

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

9.25.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Hats off to **Albert Pujols** and 700 HRs. Its coffee and scones here in Maine as we close in on the playoffs. A big issue this week—a subscriber commented that at over 40 pages it's a lot to get through. My advice to him—read what you like, skip what you don't.

This week a thoughtful piece on possible impact of the 2023 rule changes, **Aaron Judge's** great season beyond the homers, barnstorming **Bill Lee**, a deep dive on **Spencer Strider's** season, and of course, trivia. Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Four managers have taken four teams to the post-season—one of them has taken five teams.

The earliest managed his first post season team in 1969. Two managed the Mets, two managed the Yankees, two managed the Orioles and two will manage in this season's playoffs.

Name the four managers and the teams.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Pujols joined **Barry Bonds (762)**, **Hank Aaron (755)** and **Babe Ruth (714)** in the 700 HR club. He is the only one of the four who did not hit his 700th HR at age 39 (Pujols is 42).

A few other Pujols notes that jumped out:

He finished in the top 5 in MVP voting 10 of his first 11 seasons in the majors. The season he did not finish in the top 5 he hit .327 with 32 HRs, 103 RBI and 38 doubles and led the NL in WAR.

Pujols has homered off a record 455 pitchers. Babe Ruth spent virtually his entire career in an eight-team American League with no Interleague Play, homering off just 216 different pitchers in the process. Pujols has victimized only two pitchers for more than five big flies: **Ryan Dempster** (eight) and **Wade Miller** (six). Ruth did that to 38 different pitchers.

He has homered off pitchers who already are in the Hall of Fame. Included in that is five big flies off **Randy Johnson** -- more than anyone other than **Chipper Jones** hit against the Big Unit. Pujols also managed three apiece off **Greg Maddux** and **John Smoltz** and one apiece off **Trevor Hoffman** and **Mike Mussina**. Against those five Cooperstown-bound hurlers, Pujols hit a collective .358 and slugged 1.011 with a homer every 8.6 at-bats.

Pujols homered in 40 ball parks. He is the only player ever to hit 94 or more HRs in multiple ballparks—he did it in 3, old Busch (94), new Busch (120), Angels Stadium (110).

Pujols averaged 40 over 11 seasons during that first stint in St. Louis, never hitting fewer than 32. Pujols' 445 homers during the first 11 seasons of his career is a record -- 46 ahead of the closest challenger (**Eddie Mathews**). He had more walks than strikeouts 10 straight seasons.

Pujols has hit 21 HRs in his age 42 season. Bonds holds the age 42 record with 28. Next most is **Carlton Fisk** with 18. Only 7 players all time hit 10 or more at age 42 or older. Pujols still ranks fourth all-time in homers in an age-21 season (37 in 2001) and now ranks second at double that age.

2,482 players besides Pujols have hit at least one Major League home run over the span of his career (2001-present), entering Friday. That's a full 40-man roster for all 30 teams -- multiplied by two, with change to spare.

Pujols at 700. Some fun slugger combinations to compare that number with—

Mike Trout (346) + **Joey Votto** (342) = 688

Giancarlo Stanton (375) + **Paul Goldschmidt** (315) = 690

Larry Walker (383) + **Matt Holliday** (316) = 699

Johnny Bench (389) + **Ivan Rodriguez** (311) = 700

Albert Belle (381) + **Prince Fielder** (319) = 700

Pujols's 700th came in his 3,072nd game. On his way to a record 762 home runs, Bonds reached 700 in his 2,702nd game. Aaron, who finished with 755, arrived at 700 in his 2,920th game and Ruth in his 2,418th game.

Pujols hit at least .300 with at least 30 homers and 100 RBIs in each of his first 10 seasons. He helped the Cardinals to World Series titles in 2006 and 2011.

He set a career high with 49 homers in 2006 — one of seven seasons with at least 40 homers. He led the majors with 47 homers in 2009 and topped the NL with 42 in 2010.

In the end, he will be the player who hit more than 20 home runs in 18 seasons, who hit more than 30 homers 13 times and who hit more than 40 six times. Like Aaron, he never hit 50.

Patrick Corbin of the Nationals is having a season he'd rather forget. Corbin has the league's worst ERA (6.08). He also has given up the most hits (200 in 149 innings), and he also leads the league in losses (18). In 2021, Corbin lost 16 (tying him with **Luis Castillo**) with a 5.82 ERA and 37 home runs allowed.

His Nationals teammate, **Josiah Gray** has thrown a rather incredible 37 gopher balls in only 136 2/3 innings. Gray also leads the league in walks.

Aaron Judge tied **Babe Ruth's** 60 HRs in the Yankees 147th game of the season.

The milestone baseball was caught by 20-year-old Michael Kessler, an outfielder/pitcher at City College of New York. Kessler and three friends made a last-minute decision to attend the game, hoping to witness Judge's 60th in person. They got much more; Kessler pounced on the ball and clutched it to his chest until security arrived.

"Judge means so much to the organization, especially this year," said Kessler, who swapped No. 60 for autographed baseballs, a bat and an opportunity to take photos with Judge. "He's just unbelievable. Just the way he is, he deserved to have the ball back. I have no second thoughts."

Want a little history? Go back 61 years. A crowd of 23,154 came to the Bronx for the Sunday matinee. With one on in the bottom of the first, and **Yogi Berra** standing on deck, Red Sox rookie **Tracy Stallard** retired **Roger Maris** on a deep fly to left. The ball was caught by Red Sox rookie outfielder **Carl Yastrzemski**.

Yankees fans groaned when Stallard fell behind Maris, 2 and 0, in the fourth. There was fear that the righthander would walk the slugger. But Maris drove the next pitch over the wall in right field, far out of the reach of Sox outfielder **Lou Clinton**. **Phil Rizzutto** screamed "Holy Cow" into the mic.

Maris's home run ball was caught by Sal Durante, a 19-year-old Coney Islander, who instantly became famous, part of hard-ball trivia lore forever. Within hours, it was reported that Durante lived at 1412 Neptune Avenue in Brooklyn and had attended the game with his 17-year-old girlfriend, Rosemary Calabrese.

Maris's homer was the only run of the game. Yaz singled off Yankees reliever **Luis Arroyo** in the ninth, but the Red Sox couldn't bring him home against the powerhouse Pinstripers. **Ralph Houk's** Yankees were bound for the World Series, where they would handle the Cincinnati Reds in five games. Now you now.

The last player to reach 59 HRs was **Giancarlo Stanton**. In that 2017 season with Miami, Stanton hit homers Nos. 58 and 59 on Sept. 28 against the Braves, giving him three more games to reach the 60-homer plateau. With the baseball world watching closely, Stanton collected five hits in his last 14 at-bats (.357), but none of them left the yard.

Judge and Stanton have homered in the same game 25 times during the regular season (since 2018), with the Yankees going 24-1 in those games. They've also homered together in three postseason games, with the Yanks winning each of those contests.

Wil Crowe of the Pirates, the pitcher now forever connected to Judge's 60th, is a great-great nephew of Hall of Famer **Red Ruffing**, who won six World Series with the Yankees in the 1930s and '40s. Crowe even toured Monument Park before the game, inspecting Ruffing's plaque. Lots more Judge later in this issue.

Through Saturday, across MLB starting pitchers were averaging 5.23 innings (highest since 2018) and 85.3 pitches per start (highest since 2019).

Clayton Kershaw had his 27th game with at least 10 strikeouts and no walks when he dominated the Diamondbacks on Monday. That matched **Curt Schilling** for third most in history. Only **Randy Johnson** (39) and **Max Scherzer** (29) have more.

Since winning the World Series in 2020 the Dodgers have gone 209-102 heading into Thursday night — an astonishing .672 winning percentage. That would be ...

- The best two-season record of any team, after winning it all, in the division-play era (1969-2022).
- The best two-season record of any team, after winning a title, since **Stan Musial's** 1943-44 Cardinals (.682).
- The fifth-best two-season record, after winning a World Series, of all time.

The Nationals won the World Series in 2019. Since then, 143-228 (a .385 winning percentage) which is the worst record by any team in its first three seasons following a title *in the history of baseball*.

Another Nationals note-- **Stephen Strasburg**, has pitched 31⅓ innings the last three seasons, is owed \$140 million through 2026.

The Oakland A's team batting average is .216, OBP .281. That's the worst combination since the 1910 White Sox.

The Athletics have used a franchise-record 62 players this season. That includes 34 pitchers and 12 players with at least one start at first base. Oakland also has used five catchers.

Xander Bogaerts joined **Carl Yastrzemski**, **Bobby Doerr**, and **Jim Rice** this week as the only players in Red Sox history to reach that 1,400-hit mark before turning 30.

Byron Buxton of the Twins is a great talent but often injured. Minnesota is 47-39 when he plays, but 26-37 when he doesn't.

The New York Mets etched themselves into MLB history Wednesday by setting a league record for most times hit by a pitch in a season with 106. The previous record was set by the Cincinnati Reds in 2021.

Mets infielder **Luis Guillorme** got the Mets to that number when he was hit in the ninth inning by Brewers pitcher **Jake Cousins**. Mets outfielder **Mark Canha** leads the team in hits by pitches this season with 23, putting him in a tie with Chicago Cubs catcher **Willson Contreras**.

The single season individual HBP record is held by **Ron Hunt**, in 1971 while playing for the Expos. Hunt was hit 50 times. Hall of Famer **Craig Biggio** has the career record at 285.

Canha leads the majors this season, having been hit 24 times, still short of his personal high of 27 last year, when he also led the majors. His fellow Mets **Brandon Nimmo** (16) and **Starling Marte** (13) are also in the top 10.

The San Francisco Giants and the Cincinnati Reds have each had more than 80 batters get hit this season, and six more teams are in the 70s. Twenty years ago, only four teams wound up in the 70s, and 40 years ago, in 1982, no team was higher than 35.

Since 2018, there have been more than 0.4 hit batsmen a game in every season, numbers not consistently seen since the rough-and-tumble days of the 1800s.

Giancarlo Stanton hit a walk off grand slam for the Yankees over the Pirates this week. Next game **Oswaldo Cabrera** hit a grand slam for the Yankees first 4 runs of the game. First time in MLB history that has happened. It was also only the third instance of a team hitting a grand slam in the final inning of one game and then another slam in the first inning of its next contest. The others involved the Red Sox in 1955 and the Dodgers in 2017. The Yankees -- who rode consecutive-inning slams by **Aaron Judge** and **Aaron Hicks** to a rout of these same Pirates on July 6 -- also became the first club in history to hit slams in back-to-back innings twice in one season. The feat is so rare that no other team has hit a pair of consecutive-inning grand slams against the same opponent at any point in its history -- not to mention the same season. The Yankees also tied a team record with 10 grand slams in a season. (the 2000 Oakland A's and the 2006 Cleveland Indians are tied for the MLB season record with 14).

Only five National Leaguers had hit 50 home runs in a season before **McGwire-Sosa--Hack Wilson, Ralph Kiner** (twice), **Willie Mays** (twice), **Johnny Mize** and **George Foster**.

A stat that should impress you—**Lou Gehrig** had 400+ total bases five times. Gehrig also drove in a Yankee record 185 runs in 1931 and did not win MVP--it went to A's pitcher **Lefty Grove** who went 31-4 with a 2.06 ERA, 27 complete games, 4 shutouts in 288 innings pitched.

Max Scherzer was on the mound, delivering six perfect innings as the Mets clinched a playoff berth with a 7-2 win over the Brewers.

"This is what you play the game for," said Scherzer, who picked up his 200th career win and lowered his ERA to 2.15.

Making his first start since a 15-day stint on the injured list, he struck out two in the fourth inning and two more in the fifth, proving so efficient with his pitches that manager **Buck Showalter** found it impossible to remove him from the game at that point. Scherzer convinced Showalter to give him one more inning, which he punctuated with his ninth strikeout of the night.

Monday under a strict pitch count of about 75. Scherzer wound up needing only 68 to complete his six innings, becoming the 120th pitcher and third active player to win 200 games. Perfect through 6 innings in 200th win—never been done.

Scherzer, a three-time Cy Young Award winner and World Series champion the Mets to a three-year, \$130 million contract.

Speaking of Scherzer and the Mets and the question "can money buy you happiness?"

The Mets are on track to have baseball's highest payroll for the first time since 1989, among a record-tying six teams set to pay a penalty for spending.

The Los Angeles Dodgers, who started the season as the top spender, fell into second due to **Trevor Bauer's** suspension.

New York entered the last full month of the season with a \$273.9 million payroll, according to updated figures through Aug. 31 compiled by Major League Baseball. The Dodgers are second at \$267.2 million, followed by the New York Yankees at \$254.4 million.

The Mets hope to win their first World Series title since 1986. Pitcher **Max Scherzer**, at a big league-high \$43.3 million, makes roughly \$5 million less than Oakland's entire team and combines with teammates **Jacob deGrom** and **Francisco Lindor** for about \$103 million — more than eight of the 30 clubs.

When the Mets last topped MLB in payroll, their total was \$21.3 million.

The Dodgers' payroll dropped when Bauer was suspended for two years without pay on April 29 for violating the sport's domestic violence policy.

The Yankees have a tax payroll of \$267 million and a projected tax of \$9.4 million, and the Phillies at \$243 million would owe \$2.6 million.

Boston, just over the first threshold at \$234.5 million, would owe about \$900,000. After paying tax for the first time last year, San Diego is a second "offender" with a payroll of about \$233 million and a tax of just over \$800,000.

Framber Valdez's accomplishments this season cannot be ignored. The lefty delivered his 25th consecutive quality start in the Astros' 11-2 win over the A's at Minute Maid Park, breaking the MLB single-season record previously held by **Jacob deGrom** in 2018.

