hershiser and Clayton Kershaw as the only pitchers in the Modern Era to have such a streak. It is the second-longest scoreless streak in franchise history behind only Webb's 42-inning run in 2007.

9 (tie). Clayton Kershaw, Dodgers, 41 IP, June 13-July 10, 2014

Kershaw's streak arrived in the midst of an NL MVP Award-winning campaign that also saw the lefty capture his third NL Cy Young Award in four seasons while going 21-3 with a 1.77 ERA. In his first full outing of the streak, on June 18 against the Rockies, he struck out 15 in a no-hitter that came one **Hanley Ramirez** error away from a perfect game. Over the course of the 41 innings, Kershaw retired the leadoff man 36 times and racked up 52 strikeouts.

9 (tie). Ted Lyons, White Sox, 41 IP, Aug. 9-26, 1926

Like Kershaw, Lyons tossed a no-hitter during his streak, on Aug. 21 at Fenway Park. According to SABR, the Hall of Fame righty walked the first batter of that game on four pitches, then allowed no more baserunners the rest of the way, with the exception of an error. Lyons' streak also included a six-inning relief appearance in a 13-inning win at Cleveland on Aug. 11, two days after he threw a complete game. It ended in agonizing fashion, with Lyons tossing nine scoreless innings at Washington before giving up an unearned run in the 10th to lose, 1-0. The last 34 innings of Lyons' streak came on the road.

9 (tie). Luis Tiant, Indians, 41 IP, April 28-May 17, 1968

The third member of this list from "The Year of the Pitcher," the Cuban righty led the American League with a 1.60 ERA and nine shutouts that season. His streak started with four consecutive shutouts, three of them on the road, in which Tiant gave up just 14 total hits (one for extra bases) and struck out 35 over 36 innings, with opponents hitting .118 off him. Four years later, Tiant authored another streak for the Red Sox, this one lasting 40 innings and also including four straight shutouts. Walter Johnson (1913 and '18) is the only other pitcher in baseball history with multiple scoreless streaks of at least 40 innings.

Longest single-season scoreless streaks in MLB history, including dead-ball era (dating back to 1900)

Via Elias Sports Bureau

1. **Orel Hershiser**, Dodgers, 59 IP, Aug. 30-Sept. 28, 1988
2. **Don Drysdale**, Dodgers, 58 IP, May 14-June 8, 1968
3. **Walter Johnson**, Senators, 55 2/3 IP, April 10-May 14, 1913
4. **Jack Coombs**, Athletics, 53 IP, Sept. 5-Sept. 25, 1910
5. **Bob Gibson**, Cardinals, 47 IP, June 2-26, 1968
6. **Zack Greinke**, Dodgers, 45 2/3 IP, June 18-July 26, 2015
7. **Carl Hubbell**, Giants, 45 1/3 IP, July 13-Aug. 1, 1933
- 8 (tie). **Cy Young**, Red Sox, 45 IP, April 25-May 17, 1904
- 8 (tie). **Doc White**, White Sox, 45 IP, Sept. 12-30, 1904
- 8 (tie). **Sal Maglie**, Giants, 45 IP, Aug. 16-Sept. 4, 1950

THE BEST COMP FOR AARON JUDGE'S HISTORIC SEASON? BABE RUTH

The best comp for **Aaron Judge's** historic season? Babe Ruth.

By Barry Svrluga, The Washington Post

For three decades after he hit the 61st home run of the 1961 season in the last of the New York Yankees' 162 games, **Roger Maris's** record (in)famously carried an asterisk. Since that single-season record has since been blown by – six times in a four-season stretch that spanned the turn of this century – the controversy surrounding one of baseball's most revered records has been not about the length of the season but the means by which the standard was attained.

Into that morass, by no doing of his own, strides Aaron Judge, who wears the same pinstripes as Maris and **Babe Ruth**, and is doing things in the summer of 2022 that are as unusual as his predecessors did in the 1920s and '60s, respectively. Judge had 55 homers through Thursday, and with the Yankees only 24 games from the conclusion of the season, it's unlikely that he'll reach **Barry Bonds's** (murky) mark of 73. Unlikely. But don't take your eyes off him.

There's ink to be spilled about what the rightful home run record should be, because Bonds was on "the cream" and "the clear" and whatever else he took to artificially build himself into the all-time home run champ, both for one season and a career. The only other players to have hit more than Maris did in that summer of '61 are similarly stained – **Mark McGwire** and **Sammy Sosa** in both 1998 and '99, and Sosa again in 2001, the year Bonds established the record.

Home run hitting, like anything in baseball, is normally a product of where the sport is at a particular point in time: the dead-ball era, the year of the pitcher, the steroid era, the juiced

ball of 2019 and so on. In 2022, Judge is an absolute outlier, spitting on the belief that the ball has traveled less this year by launching shot after shot over the fences.

