

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

9.4.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Just over a month 'til the playoffs. This week big bucks for a **Mickey Mantle** card, Part 2 of baseballegg.com's list of best players born each year since the Civil War, Jayson Stark's weird stuff, Joe Sheehan and the impact of a batter seeing more pitchers each year than they did 40 years ago, the impact of being in first place September 1, and of course trivia. Pour a cup and enjoy.

And maybe someone can explain to me why MLB network stuck with Mets/Nationals (with cutaways to **Albert Pujols** at bats ahead of Cubs 8-4), but couldn't/wouldn't cut away to White Sox **Dylan Chase** as he took a no-hitter into the 9th against the Twins (he lost the no hitter with 2 outs on a single by **Luis Arraez**).

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Since 1934 there have been 12 back-to-back MVP seasons. The years and league are below—how many can you name?

2012-2013 AL

2008-2009 NL

2001-2002-2003-2004 NL

1993-1994 AL

1992-1993 NL

1982-1983 NL

1980-1981 NL

1975-1976 NL

1958-1959 NL

1956-1957 AL

1954-1955 AL

1944-1945 AL

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

As some readers might be aware, the Yankees went 10-18 August. It's New York's worst record and most losses in any month since the Yankees lost 19 games in September 1991.

The Red Sox are headed for their fourth last-place finish in the AL East since 2012, and fifth if you count the pandemic-shortened 2020 season. During that period they also have made five postseason appearances and won two World Series. Fenway is indeed America's most beloved ballpark, if whiplash is your thing.

Gerrit Cole has recorded at least 200 strikeouts for his second straight season (also 243K in 2021). Cole is just the fourth Yankee in franchise history to record at least 200 strikeouts in multiple seasons, joining **Luis Severino** (2017-18), **David Cone** (1997-98) and **Ron Guidry** (1978-79).

Aaron Judge leads the Majors with 113 RBIs and is on pace for 141. **Prince Fielder** and **Ryan Howard** are the last players with a 140 RBI season; they both recorded 141 in 2009. The last American League player was **Alex Rodriguez**, who had 156 RBIs with the Yanks in his 2007 MVP season.

A couple of Judge observations from Joe Sheehan:

Since Judge's debut season in 2016, just one player has hit more balls with an EV of 110 mph or higher. The two know each other.

Rocket Launcher (Batted balls with 110+ mph EV, 2016-22)

Giancarlo Stanton	296
Aaron Judge	253
Nelson Cruz	208
Vladimir Guerrero Jr.	179
Manny Machado	154

Let's put Judge's performance in a different context. He has 51 homers, and no one else in baseball has 40. That just isn't done, not since **Babe Ruth** was out-homering entire teams a hundred years ago. From 1919 to 1928, Ruth hit at least 13 homers more than the next guy did seven times. Twice, in 1920 and 1921, he hit 35 homers more than the second-place slugger.

Outside of Ruth, the biggest lead any player ever had in the home-run race was 17, by **Jimmie Foxx** in 1932, when he hit 58 homers and...well, this is awkward...Babe Ruth hit 41. A year later, Foxx hit 48 and...yeesh...Ruth hit 34. That gap, 14, is the second-largest ever.

Lapping the Field (Biggest home-run race victories, non-Babe division)

	Year	HR	Lead
Jimmie Foxx	1932	58	17
Jimmie Foxx	1933	48	14
Willie Mays	1965	52	13
Buck Freeman	1899	25	13
Jose Bautista	2010	53	12
Cecil Fielder	1990	51	11
Kevin Mitchell	1989	47	11
George Foster	1977	52	11
Ralph Kiner	1949	54	11

When **Barry Bonds** hit 73, **Sammy Sosa** hit 64 and two other guys hit 50. When **Mark McGwire** hit 70, Sosa hit 66 and two other guys hit 50. **Roger Maris's** 61 was chased by **Mickey Mantle** (54), and four other guys hit at least 45 homers.

Aaron Judge has 15 homers more than the next guy, **Kyle Schwarber**, does with a month to play. No one has won the home-run race by that much since Jimmie Foxx, and if Judge stretches the lead, he could do what no hitter has done since Babe Ruth.

This week in 1961, **Mickey Mantle** and **Roger Maris** became the first teammates to each hit 50 home runs in the same season, as Mantle went deep twice in a Sept. 3 win over the Tigers at Yankee Stadium. Mantle's 50 homers were second at the time to Maris' 53, as Maris continued closing in on **Babe Ruth's** single-season record of 60 home runs.

Don't give up on the Orioles. 9 walk off wins. Won series against Houston and Cleveland last week. They won three straight shut-outs, the last from **Kyle Bradish**. His first 10 career starts, most coming as the club's No. 10-ranked prospect, saw him pitch to a 7.38 ERA. Bradish on Thursday became the first starter in Orioles history (since 1954) to record consecutive scoreless outings of at least seven innings and two or fewer hits allowed, and they came against the vaunted Astros and the first-place Guardians. Across baseball, he's the first pitcher to accomplish this feat since **Max Scherzer** did it for the Dodgers on Sept. 12 and 18, 2021.

Last week I mentioned watching Braves rookie right hander **Spencer Strider** throwing bullets against the Cards, In his next start Strider strode into the Atlanta record books tallying a franchise-record 16 strikeouts. He tossed eight shutout innings as the Braves defeated the

Rockies 3-0. Strider (9-4) allowed two hits in eight innings to lead the Braves to a 3-0 win over the Colorado Rockies. Strider fanned his last two batters with two runners on base in the eighth — with his fastball still hitting 98 m.p.h. — to complete his masterful 106-pitch outing.

Prior to Thursday, Hall of Famer **John Smoltz** held the Braves record with 15 strikeouts, a figure he reached twice with the team (1992 and 2005).