Valdez, recognizing what was at stake entering his start on Sunday, allowed two runs on four hits in six innings, throwing 87 pitches.

Valdez, who ranks second in wins (16) and sixth in ERA (2.57) among qualified AL starters. Houston starters have combined for a 3.04 ERA, the best mark in the AL.

Valdez (25) and **Yu Darvish** of the Padres (21) are the only pitchers in the majors this year with more than 12 straight starts pitching 6 or more innings. Darvish and Valdez are two of just eight pitchers to have a streak this long since 2015.

Valdez's streak ended Saturday night against Baltimore though the Astros rallied to win 11-10.

Maury Wills died this week at 89. Wills set a modern major league record when he stole 104 bases in 1962, eclipsing the record of 96 set by **Ty Cobb** in 1915 and transforming baseball from the power game that had prevailed since Babe Ruth's heyday. He set the stage for **Lou Brock** of the St. Louis Cardinals, who stole 118 bases in 1974, and **Rickey Henderson** of the Oakland A's, who set the current record with 130 steals in 1982. His 104 steals in 1962 was more than any MLB team.

Maurice Morning Wills entered the Dodgers organization at a time when eventual Hall of Famer **Pee Wee Reese** had a stranglehold on the shortstop position. It took 8 1/2 Minor League seasons before Wills eventually wrested the starting shortstop job from **Don Zimmer** and, despite his slow start, he went on to play 14 Major League seasons, 11-plus with the Dodgers.

In his 1959 rookie season with the Dodgers, the team won the World Series, defeating the Chicago White Sox, who had their own outstanding base-stealer in **Luis Aparicio**. Wills stole 50 bases in 1960, his first full season, and went on to win the National League's base-stealing title every year through 1965.

He was named the league's most valuable player in 1962. He played on Dodger World Series championship teams again in 1963 and 1965 and a pennant-winner in 1966. The Dodgers swept the Yankees in 1963, bested the Twins in seven games in '65 and were swept by the Orioles in '66. Wills excelled in the '65 World Series, hitting .367 with three doubles, three RBIs and three stolen bases.

Wills was traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates after the 1966 season. He later played for the Montreal Expos and then was traded back to the Dodgers in June 1969, finishing his career with them in 1972.

He stole 586 bases (putting him 20th on the all-time major league career list) and had a career batting average of .281, with 2,134 hits — only 20 of them home runs. He was a five-time All-Star and winner of the Gold Glove award for fielding in 1961 and 1962. He remained on the Hall of Fame ballot for 15 seasons but was never inducted. He led the league in stolen bases in six consecutive seasons and still holds the club record with 490 stolen bases, even though he retired in 1972.

The Seattle Mariners hired Wills in August 1980 as the third Black manager in major league baseball history, following **Frank Robinson** of the Cleveland Indians and **Larry Doby** of the Chicago White Sox. But Wills's managerial tenure was brief and unsuccessful. He was later plagued by cocaine addiction.

Wills's son **Bump** was an infielder for the Texas Rangers and Chicago Cubs in the late 1970s and early '80s.

With the Astros win Saturday night **Dusty Baker** became only the fourth manager to lead a team to 100 wins in both leagues, joining **Whitey Herzog**, **Sparky Anderson** and **Tony La Russa**. Baker also accomplished a 100-win season for the first time since 1993, when he managed the Giants.

Pinch-runner extraordinaire **Terrance Gore** is excited by the possibility of earning a fourth World Series ring with the Mets.

Gore, 31, has only 15 career hits, yet contributed to Series titles with the 2015 Royals, 2020 Dodgers and 2021 Braves.

“I need to catch Tom Brady,” he said, referring to the quarterback’s seven Super Bowl titles.

Sept. 17, 1910: Around this time 112 years ago, the Mobile Sea Gulls defeated the Atlanta Crackers, 2-1, in a Southern Association game that took ... 32 minutes. You think pitch timers can help shorten game times and quicken baseball’s pace? Try, what *The New York Times* called, “coming to bat on the run.” Essentially, both teams swung as much as possible, often making weak contact on the first pitch, and sprinted on and off the field between innings. The whole nine-inning affair featured one walk, one strikeout and 10 total hits. Though no official reason was given for why Mobile and Atlanta decided to play speed ball, the fact that it was the last game of the season for both clubs may have had something to do with it.

Dodgers manager **Dave Roberts** has pulled 5 starting pitchers from no-hitters through at least 5 innings in his 8 seasons at the helm, the latest **Dustin May**. Over the previous 57 seasons in Los Angeles the 8 Dodgers managers pulled 1 pitcher from a no hitter. Those managers - **Walter Alston, Lasorda, Bill Russell, Davey Johnson, Jim Tracy, Grady Little, Joe Torre, Don Mattingly**.

Little pulled the plug on **Greg Maddux**, after six innings and 72 pitches, on Aug. 3, 2006 after a rain delay. Hall of Famer Maddux never pitched a no-hitter.

Yadi Molina and **Albert Pujols** both have multi-homer games this year. Only one other team in the modern era has gotten multi-homer games by two players in their 40s in the same season — the 2006 Giants, from **Moises Alou** (age 40) and **Barry Bonds** (42).

Rich Hill of the Red Sox won a 1-0 game over the Orioles earlier this month at age 42. The only non-knuckleballers older than him to win a 1-0 game as a starter in the modern era:

Satchel Paige (46 years, 30 days old) in 1952

Jamie Moyer (45, 271) in 2008

Gaylord Perry (44, 326) in 1983

Cy Young (44, 177) in 1911

Nolan Ryan (43, 85) in 1990

In case you missed it, September 13. Indians – Angels. Umpire Ron Kupla ejected managers **Terry Francona** (replay dispute) and **Bob Melvin** (reliever not allowed to throw warm up pitches during the replay dispute) on the same play.

Hunter Greene breaks MLB record for most 101-plus mph pitches in return from IL

Cincinnati Reds pitcher **Hunter Greene** is off to a fast start in his first game back from the injured list Saturday night. He struck out eight St. Louis Cardinals batters in his first three innings, throwing 30 pitches that topped 101 mph, the most for any game in the pitch-tracking era.

The previous record for most in a game was 26 by **Jordan Hicks** in 2019.

Greene finished his six innings of work (he entered the night on a 75 to 80 pitch limit) with a career-high 11 strikeouts, allowing four hits, zero walks and zero runs to the Cardinals' lineup.

Eight of those strikeouts came on 101-plus mph pitches. According to MLB.com, no other pitcher in the pitch-tracking era (since 2008) has more than three in a game.

Greene's start was his first since Aug. 1, after which he went on the IL with a right shoulder strain.

Speaking of triple digit flame throwers, Cards closer **Ryan Helsley** had it going this week. Pitching on four days' rest helped Helsley regain the throne of the fastest pitch of the MLB season in Thursday afternoon's 5-4 win over the Padres at Petco Park. When he cut loose a 104 mph fastball, per Statcast, in the eighth inning against San Diego slugger **Josh Bell**, it allowed him to eclipse the 103.8 mph pitch that teammate Jordan Hicks threw on July 8.

Helsley held the title of the fastest MLB pitch of the season early in the year when he fired a 103.1 mph pitch to D-backs outfielder **Ketel Marte** on May 1. Hicks, who has a 105 mph pitch to his credit early in his career, supplanted him in early July -- only to have Helsley take over that mantel once he went to work against the Padres. Helsley added an immaculate inning (just the third in Cards history) and threw 15 of 21 pitches in the eighth inning at 100 mph or faster.

The Dodgers have 45 come from behind wins this year. That led to a dig into the record book. Most impressive regular season come from behind win, by win probability? June 29, 1952 Cubs trailed the Reds 8-2 with 2 outs and nobody on in the 9th. Cubs rallied to win 9-8. Post season comeback—1929 World Series Philadelphia A's trailed the Cubs 8-0 in the 7th, rallied to win 10-8. This season on May 5 the Mets trailed Philadelphia 7-1 in the bottom of the 8th, won 8-7. (in 2001 the Indians rallied from a 12 run deficit to beat the Mariners but that's a story for another day).

REST IN PEACE QUEEN ELIZABETH

Most wins during queen's reign: 6,407, by the Yankees (who else!)

Most losses during queen's reign: 5,904, by the Cubs (who else!)

Teams that didn't exist when queen's reign began: 14

Teams playing in a different city when queen's reign began: 6

World Series involving the *Royals* during the queen's reign: 4

World Series won by the *Royals* during the queen's reign: 2 (1985, 2015)

Guys named Queen who played in the big leagues during the queen's reign: 2 (Mel and Billy)

Guys named King who played in the big leagues during the queen's reign: 14

All-Royalty pitching staff: Ed Buckingham, Vicente Palacios, Mel Queen, Mike McQueen, King Félix Hernández, Ray King, Brian Kingman, Don Prince and Zack Britton.

All-Royalty lineup: Marv Throneberry, Prince Fielder, Duke Snider, Queenie O'Rourke, Jeff King, Dave Kingman, Scott Kingery, London Lindley.

SPENCER STRIDER'S AMAZING SEASON

Jay Jaffe, Fangraphs.com

Righty **Spencer Strider** recorded his 200th strikeout Sunday faster than any pitcher ever has, reaching that total in 130 innings. MLB.com's Jason Catania notes that no pitcher in AL/NL history has finished a season with at least 200 strikeouts and fewer than 100 hits allowed, and Strider is at 202 and 86.

Strider reached 200 strikeouts at exactly 130 innings, quicker than any other pitcher in AL/NL history. **Randy Johnson** had previously set the record when he needed 130 2/3 innings to notch 200 strikeouts in 2001. **Gerrit Cole** had ranked second, needing 133 1/3 innings to reach the mark in 2019.

The Braves have gone 13-7 in games started by Strider, who has posted a 2.77 ERA in those 20 outings. Strider having done something **John Smoltz, Tom Glavine and Warren Spahn** didn't do at the start of their respective Hall of Fame careers. The only previous Braves rookies to record 200 strikeouts in a season were **Bill Stemmyer** (239 in 1886) and **Kid Nichols** (222 in 1890). Each of those pitchers tossed more than 350 innings.

How impressive is his season?.

(Highest K%, min. 120 IP)

Gerrit Cole	2019	39.9%
Chris Sale	2018	38.4%
Spencer Strider	2022	38.3%
Pedro Martinez	1999	37.5%
Randy Johnson	2001	37.4%

Strider set a record for the fewest innings needed to reach the 200-strikeout plateau, doing so in 130 innings, 0.2 fewer than Randy Johnson needed in 2001. Cole was the second-fastest by that measure, doing so in 133.2 innings in 2019.

To be fair, Johnson was doing so in a much lower strikeout environment. By K%+, a normalized strikeout rate where 100 equals league average, Johnson had a 208 mark in 2001, meaning that he was striking out batters at a little more than twice the league-average rate. Using a 120-inning cutoff, that ranks 13th among pitchers of the integration era (1947 onward). Strider has "only" a 170 K%+, meaning that he's striking out hitters at 1.7 times the league rate, merely 105th by those parameters. As with so many context-adjusted pitching stats, it's Pedro Martinez who tops this particular list, with a 239 K%+ in 1999, the year he struck out 313 hitters in 213.1 innings. Martinez reached 200 in 147 innings, via a rare relief appearance necessitated by a late arrival to the ballpark (and foreshadowing his Division Series Game 5 heroics a couple months later).

Strider is the 17th rookie since 1901 to strike out 200 batters in a season, and the first in this millennium to do so without previously pitching in Nippon Professional Baseball:

Rookie Pitchers with 200 Strikeouts

Player	Team	Season	Age	IP	TBF	SO	K%
Spencer Strider	ATL	2022	23	131.2	528	202	38.3%
Yu Darvish	TEX	2012	25	191.1	816	221	27.1%
Daisuke Matsuzaka	BOS	2007	26	204.2	874	201	23.0%
Kerry Wood	CHC	1998	21	166.2	699	233	33.3%
Hideo Nomo	LAD	1995	26	191.1	780	236	30.3%
Dwight Gooden	NYM	1984	19	218.0	879	276	31.4%
Mark Langston	SEA	1984	23	225.0	965	204	21.1%
John Montefusco	SFG	1975	25	243.2	1018	215	21.1%
Bob Johnson	KCR	1970	27	214.0	894	206	23.0%
Tom Griffin	HOU	1969	21	188.1	810	200	24.7%
Gary Nolan	CIN	1967	19	226.2	932	206	22.1%
Don Sutton	LAD	1966	21	225.2	916	209	22.8%
Herb Score	CLE	1955	22	227.1	978	245	25.1%
Pete Alexander	PHI	1911	24	367.0	1440	227	15.8%
Russ Ford	NYG	1910	27	299.2	1112	209	18.8%
Tom Hughes	CHC	1901	22	308.1	1325	225	17.0%
Christy Mathewson	NYG	1901	20	336.0	1361	221	16.2%

Cautionary tales abound on the above list, though the problems of Score, Gooden, and Wood — to cite three of the most famous ones here — bear little relationship to each other. The chronological distribution of these players is noteworthy, with four pitchers (including Hall of Famers Mathewson and Alexander) from the dead-ball era, then just one between that period and the comparatively pitcher-friendly 1960s, '70s, and '80s, and then a jump to five from the Wild Card era, three of whom got their starts in Japan. If you're wondering about K%+ from this group, Score (222), Gooden (212), Wood (190), and Nomo (177) all outdid Strider.