When Maris surpassed Ruth's record of 60 – a number the Babe reached in the 154-game season of 1927 – he was pushed by teammate and icon **Mickey Mantle**, who finished with 54. That fits with history. More often than not, there is a Robin riding alongside Batman. Not up for some severe baseball nerdiness at the moment? You may want to put down this column. The rest of you, come along.

The only seasons in which more than two players smacked 50 homers were 2001, the year Bonds set the existing mark; and 1998, the year McGwire and Sosa created what seemed like magic by tracking down and passing Maris. In each of those seasons, four players reached 50 – Bonds, Sosa, **Luis Gonzalez** and **Alex Rodriguez** in '01; McGwire, Sosa, **Ken Griffey Jr.** and **Greg Vaughn** in '98. Remember the days when chicks dug the long ball?

There have been 13 seasons before this one in which a player hit at least 55 homers. Nine of those years, at least one other player hit 50. That was true during the Bonds-McGwire steroid era, of course. But it was true, too, in 1938 for **Hank Greenberg** (58) and **Jimmie Foxx** (50). It was true in 2017, when **Giancarlo Stanton**, now Judge's teammate, hit 59 for Miami while Judge smacked 52 as a Yankees rookie. It was true for Maris and Mantle.

Separating yourself from the power pack, as Judge is doing, is something that really hasn't happened since Ruth's days, which we'll get to. Judge will almost certainly stand alone beyond 50 when the season ends in early October. Philadelphia's **Kyle Schwarber** would have to hit 14 homers in his team's final 25 games to reach 50; St. Louis's **Paul Goldschmidt** and Atlanta's **Austin Riley** have around the same number of games in which to hit 15 to get to that mark.

What it amounts to is that Judge is outpacing the league at a rate not seen since Ruth, who basically played a different sport from his contemporaries. In 1920, Ruth hit 54 homers when his closest pursuer, **George Sisler**, managed only 19. (That year, Ruth homered more times than all but one other team.) The following season, Ruth clubbed a then-record 59 homers when the next best in the league – **Ken Williams** and **Bob Meusel** – each hit 24.

Judge's 19-home-run lead on Schwarber? It would be the most since Ruth hit 54 and the next-best duo of **Hack Wilson** and **Jim Bottomley** managed 31 in 1928. In the 93 seasons since, only Jimmie Foxx – who beat Ruth by 17 homers in 1932 and 14 homers in 1933 – has approached such a gap.

The season's not over, and it will be fascinating to see when and if Judge reaches Ruth at 60, Maris at 61, Sosa's 63 from 1999 or his 64 from 2001, McGwire's 65 from '99 or Sosa's 66 from '98. Those are all reachable landmarks.

Through Thursday, Judge had homered in a staggering 9.29 percent of his plate appearances. (Ruth's best, it's worth mentioning, was 8.75 percent in 1920.) If he gets the same number of

plate appearances he has averaged thus far, and homers at the same rate, for the rest of the season, he'll hit 10 more and finish with 65 – which would tie him for the fourth-most all-time.

But as notable as that blast toward history will be, what he's doing in relation to the rest of the league better defines the impressiveness of his season.

There is time, over these final three-plus weeks, to reconsider what the rightful single-season home run record should be. I'll be honest: I'm torn. I'm not into criminalizing Bonds, McGwire and the rest, because who knows if everyone's clean – even now, with a rigorous drug-testing program long in place? But it's hard to deny that the top of the most-homers-in-a-season list reads as dirty. I'll leave it as a fun barroom discussion, and respect both views.

What's undeniable, though, is Aaron Judge is distancing himself from his power-hitting peers in a way even Bonds and McGwire didn't in their most prolific seasons. That gives his season a distinction that is decidedly devoid of controversy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Back-to-back Cy Young awards—same team, different pitchers. It has happened eight times—name the pitchers:

2008 and 2007 Cleveland Indians (two left-handed starters).

Cliff Lee and CC Sabathia

1997 and 1996 Toronto Blue Jays (two right handed starters)

Roger Clemens and Pat Hentgen

1996 and 1995 Atlanta Braves (two right handed starters)

John Smoltz and Greg Maddux

1983 and 1982 Philadelphia Phillies (two left handed starters)

John Denny and Steve Carlton

1982 and 1981 Brewers (right handed starter and right hander reliever)

Pete Vuckovich and Rollie Fingers

1980 and 1979 Orioles (right handed starter and left handed starter)

Steve Stone and Mike Flanagan

1978 and 1977 New York Yankees (left handed starter and left handed reliever)

Ron Guidry and Sparky Lyle

1963 and 1962 Los Angeles Dodgers (left handed starter and right handed starter)

Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale

HOUSEKEEPING

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