Strider is also the first of those rookies with a strikeout total that's more than double his total of hits allowed. Using the same 120-inning cutoff, only 11 pitchers have doubled up in such fashion, including one other pitcher this year and two from last year:

Pitchers With Twice as Many Strikeouts as Hits Allowed

Pitcher	Team	Season	Age	IP	H	K	K/H
Spencer Strider	ATL	2022	23	131.2	86	202	2.35
Cristian Javier	HOU	2022	25	131.2	85	173	2.04
Freddy Peralta	MIL	2021	25	144.1	84	195	2.32
Carlos Rodón	CHW	2021	28	132.2	91	185	2.03
Gerrit Cole	HOU	2019	28	212.1	142	326	2.30
Justin Verlander	HOU	2019	36	223.0	137	300	2.19
Max Scherzer	WSN	2018	33	220.2	150	300	2.00
Chris Sale	BOS	2018	29	158.0	102	237	2.32
Max Scherzer	WSN	2017	32	200.2	126	268	2.13
Randy Johnson	ARI	2001	37	249.2	181	372	2.06
Pedro Martínez	BOS	2000	28	217.0	128	284	2.22

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference

Minimum 120 innings pitched.

Again speaking to the way that a high-strikeout era has made this possible, all but two of the pitchers here are from the past six seasons, with Johnson and Martinez the only pitchers to do so beforehand; the aforementioned seasons of both Johnson and Cole are represented here. Note that Javier has flown somewhat under the radar in making this list, as most of the attention paid to Astros starters has gone to Verlander, who's the AL wins and ERA leader and likely Cy Young Award frontrunner, and Framber Valdez, who's on the outskirts of the Cy Young discussion and just set a single-season record with his 25th consecutive quality start.

These eye-opening numbers shouldn't obscure Strider's impact upon the Braves' season. He's taken some giant steps in short order since being chosen in the fourth round of the 2020 draft out of Clemson University, that after missing all of the previous season due to Tommy John surgery. After making appearances at five levels in 2021, from A-ball to the majors (2.1 innings

in two October regular-season games), he broke camp with the team in April and made 13 relief appearances, dominating in mostly low-leverage situations (2.22 ERA, 1.42 FIP, 38.9% strikeout rate). He joined the rotation on May 30 and quickly solidified the fifth spot behind **Max Fried**, **Charlie Morton**, **Kyle Wright**, and **Ian Anderson**. By most measures, he's outpitched them all in that timeframe:

Since Strider Joined the Rotation on May 30

Pitcher	GS	IP	K%	BB%	HR/9	ERA	FIP	WAR
Spencer Strider	20	107.1	38.1%	7.9%	0.59	2.77	1.91	4.2
Max Fried	18	114.1	22.9%	4.5%	0.55	2.20	2.70	3.1
Charlie Morton	19	113.1	31.9%	7.9%	1.51	3.73	3.95	1.4
Kyle Wright	19	116.1	21.7%	6.7%	1.16	3.40	3.95	1.4
Ian Anderson	13	64.0	21.1%	10.7%	0.84	5.48	3.92	0.7
Jake Odorizzi	7	33.2	18.4%	7.5%	1.87	4.54	5.28	0.0

Strider is fourth in innings among this group but leads the pack — even Fried, who made the NL All-Star team — by more than a full win in this span. Including his time in the bullpen, he's got a 4.9–4.6 edge in WAR on Fried and the lowest FIP (1.83) and xERA (2.39) of the group; his 2.67 ERA is second to Fried's 2.52. Between Wright leveling off after a strong start and Anderson pitching his way back to Triple-A (and recently suffering an oblique strain that will likely end his season), Strider's performance looms large in terms of the Braves' turnaround from a 23–27 start.

In fact, Strider's FIP and xERA are the majors' lowest among pitchers with at least 130 innings, and his 38.3% strikeout rate and 29.7% strikeout-walk differential are the highest. Even while falling 15.1 innings short of qualifying for the ERA title (the Braves have played 147 games, he has totaled 131.2 innings), he ranks seventh in the majors in WAR behind Rodón (5.7), Nola (5.5), **Kevin Gausman** (5.2), Verlander (5.1), **Sandy Alcantara** (5.1), and Ohtani (5.0).

Remarkably, Strider is doing all of this as a two-pitch pitcher, more or less. He's like a closer who throws five innings at the start of a game (to paraphrase somebody whom I've momentarily forgotten; apologies in advance). No starting pitcher throws his four-seamer as often as Strider (67%), but then, it's a damn good four-seamer. Not only does it average 98.2 mph with a high spin rate (2,343 RPM, placing him in the 76th percentile), but it also has a lot of movement and deception thanks to his size (listed as 6-foot-0) and extension (6.9 feet, 93rd percentile). When combined with that velocity — hey, good luck. As Justin Choi wrote in July in comparing Strider's fastball to that of **Hunter Greene**, who reaches triple digits with greater regularity (28% of all four-seamers, compared to 5% for Strider):

[A] lack of height actually works in his favor, as Strider is able to get on top of the ball without having to drastically raise his release point. You can also tell from their respective deliveries that Strider releases the ball closer to home plate than does Greene. The benefit of added extension is straightforward: To a hitter, the pitch appears faster and is thus trickier to deal with. Triple digits from Strider is more devastating than triple digits from Greene.

...Compared to Greene, it's Strider who not only creates more vertical movement, but also unleashes it through a lower release point and lengthier extension. His approach angle is flatter as a result, giving the illusion of rise.

Updating the table that Choi included in the comparison:

Spencer Strider vs. Hunter Greene Fastball Comparison

Pitcher	Velocity	V Mov (in.)	H Mov (in.)	V Rel (ft.)	H Rel (ft.)	Extension (ft.)
Spencer Strider	98.2	17.6	5.2	5.7	2.0	6.9
Hunter Greene	98.7	15.9	11.5	6.0	2.4	6.4

SOURCE: SOURCE: Alex Chamberlain's Pitch Leadboard

Negative values for horizontal movement and release point have been flipped for ease of reading.

Batters have managed just a .201 average and .295 slugging percentage when connecting with Strider's fastball, which isn't all that often given his 27.7% whiff rate. They've struggled even more with his slider, which has improved mightily since Eric Longenhagen evaluated the pitch as "still below-average and not nasty enough to miss bats in the strike zone" in his June prospect report, grading it as a 40 present and 45 future. He throws it 28.2% of the time, with batters hitting .139, slugging .197 and whiffing 52.2% of the time. He rounds out his arsenal with a changeup (4.8%), which despite its minimal usage has baffled batters, as they've hit .136 and slugged .237 against it, whiffing 47.5% of the time.

If there's a knock on Strider, it's that he generally doesn't pitch deep into games because of so many deep counts. He's averaging an NL-high 4.31 pitches per plate appearance and only twice has thrown more than six innings, with the most recent time being his eight-inning, two-hit effort on September 1 against the Rockies, during which he set a franchise record with 16 strikeouts. Manager **Brian Snitker** has been reasonably cautious with him and has built him up slowly; he averaged 90 pitches per start in June, with progressions to 93, 94, and 104 pitches in each month since. In his last six starts, he's thrown between 102 and 106 pitches (the latter his season high) and gone at least six innings five times, pitching to a 1.70 ERA and 1.46 FIP along the way. He threw 96.1 innings last year, so he's 35 innings past that now, and I imagine the Braves' postseason plans for him are to stick with the five-to-six-inning turns and let the bullpen take care of the rest.

In all, Strider's had an amazing season. With all due respect to teammate **Michael Harris II**, who's hit .305/.343/.537 with a 142 wRC+ and 4.4 WAR since arriving on May 28 and played a similarly instrumental role in the team's turnaround, I think Strider would be my choice for NL Rookie of the Year. What Harris has done is special and impressive, but as the numbers above suggest, what Strider has done is out of this world.

MORE AMAZING STUFF FROM AARON JUDGE'S HISTORIC SEASON

Stats from a variety of sources—sorry for any overlap, a lot of stuff coming in fast.

While **Aaron Judge** chases **Roger Maris and Babe Ruth**, and potentially a triple crown, a few other numbers from his remarkable season—

He has a chance to put up the first 11-fWAR season in the American League since Carl Yastrzemski in 1967. He has a shot at 400 total bases, which would make him the first American Leaguer to do it since **Jim Rice** in 1978 — before Rice, you have to go back more than 50 years, to **Joe DiMaggio** in 1937.

Numbers are simply what we decide they should be. We decided that a .300 season is exponentially better than a .299 season, we decided that 3,000 hits is magical, we decided that 300 wins makes a pitcher immortal, I just decided to look back at all the players who got 400 total bases in the last 50 years.*

They are **Todd Helton (twice), **Sammy Sosa** (twice), **Barry Bonds**, **Larry Walker**, **Jim Rice** and, oddly, **Luis Gonzalez** in 2001.*

As of last Sunday, Judge leads the AL in home runs by 22 and in RBI by 15. After that 4-for-5 yesterday, Judge is also batting .374 in the second half and .491 in September. He is now just one point off the AL lead in batting average.

In the second half of 2022, Aaron Judge is batting .374/.508/.850 in a league hitting .244/.312/.397. His second-half 277 OPS+ is the seventh-best half in baseball history. The top of this list, the first 14 slots outside of Judge, are all held by **Ted Williams**, Babe Ruth, and **Barry Bonds**.

We've spent much of the second half mulling an NL Triple Crown, so we didn't see Judge's charge. He's made up almost 50 points on **Luis Arraez** in two months. He now has a very

realistic chance at a 60-homer Triple Crown, which would be unique. The record for homers in a Triple Crown year is 52, set by **Mickey Mantle** in 1956.

OPS+. It's adjusted for park and era, and compares a player's performance to the rest of the league that season, setting the league average as "100," which this year is basically what Josh Donaldson is doing.

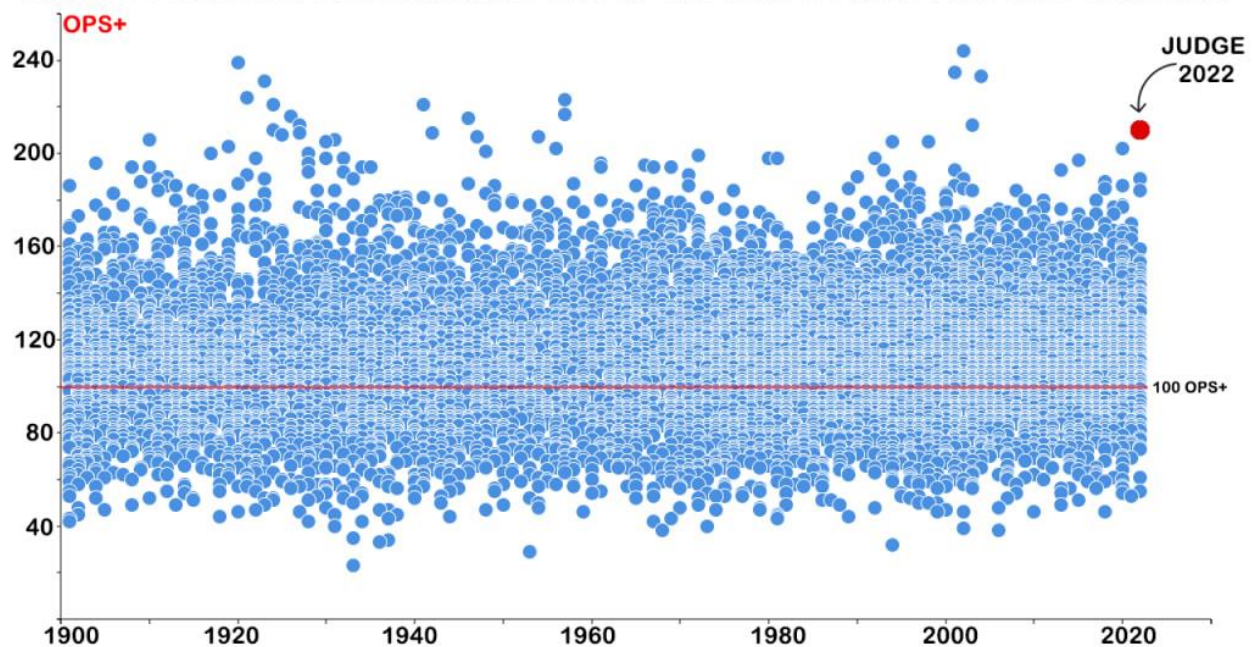
Judge's OPS+ is 213. It makes him more than twice as good as a league average 2022 batter. It is one of the 25 best seasons in Major League history; it's one of just 50 seasons all time to see a 200 OPS+ or better.

it's one of just 50 seasons all time to see a 200 OPS+ or better. (Which, again: *Twice as good as average.*) It's because of the homers, obviously, but it's more than that. Judge leads in OBP and walks and runs

Mike Trout has never surpassed 200 OPS+ in a season. **Albert Pujols** hasn't done this. Nor did **Willie Mays**. Neither did **Henry Aaron**, **Roberto Clemente**, nor **Ken Griffey Jr.**

graph by putting all 13,400 of those seasons together, and show you where Judge's 2022 stands out, and if this looks like a fuzzy mess of thousands of dots, that is half the point. Here's all of baseball history. And here's Aaron Judge.

AARON JUDGE REALLY IS HAVING ONE OF HISTORY'S FINEST HITTING SEASONS



look at the 22 seasons superior to Judge's on the OPS+ list. Realize there's a "yeah-but" attached to almost all of them, a reason to raise at least an eyebrow or two. That does sort of remind us that the history of baseball has rarely been smooth, easy, or uncomplicated. But it might also provide us a reason to hold Judge's great year in even higher regard, in that so many of history's other great seasons have had some controversy attached to them, and this one seems like it does not; if anything, offense is harder to come by this year. It's the lowest-slugging season since 2014.

Take the 22 better seasons, and consider what happened during each of them. It's enough to make the case that Judge might be having *the best offensive season in AL and NL history*. Let's break it down.

The pre-integration group

- **Thirteen** of the 22 came in pre-integrated times (through 1946). We know for a fact that players of the time were not facing all of the best talent in the sport, and while that's not specifically the fault of Babe Ruth, **Lou Gehrig**, **Rogers Hornsby**, or Ted Williams, if the players of the Negro Leagues and elsewhere hadn't been excluded from the bigs, then the overall skill level would have increased, making it likely these stars wouldn't have stood out from league average by *quite* as much – which is entirely what OPS+ is used for. (They'd still have been great, of course.)

- **Two** more – Mickey Mantle and Williams in 1957 – came in partially integrated times. At the time, Williams' Red Sox still hadn't integrated, and would not until 1959. In 1957, for example, Mantle hit .422/.589/.797 against a Cleveland pitching staff that – although they had done so previously – did not have any Black pitchers. Williams did even better, pounding them for nine homers and a wild .474/.600/1.000 line.

If we're just looking at seasons since 1961, when the expansion era began, when the American League finally reached California via the Angels, when all teams were integrated, then Judge's 213 OPS+ is tied for 7th-best. Let that sink in: It's the 7th-best hitting season of the last six-plus decades, without any caveats.

But of course, there *are* caveats. Take a walk through those seven equal-or-better seasons, which split nicely into two different groups.

The shortened season gang

- **1994: Jeff Bagwell 213 OPS+**
- **2020: Juan Soto 217 OPS+**

Throw in Frank Thomas' 212 OPS+ in 1994 as well here, if you like.

Judge has played in 142 games and taken 631 plate appearances, the latter being more than all but seven other players in the Majors. Availability is a bonus for counting stats, like homers or Wins Above Replacement, but it isn't really like that for a rate stat, like batting average or OPS+, where sometimes you're better riding that hot streak and then getting out before the downside can come. (Just look at light-hitting **José Iglesias** somehow managing to pull off a .373 average in the shortened 2020.)

That doesn't mean that Hall of Famer Bagwell and possible future Hall-of-Famer Soto weren't showing real talent in their greatest seasons, because obviously they're incredibly talented players, among the best of their generations. But it also isn't really a coincidence that their best OPS+ seasons came in years that weren't played to full-length 162 games, is it?

Judge has taken 152 more plate appearances than Bagwell and *435 more* than Soto, who played just 47 games in 2020, between a late start (due to the pandemic) and a short season (also due to the pandemic).

Think about it like this. For Bagwell, three times in his career, he posted an OPS of 1.030 or better in the first 110 games of the season. In 1999, he was then 53 points worse the rest of the year. In 1997, he was 13 points worse. In 1996, he was about the same. In 1994, well, we'll never know, though it's worth noting he had been hit by a pitch and broke a bone in his left hand for the second consecutive season two days before the strike began.

The "what do we do with the turn of the 21st century guys?" gang

- **1998: Mark McGwire 216 OPS+**
- **2001: Barry Bonds 259 OPS+**
- **2002: Barry Bonds 268 OPS+**
- **2003: Barry Bonds 231 OPS+**
- **2004: Barry Bonds 263 OPS+**

There's an elephant in the room here, and then some. Bonds is maybe the greatest hitter to ever live, but there has been widespread speculation that he used PEDs later in his career when he was setting home run records.

Whatever you think the true effects of the PED era were, whatever advantages Bonds may have enjoyed that others didn't, we know that he didn't exactly turn from a slap-hitting Minor Leaguer into a star. (McGwire, too; he didn't hit 49 homers as a rookie by accident.) But it's also not exactly curious that Bonds just dropped off the Hall of Fame ballot after 10 fruitless years, either, when otherwise he would have been a first-ballot slam dunk. The debate about what was legitimate, what was earned, and what his place in history really is will probably never end.

As Judge chases a possible triple crown—the last triple crown winner whose team won the World Series—**Frank Robinson** 1966 Orioles.

His 60th homer just happened to be the hit that gave him control of the American League Triple Crown.

That is not a sentence that has ever been typed before, because no 60-homer man has ever been in the race for one of those Triple Crowns.

Babe Ruth, 1927 — Finished in the top seven in all three Triple Crown categories, but led in only one (homers, obviously) — and finished 42 points out in the batting average race.

Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa, 2001 — Both wound up in the top eight in all three categories. But Bonds led the league in only homers, Sosa led in only RBIs, and neither was within 22 points of the batting champ, **Larry Walker**, who hit .350.

And that's about it! Nobody else even made the top 10 in all three departments. And the Triple Crown winner who hit the most homers in a season — **Jimmie Foxx**, in 1932 — hit his 58th in his final at-bat of the year. So he never had a shot at the 60-Homer Triple Crown Club. But Judge headed into Thursday's games *leading* in all three divisions of that club room.

Most runs, AL

Aaron Judge — 123

Jose Altuve — 92

Marcus Semien — 92

Look, I know it's helpful that Judge has driven in himself 60 times. Nevertheless, you should stare long and hard at that leaderboard — because you know how many players have led the NL or AL in runs scored *by 30* (or more) in the history of baseball? A lot fewer than have hit 60 or won a Triple Crown!

Rickey Henderson, 1985 (by 30)

Babe Ruth, 1921 (by 45)

Ross Barnes*, 1876 (by 54)

(-born 11 years before the Civil War)*

So think about Judge doing something that has been done once in the last 100 years — and this is probably the first you've even heard about it. Apparently, this guy has some other stuff going on!

IT'S A TOTAL ECLIPSE!

Or what about total bases — a stat that counts up how many bases Judge has stomped on via all of his hits this year. He's up to 376 — which puts him within range of becoming only the seventh player in AL history to join the 400 Total Bases Club. And just so you know, that 400

total bases threshold has been cleared exactly once in the AL in the last 85 years — by **Jim Rice** in 1978.

But ... that's not even the Weird and Wild part.

Judge leads the league in this category *by 85*. And you don't see that often.

Ruth led his league by 80-plus twice (in 1921 and 1924). So did **Stan Musial** (1946 and '48). But just three other players have ever done that: **Rogers Hornsby** (1922), **Tommy Holmes** (1945) and Rice (1978).

Or maybe this would put it in better perspective: In Judge's lifetime (1992-2022), no player has even come within 30 of this! Or how about this: Did you know Ruth didn't even lead his league in total bases the year he hit 60? Neither did Bonds in 2001 nor **Mark McGwire** in 1998. But Judge leads the AL at the moment *by 85*. Wow.

YOU CALL THIS A COMPETITION?

But it isn't just the homers. It isn't just the runs scored. It isn't just the annihilation of the field in total bases. It's how Judge has separated himself from the rest of the hitters on this planet — in a way we haven't seen since the heydays of **Ted Williams** and the Babe. Going into Thursday's games ...

- He led the AL in homers — by 23!
- He led the AL in RBIs — by 13!
- He led the AL in walks — by 11!
- He led the AL in extra-base hits — by 11!
- He led the AL in OPS — by 91 points!
- He led the AL in most times on base — by 22!
- He led in all three Triple Crown categories — and all three slash line triple crown categories (OBP/SLUG/OPS).

Seriously? Who does that?

Not even the Babe. He came close in a bunch of seasons — 1920, '21, '23, '24, '26, '27 and '28. And his 1921 season was ridiculous, blowing away the rest of the league in every one of these departments except batting average, because he made the mistake of "only" hitting .378 in a year when **Harry Heilmann** batted .394 and **Ty Cobb** hit .389.

But even Babe Freaking Ruth never had a season when he ranked first in every one of these. Only one man in AL/NL history has done that — Ted Williams ... *twice* ... in 1942 and 1947. Check out those two league leaderboards (1942 AL batting leaders, 1947 AL batting leaders) sometime. Williams was in a universe of his own in those years, and that's saying something, when you consider all the other Hall of Famers who played alongside him.

Since Ted, only **Carl Yastrzemski** has had a season (1967) in which he led the league in almost everything on that Judge list above. But Yaz missed leading the league in walks — *by 40*. So you get what we're driving at, right?

What Judge is doing is a thing we pretty much have seen no humans do in our lifetimes. But we can also measure that in other ways ...

A 214 OPS+? How many men in AL/NL history have had an Adjusted OPS that above and beyond league average? Just two who weren't named Ruth or Bonds: **Lou Gehrig** (220, in 1927) and McGwire (216, in 1998).

A 211 wRC+? Filter out Ruth and Bonds, and you'll find only three other men who were run creators at Judge's astronomical level: Williams (1941-46-57), Hornsby (1924) and **Mickey Mantle** (1957).

A .705 slugging percentage? Want me to toss out a few active players who have never slugged .700 (or better) in any *month*? OK, sure. **Pete Alonso ... José Abreu ... Salvador Perez ... Michael Brantley**. ... There are literally hundreds of them. And Judge is slugging .705 *for the season*. How even?

So 60 home runs? Whew. It's the stuff goosebumps are made of. But being this much better at hitting a baseball than the best hitters on Earth *in your time*? That's what legendary seasons are truly made of.

Prior to this season, no player had finished a calendar day with 20 home runs more than any other player since the final day of the 1928 season, when **Babe Ruth** led **Jim Bottomley** and **Hack Wilson** by 23

BILL LEE COLLAPSED ON THE BASEBALL DIAMOND. IT DIDN'T SLOW HIM DOWN

Stan Grossfeld, Boston Globe Staff,

MANCHESTER, N.H. — When the Chicken Man spies the Spaceman, he acts as if he has just seen a ghost.

“Oh my God, you’re alive!” shouts Hall of Famer **Wade Boggs** as he embraces Lee at the 2022 Granite State Baseball Dinner Experience. Hugs are shared with former Red Sox teammates **Rico Petrocelli, Bob Stanley, and Dick Drago**.

On Aug. 19, Lee, the 75-year-old Red Sox Hall of Famer, was in the bullpen warming up for the Savannah Bananas when he collapsed and reportedly wasn’t breathing. He was paddled twice and revived, and walked to the ambulance. Later he underwent a surgical procedure at a local hospital and received a pacemaker.

Channeling **Lou Gehrig**, Lee says he is “the luckiest man on the face of the earth” for the timing of his emergency.

“I went down on First Responders Night. There were hundreds of them there. They beat the [expletive] out of me,” he says with a laugh.

Lee has no qualms about dying while playing the game he loves.

“I always thought I’d die on the field, but not in the [expletive] bullpen,” he says.

This past season he pitched effectively for the Bananas, a professional traveling baseball squad that is part circus, part Globetrotters, but never boring.

Here at Delta Dental Stadium, home of the New Hampshire Fisher Cats, fans gave Lee a rousing ovation when he was introduced from behind some makeshift “Field of Dreams” cornstalks.

Lee high-kicked his sandals in the air, then caught them while running toward the infield. He later pitched batting practice, signed dozens of autographs, and felt the love of Red Sox Nation. It is a homecoming of sorts for Lee, who pitched a game in Manchester the day before he was called up to the Red Sox in 1969.

Forty years after his turbulent big league career ended, the Peter Pan of Baseball has never stopped competing. In 14 seasons with Boston and Montreal, Lee went 119-90 in a controversial career that included three consecutive 17-win seasons for the Red Sox (1973-75) and an All-Star selection in 1973.

At Grayson Stadium, the ancient Savannah park where the Babe, the Mick, and Henry Aaron all played, the wooden dugouts still smell of sun-baked chewing tobacco. Lee went to warm up in the fourth inning to prepare for tossing the fifth against the Party Animals. They’re the Washington Generals-type foil to the Bananas, except they try to win.

“I warm up too fast, and I am hyperventilating,” recalls Lee. “I throw a really hard fastball. Take a breath, come back, and throw a changeup. It was perfect and I was really happy. Then boom, the lights went off.”

Mat Wolfe, a pitcher, EMT, and Oklahoma City firefighter, was his batterymate in the bullpen. He says he tossed the ball back to Lee.

"He literally went down, just out of nowhere; right when he caught it, he went straight backward," Wolfe told the Savannah Morning News.

"I never remembered landing," says Lee. "Never felt a thing."

Wolfe told the Morning News that initially Lee was not breathing or responsive. As emergency crews attended to Lee, both teams huddled in the outfield and prayed. Lee was given CPR and reportedly two shocks from a defibrillator.

"Next thing I know, the lights are coming back on," Lee says. "I'm waking up, I'm breathing. I take a deep breath. And [the paramedics] go, 'Bill?' Yeah. 'What day is it?' I tell them what day it is. I give them my full name. They go through a bunch of questions. They said, 'You sound OK.' "

"I said, 'I'm OK.' "

"You want to stand up?"

"Certainly."

"They helped me up. I stand up. I'm not dizzy or anything. And I'm saying, 'OK. I'm fine.' "

Lee started talking about his changeup as if nothing happened. He still wanted to pitch.

"They go, no, you're going to the hospital," says Lee. "I go, 'Really?'"

"You were dead. We paddled you." Twice.

"The paramedics, you know where they were from?" Lee says with a laugh. "Thunderbolt."

Thunderbolt, Ga. Five miles away.

Some fans initially thought this was just another Bananas skit. Jonathan Papelbon came in and pitched in a kilt this summer, and former Red Sox players Jake Peavy, Josh Reddick, and Jonny Gomes have also made guest appearances.

Eventually, Lee got up and walked to the ambulance with rescue workers on each side of him for support. He waved to the crowd, which gave him a standing ovation.

The cardiologist at Memorial Health University Medical Center wanted to put a pacemaker on his left side. Lee refused.

“That’s the side I shoot my rifle and pitch from,” he says.

The device was successfully implanted on his right.

“Now I’ve got more wires in me than an Uber-driven Tesla,” he says, adding that the pacemaker has left him energized. “But I wish it would quit playing the ‘Adagio for Strings’ by Samuel Barber. I wonder if it will be able to jump start my car in the winter.”

He was still wearing his baseball pants in the hospital the next day. At one point, he got out of bed against his doctors’ orders.

“You can’t do that,” said the nurse, “You can’t get out of your room.” And I go, you want to dance? Yeah, and that’s what I did. It was 4 in the morning.”

A week later he was back at Grayson Stadium throwing out the first pitch.

“He’s the eighth wonder of the world,” says Jesse Cole, the Savannah Bananas owner.

In 10 appearances, Lee had the second-best ERA on the team. On two occasions, he chugged a beer in the stands, took the mound, and got quick outs.

“He can compete as good as anyone I’ve ever seen,” says Cole. “He throws strikes. He only went to a three-ball count once all season.”

A secret to his longevity

Back in Manchester, Lee decides he needs coffee, and drives to Blake’s Creamery, where he orders that and two scoops of chocolate ice cream with hot fudge. He does a little stretching in the restaurant, and the waitresses and customers fawn over him.

Lee says reports of his demise were greatly exaggerated, and that he did not suffer a heart attack.

“I have really shallow breathing. My pulse is 62 on the button,” he says. “My blood pressure is 113 over 71. My heart is fine. What happens is I have a lower bundle branch block in my left ventricle. It’s an electrical beat malfunction. A little beat. Nothing big.”

He recalls a game in Fort Myers five years ago where he passed out while running to first base.

“When I came to, the umpire was standing over me and he goes, ‘Bill, what happened? You pull a muscle?’ I went, ‘No, I got dizzy,’ and the umpire goes, ‘How would you know? You’re always dizzy.’ This was very similar.”

Initially his young teammates questioned whether it was safe for a 75-year-old man to play with them. They held a meeting last February right after Lee's successful tryout.

"The young kids, they go, what happens if he dies?" Lee says with a laugh. "I said, 'Well, if I do, I would suggest just put a little small tarp on me, behind the mound, continue the ball game, and then deal with me after the game is over.' "

The Craftsbury, Vt., resident says he's going to resume pitching competitively next month in Arizona and rejoin the Bananas next season. He shares his secret to his longevity.

"I have an ace in the hole. It's 6 a.m. in the morning. I do 20 minutes of yoga and stretching with a ballerina from Edmonton, Alberta, named Miranda Esmonde-White," the host of a long-running PBS show, "Classical Stretch."

Lee also volunteered to pitch for the Red Sox against the Yankees last week. He's serious.

"I got a great change up. I could beat the Yankees," he says. "I got a good knuckleball, too. I haven't even broken that out yet. I'm waiting for when I get old."

What did he learn from his big scare?

"Drink more fluids," he says.

The Spaceman leaves his ice water untouched and heads back to the ballpark. Out on the field, Lee lugs the pitching screens himself, to the dismay of the announcer.

He does a theatrical high kick before tossing batting practice for New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu, who marvels at his breaking ball. Every pitch is a strike.

After the exhibition, Boggs shakes his head in amazement at the Spaceman.

"Oh, my God. He's an icon for baseball," Boggs says. "He's good for baseball, he really is. He said, 'In order for me to get out of this game, you're going to have to rip the shirt off of my back.' And that's his philosophy. God bless him."

Lee, ever the showman, wants to leave 'em laughing.

"Dying is easy," he says. "Comedy is tough."





MLB'S NEW RULES: HOW THE PITCH CLOCK, SHIFT BAN AND BIGGER BASES WILL—AND WON'T—CHANGE THE GAME

Jayson Stark (and another reason you should subscribe to The Athletic)

There's a thing I've noticed about sports: When you change the rules, stuff happens.

So here we are, a week or so after baseball announced its three most tide-shifting rule changes in almost half a century — pitch clock, shift limits and bases the size of the tires on your Honda. And now here's the safest prediction I've ever made:

Stuff ... will ... happen.

But what stuff? And how will — and won't — it change the game? Here are 10 Things to Watch When the Rules Change.

1. The 2 1/2-hour game is back

Baseball has just fired its most accurate shot — aka., the 15-second pitch clock — in the War on Dead Time. And before it even lands, you should know this: That war is won.

“This thing is going to knock at least 20 minutes, I believe, off the time of a game in the big leagues.” — **Morgan Ensberg**, former Astros third baseman, who now manages the Rays’ Double-A team, the Montgomery Biscuits

Guess what? There is zero reason to think he’s wrong. The average time of a minor-league game is down 26 minutes this year, compared with the olden days of the pre-pitch-clock era (by which we mean last year).

2021 — 3:04 (hours, minutes)

2022 — 2:38

Or you could just compare a typical day of baseball in Triple A (home to a 14-second pitch clock) versus the big leagues. This was from last Wednesday.

	<u>Triple A</u>	<u>MLB</u>
9 inning games	13	14
Average time	2:44	3:00
Games over 3 hours	2	7
Games under 2:40	7	1

Yes, I’m aware the commercials mean the between-inning breaks aren’t the same in both leagues. Yes, next year’s big-league clock will be a second longer than this year’s Triple-A clock. Still ...

- An 8-7 big-league game in Texas, featuring 20 hits, took 3 hours, 40 minutes.
- A 12-4 minor-league game in Nashville, featuring 24 hits, took 2 hours, 38 minutes.

I could give you 500 examples like this, but you get the idea. Watch any minor-league game on MiLB.com. You can’t miss the difference. The clock, Ensberg said, is “absolutely incredible. It’s given more time to the game versus just the fluff in between pitches. ... What it does, it takes all the fluff out.”

Any fluff fans out there? Thought so! Now let's move on.

2. The balk record is in major jeopardy

On the other hand ... there are going to be issues!

There *will* be wrinkles to the pitch clock that will take some getting used to. It's not only 15 seconds between pitches with nobody on and 20 seconds with men on base. But also ...

The hitter has to be in the box, eyes locked on the pitcher, with eight seconds left on the timer (or the umpire can call a strike). ... The pitcher needs to start his delivery before the clock hits zero (or the umpire can call a ball). ... The hitter can step out only once per plate appearance (or it's a strike). ... The pitcher can step off/throw to a base only twice per plate appearance (or the third time is a balk, if he doesn't throw to a base and the runner is out).

So what can possibly go wrong? Ummm, paging Angel Hernandez.

Everyone I've talked with predicts a turbulent April as all parties — pitchers, hitters and umpires — adjust. Are you ready for this fun moment:

Bases loaded ... **Shohei Ohtani** at the plate ... two outs and a 3-2 count ... Ohtani isn't quite set and focused on the pitcher as the timer count hits "7" ... and some letter-of-the-law umpire screams: *"Timer violation ... strike three ... you're out!"*

Hoo boy.

"I think MLB has been very upfront that they don't want this rule used in that way. They don't want this rule deciding key moments of a baseball game." — a team executive on that scenario.

"I think it's important for umpires to understand the spirit of the law versus the letter of the law. And the umpires in the (Double-A) Southern League have done a really good job of understanding that meaning. They're looking at the clock while looking at the pitcher, and they're making an assessment whether or not to stop the game for a second and assess a ball. And if it's at zero or minus-one, they're letting it go. And they should, because ... stopping (the game to make a call) is going to go against the entire spirit of the rule." — Ensberg

Agreed. But be ready. Even if everybody gets that spirit-of-the-rule memo, this will get messy. Early in the season, before everyone settles in, there are going to be shocking calls never witnessed in baseball history. There are going to be ejections. There are going to be words uttered that you won't hear on Nickelodeon. There are going to be lots of sensational sports-talk-radio moments. And also ... there are going to be balks.

DOUBLE-A BALK RATE

2022 — One balk every 10.7 games

2021 — One balk every 20.5 games

Then again, in other news ...

3. Terrance Gore has never been more employable

Will the stolen base actually be cool again? Before you answer that, check out what's happened this year in the minor leagues.

Pickoff/stepoff limits and larger bases (18 inches-by-18 inches square, up from 15-by-15) — which shrink the distance between bases by 4 1/2 inches — have been in effect all season. And they've turned these games into the Penn Relays.

STOLEN BASE ATTEMPTS PER GAME

Minor leagues — 2.83

Major leagues — 1.36

Now here's what that means: If big-league players suddenly started running at the same rate as minor-league players have this year, it would lead to a stolen-base attempt rate we haven't seen in the major leagues *in more than 100 years*. So is that going to happen?

Quick answer: Of course not. As one exec I surveyed put it, "the cost of an out in the big leagues is still going to be valued."

But also remember these rules aren't just there to subtly encourage base stealing. They're there because this sport's brightest minds see base stealing as one of the centerpieces of the next wave of baseball's entertainment strategy. So even if these rules don't roll back the clock to, say, 1917, here's what MLB execs do expect:

34 steals will never lead the league again! I'm guessing you could win this bar bet with your buddies: Who leads the big leagues in stolen bases? It's Marlins track star **Jon Berti** (who else?) — with 34. Meanwhile, in the minor leagues, *79 players* have stolen 34 or more, because thanks to these rules, stolen-base success rates have skyrocketed (to 77 percent).

MLB teams tend to run these days when they calculate at least a 75 percent probability of making it. If that's the new probability for, basically, *everybody*, look out.

But it might take 70! Rickey Henderson's 130 steals look as unreachable as ever, but would anyone find it shocking to see somebody swipe 70 (for the first time in 14 years) next season? Again, don't forget, these rules are designed to make that eminently possible. As one exec put it, "I don't think you'll see any records, but if someone steals 70 instead of 35, that's a dramatic change."

Some team might steal 250! In 1976, **Bert Campaneris** and those fast-stepping Oakland A's stole an incredible 341 bases. We won't see that again. But as recently as 1992, **Pat Listach's** Milwaukee Brewers stole 256. Is that out of the question? Why would it be?

The Rangers, for example, have *eight* minor leaguers with at least 32 steals this year. So why *wouldn't* a team or two — or eight — decide the best way to find an edge and wreak havoc next season is to start running at rates no current big leaguers have ever had to find a defense for?

Terrance Gore forever! One more question: Shouldn't teams start saving the last spot on their roster for the fastest dude they can find — since these rules will make it almost impossible to throw him out?

"If we're going to be mandated to have 13 position players, that 13th guy could be a **Terrance Gore**," one club exec said. "Then every time one of your slow guys gets on base after the seventh inning, you send in Terrance Gore to run. I think that makes a lot of sense."

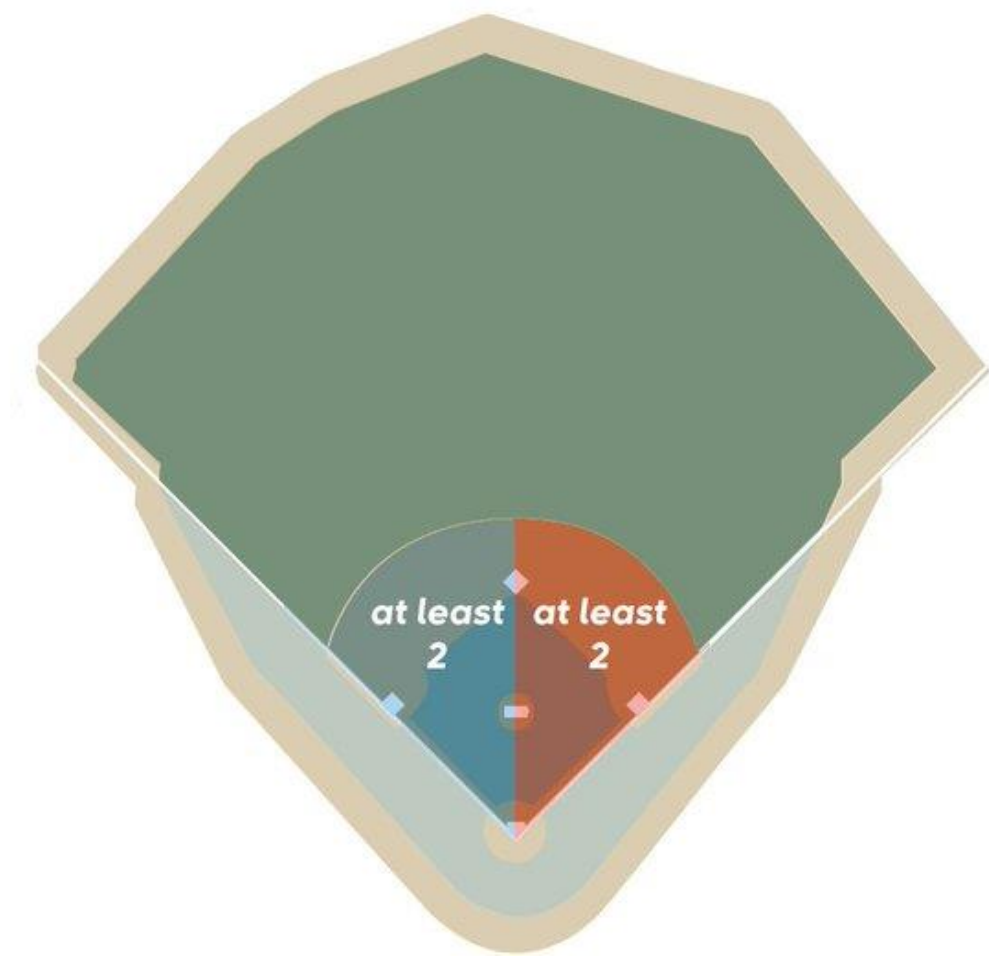
It's also a reminder that these rules will affect how front offices construct rosters. More on that shortly. But first ...

4. Coming to a park near you: the two-man outfield?

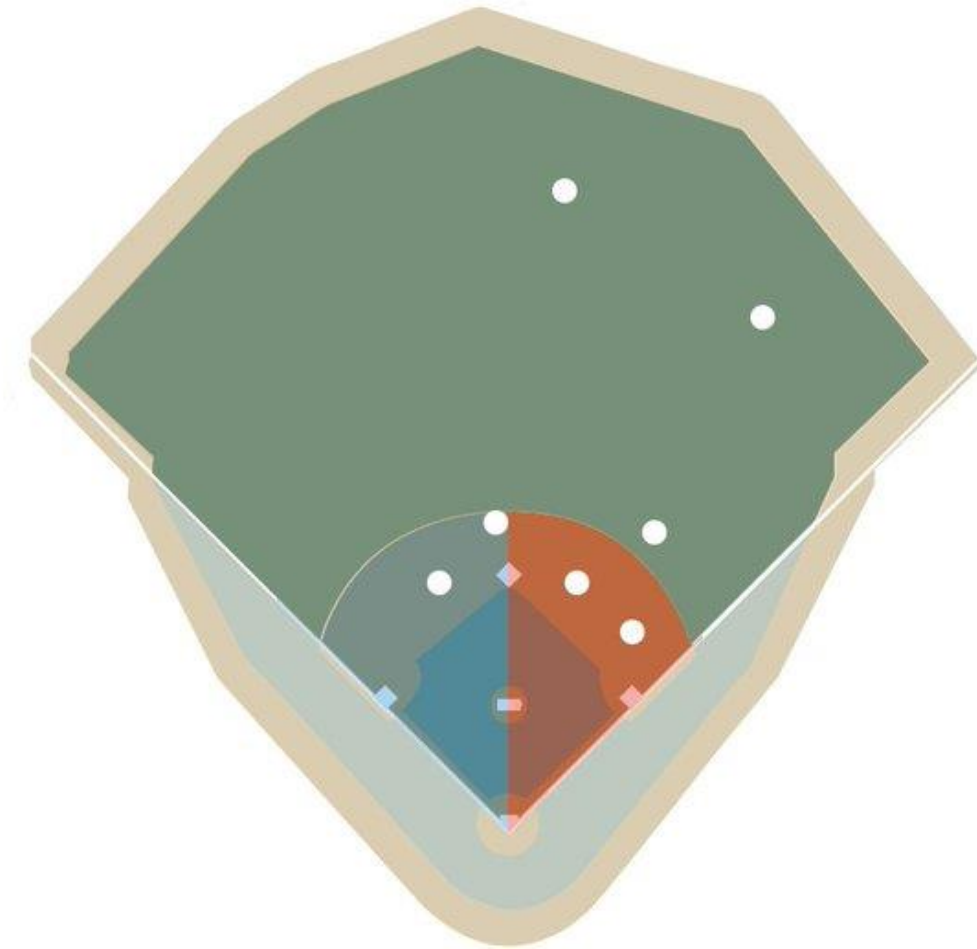
One theme that has come through loud and clear in the last week: Front offices are already think-tanking ways to turn these new rules upside-down and devise innovative strategies to use them to max advantage.

The idea I've heard most so far? The four-man outfield may be going away — but say hello to the "two-man" outfield.

All right, so technically, it's not really a two-man outfield. It's just an outfield with two defenders in conventional outfield locations — and a third outfielder lurking in, say, short right field, where those shifting infielders used to hang out against pull-heavy left-handed hitters. Here's how MLB.com's Mike Petriello diagrammed that one.



Leaving this option



But this idea isn't just popping up on Twitter. It's sweeping through front offices and coaching staffs. Not everybody is convinced it will be widespread — or even work effectively enough to become popular. But if 18 teams start using it regularly, it definitely will be interesting to see how — or if — MLB reacts.

“MLB wants more triples, right? So in theory, if you're hitting against a two-man outfield, you're going to find some triples in there just by accident. So they may be OK with two-man outfields.” — one club exec

“You know what'll happen if we see a lot of those two-man outfields, right? Then they'll just change that (rule) the following year.” — another club exec

Are there really enough **Joey Gallos** out there who hit so few balls the other way, even in the air, that teams would go to that extreme? Seems doubtful. But you know what isn't doubtful? That we're about to find out.

As MLB consultant Theo Epstein said at the press conference announcing these rules, “The smartest organizations are already thinking about how to react” — to every one of these changes. No telling where that will lead. But in the meantime ...

5. Left-handed hitters shouldn't party too soon

That sound you heard, off in the distance, after that press conference, was the left-handed hitters of Planet Earth celebrating. And why would they be celebrating? Pulled groundballs might actually be hits again!

Avg. on pulled groundballs, LH hitters

Year	Average	LH shifts
2022	.146	56%
2019	.156	42%
2017	.189	22%

**percentage of plate appearances versus shifts*

(Source: Statcast)

What does that chart show us? In the 15 seasons Statcast has been tracking batted balls, it has never been harder for a left-handed hitter to sneak a groundball through the pull side than it is right now. At the same time, the shift rate on those hitters has mushroomed. So is there any question about whether shifts work? C'mon. They totally work.

The data even shows they work no matter how hard these guys mash the ball. Check out these numbers, also from Statcast, on the impact of the shift on batting average on the hardest-hit groundballs (for all hitters).

	100+	110+
Versus the shift	.362	.442
No shift	.445	.554

So shifts are depressing averages, even on rockets, by about 100 points. I think that explains why Phillies hitting coach **Kevin Long** confidently told *The Athletic* this the other day:

*“There are going to be guys where their average skyrockets. I think **Kyle Schwarber** is going to be one of the biggest. **Anthony Rizzo** is going to be another one. **Brian McCann**, when he played, would have been a huge one, because those guys don’t run.”*

So there is going to be a subset of left-handed hitters whose average will climb because the shift disappears — possibly as much as 40 points in some cases, Long predicted. I don’t know why there’s anything wrong with that. Where’s the rule that says the sport is more entertaining when **Max Muncy** hits .199? I can’t find that.

So which left-handed hitters might fit into this subset? Sports Info Solutions just looked into that question. **Corey Seager** ranked No. 1. And Schwarber was way up there on the list.

But before that crowd starts popping too many Moët & Chandon corks, I need to break some news to these guys: The shift ban isn’t going to help as much as they’re dreaming it will.

I wrote about this earlier this year. As long as the shortstop can still play an inch to the other side of second base, and the precision of modern data places second basemen where teams know these hitters pull the ball most often, most groundballs will still be outs.

“The shortstop is still directly up the middle, and they’re still taking hits away from left-handers. And on the other side, the second basemen are taking hits away from right-handed hitters. ... So the biggest impact is that you don’t see the second baseman in right field.” — Ensberg

Bingo. I asked Sports Info Solutions to dig into the effects of the minor-league shift ban by examining what happened in Double A, where the data is most extensive. As predicted by Ensberg, keeping two infielders on each side of the bag has had minimal impact. But keeping infielders out of the outfield? Different story.

PCT. OF OUTS ON PULLED GROUND BALLS/BUNTS BY LHH

2019 (last season before shift rules) — 69.3 percent

2022 (first full season of shift rules) — 64.4 percent

PCT. OF OUTS ON PULLED LINE DRIVES

2019 — 12.3 percent

2022 — 6.8 percent

(Source: Sports Info Solutions)

In other words, when this rule was implemented, in Double A, it turned out to help just one more groundball out of 20 get through the right side. For a guy like Seager, who puts the ball on the ground an average of only 1.3 times per game, that doesn’t even work out to two extra ground-ball hits a month.

But let's turn to the impact on pulled line drives. In the big leagues, they're still being gobbled up regularly by that extra infielder in the outfield. But when that sneaky hit-burgling trick was outlawed in Double A, the rate of hits on those line drives nearly doubled!

In terms of total extra hits, we're still talking about very few for any individual hitter when spread out over a whole season. Still, it's something.

"I think we will all agree hitters should be rewarded for line drives. So if you're hitting a really hard line drive to the pull side, you should probably be rewarded for that. And if this new rule helps that, I think that's a good thing." — one team exec

So if the line-drive single is back, hey, cool. But what about the beloved single up the middle? Well, I never enjoy being the bearer of unhappy news, but ...

6. Still M.I.A.: The good old single up the middle

In the piece I wrote about the shift earlier this year, there was a **Freddie Freeman** quote that's still stuck in my brain:

"That rover in right field ... it's very rare that I hit one into that shift. It's just the one up the middle is the one that gets me. I'm like: You've been taught your whole life to hit a line drive up the middle — and now you're out. ... So maybe if they eliminate that, and they keep the shortstop on the left side of the bag, I might get some more hits."

Freddie, I hate to hit you with this. But this particular shift limit isn't going to change your life much. Here's the Double-A data, courtesy of Sports Info Solutions.

PCT. OF OUTS ON GROUNDBALLS/BUNTS UP THE MIDDLE BY LHH

2019 — 66.1 percent

2022 — 64.2 percent

So basically, about one of every 50 groundballs makes it into center field now that didn't before the shift was "banned." Commissioner Rob Manfred often talks about his passion to "restore" the single up the middle. Oops. This sure isn't going to do it.

"You do still see some balls get up the middle occasionally, just due to positioning. But that's usually more on the right-handed pull hitter, versus the left-handed pull hitter." — Ensberg

So as we were saying — sorry Freddie! And in a related development ...

7. Launch angle is still a thing

At the press conference announcing these shift-rule changes, MLB's **Raul Ibañez**, former left-handed masher of yesteryear, mentioned something we all need to stay dialed in on. The big hope here, he said, is that eliminating the defensive traffic jam on one side of the infield will change more than just batting averages.

Suppose groundballs are hits again, he said. ... Which means singles become more attainable again. ... Which means hitters might just realize they no longer need to design a swing with a sole goal to lift the ball over all of those infielders.

If all of that happens, Ibañez hypothesized, maybe that's enough incentive for hitters to recalibrate those swings. Then, maybe launch angle won't be quite as hot a ticket anymore, he said, hopefully. Which could bring back the old line-drive stroke that used to be the swing of every hitter's dreams.

Hey, what a beautiful thought. I hope it turns out that way. It's just hard to look at *this* shift rule — which mostly benefits pull-happy, left-handed, turn-and-burn hitters — and expect any of that to happen.

"Do you know how much these guys are creatures of habit? I mean, Schwarber's not changing anything. He's going to get more hits because the field's opened up. ... But I don't think that has anything to do with it. Are our hitters going to change? No, they're going to stay the same. ... Like I've always said, home run hitters are home run hitters." — Long

So what would have to happen to make that change? Maybe the big-league results won't match the minor-league data we just laid out. Or maybe there will be more rules coming that alter the hitting climate more than these rules do. But is Gallo going to look at *this* set of rules and decide it's time to try to win a batting title? Not happening.

But you know who is going to have to make some changes? I'll tell you who ...

8. Relievers are in for a shock

The one-inning, let-it-fly relief pitcher is one of the great gigs in the history of baseball. But all of a sudden, trouble is ahead. And you spell that trouble: C-L-O-C-K.

What's coming next year? A 15-second pitch clock with nobody on base. And how will that affect the boys in the bullpen? Thanks for asking. The Statcast data spells out exactly how.

According to Statcast, among pitchers who have thrown at least 100 pitches in the big leagues this season, there are 95 whose "tempo" (average time between pitches) would be considered to be slower than that 15-second clock would allow. And of those 95, 89 are relievers.

So their first challenge is they're going to have to pick up that glacial pace. But that's not these relievers' only challenge.

The biggest question: If they no longer can take all the time they need in between pitches, to recover from that 101 mph smokeball they just fired, will they be able to throw the next pitch at 101 — and the one after that and the one after that?

MLB's original hope was no. But the data doesn't support that. Here was Ensberg's reply when I asked if his relievers had seen their velocity drop:

"No. Absolutely not. There was no decline in any sort of performance. And arguably, the performance improved because of that tempo, because of that rhythm."

That seems surprising. But it has turned out to be true, across the minor leagues. We know that thanks to Baseball America, which recently obtained velocity readings across minor-league baseball. Those readings showed zero drop in velo — literally.

AVERAGE FOUR-SEAM FASTBALL VELOCITY, MINOR LEAGUES

2021 — 92.3 mph

2022 — 92.3 mph

So for all those bullpen heat-wavers, it turns out this clock doesn't pose a velocity challenge, Ensberg said. It poses a conditioning challenge:

"This will change the way (relievers) train, because they're going to be throwing pitches quicker. So they're going to want to have a little bit more endurance than usual. Nothing crazy, but they're going to be throwing more pitches and doing more action, in a quicker amount of time. Their bodies will adjust. But early on, they're going to want to have some more stamina."

In fact, big-league execs I surveyed said they're more concerned about whether their *starting pitchers* can sustain velocity deep into games than they are about their short relievers. So can anyone really be sure how this clock will affect big-league pitchers — especially veterans who have never experienced a clock in the minors? No, we can't answer those questions until we see what happens next year.

But here's one thing you *can* be sure of ...

9. Wave goodbye to Mike Moustakas at second base

It's easy to look at these rules and start digging into how they'll affect games on the field. But if you only hone in on that part, you'll be missing one of the biggest impacts of all:

This has a chance to dramatically change how teams are built.

In what ways, you ask? Here are two:

It's a great time to be an athletic middle infielder. Let's begin with another Epstein observation from the press conference: What fans want, he said, is having games decided "by diving plays" — not "by whose front office devised the best algorithm" to position all their shifting infielders.

So on that note, let's talk about **Mike Moustakas**. Nothing personal. He just came up over and over as the poster boy for second basemen you'll never see again in baseball.

"When you're putting a roster together now, this is going to impact how you view defense. I'll use Mike Moustakas as an example. He's played a lot of second base, but he's not a second baseman, He doesn't have the foot speed to play second base. But in a shift, he could do it." — one club exec

Well, not anymore. Teams are now going to rethink which positions they can sacrifice defense for offense. And in a world without shifts, second base won't be one of those positions. I'd love to be an agent for an athletic free-agent middle infielder this winter. That's going to go well.

"When you put together your team now, you may have three positions that are all about defense only — second base, shortstop and center field." — the same exec

It's time to collect left-handed pull hitters. You know what has changed since these new rules were announced? How front offices watch games every night. They now amuse themselves by tracking all the outs that would be hits with no shift. And all of a sudden, they have a newfound appreciation for left-handed mashers.

An executive of one team told me about a left-handed hitting player in his system who might not still be on the 40-man roster — but was kept around because the new shift rule would change his value. Another exec brought up **Matt Carpenter**, a perfect example of a left-handed pull hitter whose career was almost ended by the shift and now will be looked at in a whole new light.

"I think there are guys who are going to add 15 to 20 points to their average because of this. Matt Carpenter is one. Anthony Rizzo is another. Those are guys whose average has just been brutalized by the shift. But now I can see guys like that having much greater value, because they do hit the ball the other way in the air. They just hit most of their groundballs to the right side. And the shift has turned them all into outs." — one longtime exec

So who knows — in future years, players like that could add even more value. And why would that be? Because ...

10. The shift rules might keep shifting

Remember the early days of replay in baseball? MLB's replay point guard, the Braves' John Schuerholz, talked often then about how baseball should and shouldn't implement major rule changes. You should keep that in mind at times like this.

What *not* to do: Fire up your new rule, assume you nailed it, then forget about it and move on to something else.

What *to* do: Implement your rule. Watch carefully. Then tweak it over the next few years until you get it right.

I still hear people in baseball quote that philosophy all the time. So that tells me something: Why would we think the same thing can't happen again? Why would we think these will be the last rules MLB will ever install to neutralize the shift? Here are two I suspect we could see someday:

Into the deep: So now there's a rule designed to add hits and action by telling infielders where they can and can't stand. Why wouldn't the next shoe drop? Why not a future rule that tells *outfielders* where they can and can't stand?

Do you recall that two-man outfield experiment we talked about earlier? Suppose that works. Suppose it turns into a regular thing. Why wouldn't baseball react with a rule that shuts that trick down? Could happen.

Also remember that MLB's fan polling shows that the customers love doubles and triples, which have dropped to levels not seen in 50 years. Why wouldn't baseball consider a rule requiring outfielders to play shallow again, so all those gappers would stop landing in outfielders' mitts? MLB has tried that out, in extended spring training. So anything is possible.

Pie, anyone? Manfred wants to bring back the single up the middle, huh? That can be arranged. Remember, baseball started experimenting with a rule to do exactly that in the minor leagues this year.

It's the Pie Slice Rule — a big, wedge-shaped diagonal line drawn in the infield dirt, which forces the second baseman and shortstop to leave the middle of the field open. They've tried it, and it works. And back in the minor-league test lab, that one has a lot of fans.

"They need to add that rule, because that's the most important one." — Ensberg

Of course, it was complicated enough to get *these* rules written and implemented. The next wave figures to be just as complicated. Maybe more.

But Manfred made it clear at that press conference. The competition committee that drew up these rules isn't closing up shop. It's open for business indefinitely, he said — for “an ongoing review process of the way we're playing.”

So change is coming — after which, well, more change is coming. And you know what that means.

Stuff ... will ... happen.

THE DODGERS' MASTERMIND AND HIS LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH OCTOBER

Andrew Friedman has built a machine that destroys every regular season—and have 100 wins already this year. Playoff results have been less consistent.

By Tim Brown, WSJ

LOS ANGELES—Andrew Friedman has become one of the locals in the city where he built baseball's most fearsome machine. He's raising his children next to them, inching along the freeway beside them, rationing water and paying \$7 for a gallon of gas.

And then it's that time of year again. Almost October. And it's time for the Los Angeles Dodgers president of baseball operations to ponder one more bit of L.A. stuff alongside his neighbors: Why the postseason Dodgers aren't as dominant as the regular-season Dodgers.

“I have a love-hate relationship,” Friedman says, “with October baseball.”

April to September baseball has been very kind to him. The Dodgers are 733-443 in nearly eight full regular seasons with Friedman as their president, since the start of the 2015 season. That's 33 more wins than the Houston Astros, second in Major League Baseball in that time, 56 more than the New York Yankees and 80 more than the St. Louis Cardinals. They won their 100th game of 2022 on Saturday.

For those who wondered how the lucid intellect and desperate creativity required in Tampa, where he helped turn the prostrate Devil Rays into the robust Rays, might look when infused with the sort of money that launches rockets, the Dodgers last week won their seventh National League West title in eight seasons. In the outlier season of 2021, they won 106 games and finished second.

Backed by Guggenheim Partners, an \$8 billion television deal and the highest attendance in the league for nine years in a row (not counting 2020, when the pandemic emptied ballparks), the Dodgers also have committed about \$1.8 billion to payroll in the Friedman era, \$200 million more than the New York Yankees.

MLB can be a get-what-you-pay-for league, as well as an answer-for-what-you-pay-for league, even a regret-what-you-pay-for league. For the Dodgers, over the better part of a decade, that has translated into massive expectations come October. They have played every bit to their potential for six months, season after season. They have endured the pressures, whims and downright evil of October with varying results—once with a championship trophy, more often than not, somebody else raising the banner.

They stand again on the familiar precipice in the third week of September, when it's too hot in Los Angeles. Friedman sits in the home dugout, in the shade. He is not sweating. His face is slightly flushed. The Dodgers are again the best team in the game, which was the goal six months ago. It's always the goal, as home-field advantage squares one possible variable next month, of a million possible variables.

The boy GM has gray in his hair now. He's no longer a general manager, but a president. He's taken up pickleball, which is to say he has a court in his backyard and the occasional scuff on a knee or elbow. He sometimes returns work calls from the sidelines of youth soccer practices. He does not surf or drive an electric car. He has three kids and a wife, Robin, who has dedicated her career to the education of underprivileged children.

He has one World Series championship. In his seven years in L.A., the Dodgers' playoff record is 46-31. He begins to describe what it's like to spend months, even years, to get to Game 1 every fall, to separate healthy players from ailing ones, good matchups from uncertain ones, black and white from gray, head from heart, then stops for a story.

Six years ago during a division series in Washington, D.C., the Dodgers trailed the Nationals by a run in the fifth inning. The Dodgers loaded the bases with two outs. In a Nationals Park suite above third base, Friedman stood at the window. Behind him, Robin and the kids, assistant general manager Alex Anthopoulos and his family and an assortment of team officials, spouses and children. Pinch hitter **Howie Kendrick** came to the plate. Friedman felt the moment get big in his stomach, so he left the suite to watch by himself, in the open-air seats in front of the box, and closed the glass door behind him. Kendrick hit a line drive that, from Friedman's vantage point, looked destined for the left center-field gap.

"He *steps* on the ball," Friedman recalls. "Three runs are coming in. We're gonna have a lead."

In left field, **Jayson Werth** hardly had to move. He raised his glove, made the catch.

Friedman loudly cursed the baseball gods for a solid 30 seconds. Then he composed himself and returned to the suite, to Robin's side. She arched an eyebrow.

"Just so you know," she said, casting a glance at the children, "these windows aren't soundproof."

It's how things go in the postseason. Friedman and his lieutenants have used their theories, experience, analytical devices, scouts, guts and wealth to tease as much randomness from the regular season as they can. Then October starts and **Eddie Rosario** hits .560 with three home runs and nine RBI in six games, as he did for the Atlanta Braves last October, and the Dodgers are eliminated. Or **Corey Seager** hits .328 for four weeks, hits eight home runs, as he did the October before, and the Dodgers are champions for the first time in more than three decades.

Friedman welcomes the ride. These Dodgers are good, if light in the starting rotation and, potentially, on the back end of their bullpen. Statistically, they are the best offensive team in the league. They lead the league in ERA. Many of them have ridden the October rails before, some here and some in cities where the relationships with October are just as uneasy, so know where this is headed.

Freddie Freeman, signed in March, leads the National League in batting and doubles. **Mookie Betts** leads the league in runs. **Trea Turner**, many nights, is the best player on the field. **Walker Buehler** just endured his second Tommy John surgery while **Dustin May** returns from his first, in time to fold into the rotation again. What the Dodgers don't develop, it seems, they acquire. What they can't acquire, they develop. That's how the machine works.

"I credit Andrew and Doc [manager **Dave Roberts**]," said **Clayton Kershaw**, who is coming up on 200 postseason innings. "I mean all the personnel, ultimately, they get good players here. Good players more often than not win games. So, there is that and that's as simple as that sometimes. And then other times I do think it's like the culture here is like, 'Hey, winning is everything. Winning is *everything*.' It doesn't get in the way of us having a good time. But at the same time, everybody understands the bigger picture here when you come to be a Dodger."

The wins shine. The losses linger. For those who've been around for a lot of both, especially in October, there can only be love for the moment. That's where Friedman's love-hate relationship with October comes in.

"There's a little bit of that gambler's mentality in all of this," Friedman says, "in that professional gamblers love to win, obviously, but they also almost like to lose, where it makes you feel more alive. Even the bad things. There's such a purpose to what you're doing, that in a weird, sick, twisted way, even a bad thing that happens is different. Like, I'd rather go through that than not experience the postseason at all. But that's where the love-hate all intertwines and meshes together in ways that I don't know what it comes out to."

Maybe, as much as anything, that's what makes him a Dodger. An L.A. guy. October baseball is coming, again. He's pretty sure the Dodgers are the best team, again. He's not sure that matters. He's going to go find out. Then, however it goes, he's going to come back to the place he calls home.

MORE INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS FROM THE JOE SHEEHAN BASEBALL NEWSLETTER

The slightly compressed schedule for the playoffs includes some quirks that I'm trying to determine whether or not are potentially consequential. For instance, the AL has off days in the Division Series between games one and two, and two and three, which eliminates any question about whether the game one and two starters can pitch games four and five, since they'd both be on full rest. The NL doesn't have that extra off day, so their game one and game two starters would be on short rest if they went in games four and five.

Then, both the ALCS and NLCS only have one off-day, such that games three through seven could potentially be five games in five days. Just wondering if you've put any thought into these scheduling quirks and whether or not they would factor into any matchups or just generally impact all teams about the same.

--Christopher V.

I also noticed the quirky Division Series schedule, which seems designed to allow all four bye teams to get the same rest advantage over teams emerging from the first round. Usually, both Division Series would be played over seven days, in a 2-x-2-x-1 format, with the starting dates staggered to ensure baseball on every day. To meet all the goals of this new format (and squeeze the playoffs into a compressed window), we now get a 2-x-2-1 format, with an extra off day in the AL. After that first day, the league wants to do the usual staggering of games to avoid having days with no games, so the first four days of games run 4-2-2-2 instead of 2-4-2-2.

This does mean one league's Division Series runs over more days. Remember also that there is no off day scheduled between the fourth and fifth games in either league, a change from most years.

That last change, which as Christopher notes repeats in the LCS round, is significant. We got a taste of this in 2020, when the neutral-site playoffs eliminated travel and allowed the Division Series and LCSs to be played with no off days. While I'd prefer to not repeat 2020 in general, the elimination of playoff off days corrected for one of the biggest differences between regular-season and playoff baseball. In a normal postseason, teams are only faced with playing on three straight days twice, and never more than that. With the next rest day always just around the corner, teams can lean heavily on their best relievers and in fact, not worry too much about usage relative to winning that day's game.

These changes make playoff baseball a bit more like regular-season baseball. They should reward those teams with more pitching depth. The effect on the LCS round is dramatic, with the potential for games on five straight days. It's now almost impossible to make three starts in an LCS, whereas a true ace could at least theoretically have pitched 1-4-7 on three days' rest. It will have a sharp effect on bullpen usage should an LCS series stretch to six and seven games.

My concern is that in building this schedule, MLB has left itself no wiggle room at all. Any rainout is going to disrupt the calendar, and multiple ones could create scheduling and travel challenges. As it stands, you could have teams making cross-country flights in the Division Series and LCS rounds without a day off -- Seattle/New York and Los Angeles/New York are both possible matchups. While I think we want to make playoff baseball more like regular-season baseball, we also don't want bad baseball caused by unrealistic travel demands.

In all cases, the Astros stand to benefit. They have more pitching than anyone else does, and beyond that, more pitchers qualified to provide innings. They will never have cross-country flights, and at least their home games cannot be rained out. Teams likely to be hurt are the ones with the biggest fall-offs from their top relievers to their next tier. The Blue Jays, the Mets, maybe the Braves.

FORMER MLB EXECUTIVE SAYS ALBERT PUJOLS WAS LYING ABOUT HIS AGE WHEN HE SIGNED \$240 MILLION CONTRACT WITH ANGELS

Jackson Thompson and Cork Gaines

Albert Pujols is not the age he says he is, according to one former MLB team executive.

David Samson, who served as the Miami Marlins' president from 2002 to 2017, said no one in baseball believed Pujols was telling the truth about his age when he signed a 10-year, \$240 million contract with the Los Angeles Angels after the 2011 season. Samson made the comments during an appearance on "The Dan Le Batard Show."

"There is not one person in baseball, not one executive, who believes Albert Pujols is the age that he says he is," Samson told Le Batard. "The amount of fraud that was going on in the Dominican back in the day, the changing of names, the changing of birthdays, it would blow your mind."

Samson said he knew Pujols was not the age he said was when the Marlins tried to court the three-time NL MVP in free agency in December 2011.

"We knew when we did the calculations for that deal that we didn't care about 2019, '20, or '21. It was so far in the future that it didn't matter," Samson said, recalling his negotiations with Pujols. "We knew he'd be unproductive. We knew that he was not the age that he said he was. We had all the information."

Pujols hails from the Dominican Republic, a nation with a proud history of baseball talent and a slight history of birthday fraud among that talent. One instance of a Dominican player lying about his age occurred in 1999 with the former pitcher **Wandy Rodriguez**.

Rodriguez was 19 at the time and threw in the mid-80s, which was hardly impressive for young Dominican prospects. But Rodriguez found a way to boost his profile among MLB scouts by not only lying about his age but also taking on a new identity, **Jose De Jesus Ortiz** of The Houston Chronicle reported.

Rodriguez "borrowed" the identity of his friend Eny Cabrera, who was two years younger than Rodriguez. A mid-80s fastball for a 17-year-old was suddenly more attractive to MLB scouts, and he signed a contract with the Houston Astros.

Rodriguez later acknowledged his true identity to the organization but still went on to pitch in the majors for 10 years, from 2005 to 2015.

Another example was with the former shortstop **Miguel Tejada**, who also lied about being 17 when he was 19 to land a contract with the Oakland Athletics in 1993, according to ESPN.

This season is expected to be Pujols' final in MLB as he announced he will retire at the end of the year.

22 BONKERS STATS FROM THE 2022 SEASON

Anthony Castrovince, mlb.com (stats through Wednesday's games).

20

The gap between **Aaron Judge's** Major League-leading home run total of 60 and his next-closest competitor -- the Phillies' **Kyle Schwarber**, with 40. As Judge continues his unstoppable trek toward breaking Roger Maris' American League home run record, this stat is common knowledge at this point. But that doesn't make it any less bonkers. The only other player in history to lead the rest of the Major League field by at least 20 home runs was **Babe Ruth** (the Bambino's largest margin was 35). The biggest margin for anyone not named Babe Ruth was Jimmie Foxx's 17-homer lead atop the MLB rankings in 1932.

In fact, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, prior to Judge earlier this month, there had never been a player to finish so much as a calendar day with a 20-homer lead on the rest of the MLB field since Ruth finished the 1928 season with a 23-homer lead on **Jim Bottomley and Hack Wilson**.

The Astros' **Yordan Alvarez** is second in the AL with 37 homers, or 23 behind Judge. The only players other than Ruth to lead their league by at least 20 homers were **Mickey Mantle** (52 to **Vic Wertz's** 32 in 1956) and **Giancarlo Stanton** (59 to **Cody Bellinger's** 39 in 2017).

A few bonus bonkers Judge stats (because his 2022 is the definition of bonkers):

54: The number of different pitchers Judge has taken deep. That is already an AL record (breaking **Ken Griffey Jr.**'s mark of 52 in 1998, but **Mark McGwire**'s National League record of 65 from that same '98 season appears safe.)

11: Multi-homer games. That ties **Sammy Sosa** (1998) and **Hank Greenberg** ('38) for the most in a single season.

48: Homers in victories. That's second-most in AL/NL history, with an eye on Ruth's all-time record of 51 in '27.

1

Where the Dodgers rank in the NL in runs scored (799) and in (fewest) runs allowed (474). If they can remain in that position the remainder of the year, they will become the first team in history to lead a league in both categories for five straight seasons, topping the previous mark of four that was set by the 1936-39 Yankees.

But in 2022, the Dodgers actually lead *all of MLB* in both categories. They could become just the seventh team to do that, joining the 1902 Pirates, '06 Cubs, '27 Yankees, '39 Yankees, '44 Cardinals and 2001 Mariners.

The above puts the Dodgers on pace for a plus-325 run differential, which would be one of the best ever, trailing only the 1939 Yankees (plus-411), '27 Yankees (plus-376) and 1902 Pirates (plus-334) in the modern era.

1.93

This is the ratio of extra-base hits **Shohei Ohtani** has collected at the plate over the past two seasons to extra-base hits he has allowed on the mound in that same span.

OK, so this is not a commonly cited stat, because, well, prior to Ohtani, there was never any need to look up such a ridiculous thing. But it's just another way of explaining how awesome these last two seasons have been for quite possibly the greatest baseball talent of all-time.

In the two seasons in which his health and schedule have freed him up to be the two-way star he was envisioned to be, Ohtani has logged 147 extra-base hits as a batter (only Judge has more, at 150) while allowing just 76 extra-base hits as a pitcher (only six guys with at least 270 innings in that span have allowed fewer). So if you're scoring at home, yes, that's nearly twice as many extra-base hits collected as allowed.

By the way, Ohtani's 148 OPS+ for 2022 is just points behind that of **Juan Soto** -- ranking tenth in MLB. And his 165 ERA+ is one point better than that of **Max Fried** to rank sixth in MLB.

0

Homers for **Kris Bryant** at Coors Field. Granted, injuries have limited Bryant to only 42 games played this season (26 at Coors), but we can think of 182 million reasons why the Rockies didn't expect this.

Only 16 other times has a player had as many Coors plate appearances in a season as Bryant has this year (111) without a home run: **Juan Pierre** (2000, '01, '02), **Walt Weiss** (1995), **Willy Taveras** (2008), **Tony Wolters** ('17, '19), **Cory Sullivan** ('06), **Aaron Miles** ('05), **Jonathan Herrera** ('10, '13), **Alex Ochoa** ('01), **Desi Relaford** ('05), **Cristhian Adames** ('16) and **Eric Young Jr.** ('10, '11).

How many of those guys are former MVPs? Uh, none.

Bryant is not alone this year in having a strange Coors experience. Teammate José Iglesias has hit .333 on the road but just .264 at his hitter-haven home. It's the largest home/road differential ever for a Rockies player with at least 450 plate appearances.

.520

The Orioles' winning percentage. Last we checked, that means they have a winning record. And if the O's can finish the season with just such a record, they will be the first of their kind. Because never in history has a team lost 110 games or more (as the 2021 Orioles did) and posted a winning record the very next year. The only other teams to win at least 70 games a year after losing 110 or more were the 1936 Boston Bees (71), the '70 Montreal Expos (73), the 2004 Tigers (72), the '05 D-backs (77) and the '14 Astros (70).

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the O's are already the first team ever to win more than 70 games after losing 100 or more in each of the previous three full seasons.

217

That's **Justin Verlander**'s ERA+, which means he has been 117 percent better than league average. It is -- incredibly -- the highest ERA+ of Verlander's Hall of Fame-worthy career, 38 points higher than his previous best, in his last full season in 2019.

Here's another bonkers Verlander stat: 13,737. That's how many days (37 years, seven months, 10 days) Verlander was when he had Tommy John surgery on Sept. 20, 2020. No one has had the procedure that old and returned to be a dependable starter, let alone to have a Cy Young Award-worthy season.

By the way, the Astros' pitching staff, in case you haven't noticed, isn't all about Verlander. **Framber Valdez** set a single-season record with 25 consecutive quality starts. And as a group, the Astros have limited opponents to a .612 OPS -- the lowest in a full season since the 1975 Dodgers (.612).

142

Speaking of old dudes getting it done, this is **Albert Pujols'** OPS+, 42% better than league average. Not only is it his highest since his previous season with St. Louis -- way back in 2011 (148) -- but it is the second-highest of any player with at least 200 plate appearances in a season in which he was 42 (Pujols' age) or older. The only better offensive season by a player that old was when **Barry Bonds** put up a 169 OPS+ in his final season in 2007.

Bonds' 28 home runs that year are also the only higher total for a player 42 or older than Pujols' 19 this year.

5

Complete games for NL Cy Young favorite **Sandy Alcantara** of the Miami Marlins. Sure, that's not a bonkers number if you're comparing Alcantara to pitchers from, say, the Dead Ball Era. But you might have noticed pitchers don't typically go as deep into games as they once did. There aren't any MLB *teams* other than Alcantara's Marlins with four complete games this year, let alone individuals with five. In fact, 16 teams don't have any complete games at all.

Alcantara has 212 2/3 innings this season -- 19 1/3 more than the next-closest pitcher in MLB (the Cardinals' **Miles Mikolas**, at 193 1/3).

36

This is the MLB-leading stolen-base total for the Marlins' **Jon Berti**. Unless he (or somebody else) goes crazy down the stretch, this will be the first time no one in MLB swipes 40 bags since way back in 1958, when **Willie Mays** led with 31.

The good news? Major Leaguers have never been more efficient at stealing bases. The league-wide stolen base success rates in the last three seasons all rank in the top three all-time (2021 is first at 75.7%, followed by '22 at 75.3 and '20 at 75.2). Anyway... bring on those 2023 pickoff limits!

352

Sacrifice bunts this season. That is the fewest ever -- by a long shot -- in a non-"shortened to 60 games because of a pandemic" season. A new record has been set in each of the last three full seasons. But this time, the total is less than half of last year's mark (766). Turns out, when you stop having pitchers hit, you get fewer bunts.

2

The number of rookies this season -- the Mariners' **Julio Rodríguez** and the **Royals' Bobby Witt Jr.** -- with at least 20 homers and 20 steals. Only one other season in history had two such rookies, and that was in 1987 (**Ellis Burks** of the Red Sox and **Devon White** of the Angels).

The Braves' **Michael Harris II**, who currently has 18 homers and 18 steals, could make the 2022 season unprecedented. And speaking of unprecedented, Rodríguez is the first player ever to have at least 25 homers and 25 steals in his debut season.

286

The number of players who have made their debut this season, blowing past the previous record of 268, which was set last year. The Rangers' **Josh Jung** was the record-breaker, on Sept. 9, and 17 more players have debuted just since then.

Prior to 2021, the previous high was 262, set in 2017.

2

Pitchers who have debuted this season with a scoreless start of at least seven innings. **Drey Jameson** and **Ryne Nelson** both did it.

The bonkers part is that they both pitch for the D-backs, and they both did it against the Padres. It had been three years since anybody debuted with such a game, let alone two pitchers on the same team and against the same team. There have only been two previous pairs of teammates to debut with seven-plus scoreless innings -- **John Neuer** and **King Brockett** with the 1907 Yankees and **Andy Van Hekken** and **Mike Maroth** with the 2002 Tigers. But in neither of those previous pairs did both outings come against the same team.

130

How many innings Braves rookie **Spencer Strider** needed to reach 200 Ks this year. That's the fastest of any pitcher in AL/NL history, besting **Randy Johnson's** record of 130 2/3 in 2001. Strider is just the 29th rookie with a 200-strikeout season.

3

Teams for whom **Dallas Keuchel** allowed seven-plus runs in a start this season -- the White Sox (April 20 at Guardians), D-backs (July 12 at Giants) and Rangers (Aug. 27 vs. Tigers and Sept. 2 at Red Sox). That had never happened to any previous pitcher, let alone a Cy Young Award winner.

106

Times the Mets have been hit by a pitch -- the most in the Majors by 16 and a modern-era record. With 11 games remaining, the Mets could become the first team to be hit by 110 or

more pitches since the 1899 Baltimore Orioles (no, that's not the current O's franchise) and 1899 Brooklyn Superbas. The Mets have been hit by at least 94 pitches each of the last three full seasons, so this is what you'd call a trend. And a painful one, at that.

3.34

Runs per game for the Tigers. The only other teams that had a designated hitter spot in a full season who had a lower average were the 2010 Mariners (3.17) and the 1978 A's (3.28).

18

Outs above average ... against Guardians center fielder **Myles Straw**. Granted, we don't have a lot of history to this stat. OAA only goes back to 2016. But in that time, no hitter has had better defense played against him than Straw. Previously, no one had more than 15 OAA recorded on balls they put into play. While that doesn't explain everything baked into Straw's MLB-worst .564 OPS, at least it shows he's had some bad luck. And what makes this more interesting is Straw is a terrific defender. His 10 OAA rank second among center fielders.

21

Extra-base hits for Nationals first baseman/outfielder **Joey Meneses**. The Nats made the biggest trade of the year when they sent both **Juan Soto** and **Josh Bell** to the Padres, and Meneses -- a 30-year-old journeyman Minor Leaguer -- was one of the players they called up to fill out the lineup. Turns out, 40 games later, Meneses has more extra-base hits than Soto and Bell have for the Padres -- combined (18)!

.281

The A's on-base percentage. The franchise that taught the broader baseball world to pay attention to this stat now is tied for the second-worst single-season OBP in the Live Ball Era. Only the 1965 Mets (.277) got on base less frequently.

8

Position players pitching has become weirdly commonplace, thanks in part to the 13-pitcher roster max that went into effect in June. And no position player has toed the rubber more than Dodgers infielder **Hanser Alberto**, whose eight appearances are a new record for a position player pitching, besting the old record of six that was set by **Chris Gimenez** in 2017 and matched by Sandy León last year.

The Dodgers are 7-1 when Alberto pitches, and he has a respectable 3.38 ERA.

24

Players who have worn a jersey number in the 90s this season. That is a record, and a continuation of a 90s trend that has nothing to do with fanny packs, chain wallets or capri pants.

2017: 4 players in the 90s (all wearing No. 99)

2018: 7

2019: 9

2020: 15

2021: 19

The Yankees, who now have 22 jersey numbers retired after honoring **Paul O'Neill** earlier this year and are basically running out of numbers, lead the way with five guys in the 90s: **Estevan Florial** (90), **Oswald Peraza** (91), **Oswaldo Cabrera** (95), **Ron Marinaccio** (97) and **Aaron Judge** (99). And what do you want to bet Judge's heroics this season inspire another wave of 99s? Eight of 30 teams have had a player wear 99 this season.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Four managers have taken four teams to the post-season—one of them has taken five teams.

The earliest managed his first post season team in 1969. Two managed the Mets, two managed the Yankees, two managed the Orioles and two will manage in this season's playoffs.

Name the four managers and the teams.

Buck Showalter has now taken four teams to the postseason (Yankees, Diamondbacks, Orioles, and Mets).

Dusty Baker (Giants, Cubs, Reds, Nationals, and Astros)

Davey Johnson (Mets, Reds, Orioles, and Nationals)

Billy Martin (Twins, Tigers, Yankees, and Athletics)

HOUSEKEEPING

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