The performance also gives Strider the most strikeouts in a game of any pitcher in over three years, when Dodgers starter **Walker Buehler** also struck out 16 Rockies on June 21, 2019.

Thursday's outing was the 17th start of Strider's career and marked the fifth time he reached double-digit strikeouts. With the shutout performance, he has now allowed one or fewer earned runs in all but two of his last 12 starts.

Historical context--Strider became just the fourth rookie pitcher in history to strike out 16 without walking a batter, joining **Jon Gray, Kerry Wood and Dwight Gooden**, according to ESPN Stats & Info. Kerry Wood holds the rookie record with 20 in 1998 which is tied for the all-time single game strikeout record with **Roger Clemens** (twice) and **Max Scherzer**.

Speaking of strikeouts... **Yu Darvish** has been striking out hitters professionally for a long, long time.

Long enough, that he made a bit of international baseball history on Friday night at Dodger Stadium.

Darvish's fifth-inning strikeout of **Cody Bellinger** marked the 3,000th of his illustrious career, between Japan and MLB. Then he tacked on a few more -- nine in total on the night -- as the Padres delivered a statement victory over their Southern California rivals.

It's an awfully exclusive group of pitchers to record a combined 3,000 strikeouts between MLB and NPB with at least 1,000 in each league. And they're both presently employed by the Padres.

Darvish joins Japanese pitching icon **Hideo Nomo** as the only two players to achieve the milestone. Nomo, who serves as a Padres special adviser in the baseball operations department, finished with 3,122 combined strikeouts.

His 1,750th strikeout across 10 seasons in the big leagues. (Innings-wise, he's the fastest in history to reach that number.)

Tack on his 1,250 strikeouts during his seven seasons pitching for the Nippon Ham Fighters in Japan, and Darvish achieved quite a milestone on Friday night.

I watched **Jacob deGrom** against the Dodgers this week and was treated to Mets center fielder **Brandon Nimmo** making an awesome catch, robbing a homer from **Justin Turner** in the seventh inning Wednesday. Definitely worth a look:

https://www.mlb.com/news/brandon-nimmo-robs-justin-turner-of-a-home-run?partnerId=zh-20220901-691733-mlb-1-A&qid=1026&utm_id=zh-20220901-691733-mlb-1-A&bt_ee=w%2BOcsSB6Ah2SnTHUkpzvFHT3FrT89Q6AW%2BeNe6m3%2FQzTMjil5msUTMa3zfxtxzCD&bt_ts=1662044330927

It is right there with the best from **Ron Swoboda and Tommy Agee**.

The Mariners have seen enough: Seattle doesn't intend for rookie **Julio Rodríguez** to ever wear another team's jersey.

- The 21-year-old Rodríguez, just 110 games into his career, agreed to a complex contract that will guarantee him \$210 million, with a base of \$120 million through 2029.
- It's the highest amount of guaranteed money ever for a player with under two years of major-league service time. Sheesh!
- There's the potential for him to make \$470 million (!!!), which would be the largest contract in MLB history.

The deal, designed by his agent, could run either eight, 13, 16 or 18 years. Getting the maximum value hinges on his finish in MVP voting during the first eight years.

From Dan Shaughnessy of the Boston Globe--**Roger Clemens** was drafted by the Red Sox, 19th overall, with their first pick of the 1983 draft. While the Sox were bragging about their first-round pick, ancient **Carl Yastrzemski** was playing his 23rd and final season for the team.

I mention all of this only because it was cool seeing the names "Clemens" and "Yastrzemski" in the same box score when the Tigers beat the Giants, 6-1, recently at Comerica Park.

Kody Clemens (son of Roger) played second base for the Tigers, batted third, and went 1 for 3, scoring a run and driving in one. **Mike Yastrzemski** (grandson of Carl) played center field for the Giants, batted eighth, went 2 for 3, and scored San Francisco's only run.

MLB players will play games in South Korea for the first time since 1922 this November, when a group travels to Busan and Seoul for matchups against players from the Korean Baseball

Organization. The “Korea Series” is part of the MLB World Tour, an international slate of games played in Asia, Mexico, Latin America and Europe through the 2026 season.

Angels two-way star **Shohei Ohtani** has been doing things never seen in the history of Major League Baseball, and he created more history against the Yankees on Wednesday.

Ohtani launched his 30th homer of the year, which made him the first player in AL/NL history to record 10 wins on the mound and 30 homers at the plate in the same season. And it came at a critical moment, as his three-run blast off Yankees ace **Gerrit Cole** in the sixth inning gave the Angels the lead in an eventual 3-2 win at Angel Stadium. It also helped Ohtani become the first Japanese-born player with multiple 30-homer seasons.

Ohtani is slashing .269/.359/.529 with 30 homers, 20 doubles, 82 RBIs, 75 runs scored and 11 stolen bases in 127 games. And he’s also pitched like an ace in 22 starts on the mound, with his next start coming on Saturday against the Astros. Ohtani is 11-8 with a 2.67 ERA and 176 strikeouts in 128 innings. He’s also the only player in AL/NL history with at least 30 homers and 100 strikeouts in a season, a feat he also accomplished last year, when he hit 46 homers and struck out 156 batters.

To put things in perspective, Ohtani is third in the AL in homers and fifth in the AL in strikeouts as a pitcher.

The closest **Babe Ruth** came to 30 HRs and 10 wins was in 1919, when he clubbed 29 homers for the Red Sox and won nine games on the mound. Ruth, of course, was traded to the Yankees after that season.

Prior to Saturday's Mets Old Timers Game at Citi Field, **Bartolo Colon** spoke to Spanish radio broadcaster Johnny Trujillo about his future plans. In what will surely be sad news to his fans around the world, Colon told Trujillo he's going to retire from professional baseball following one more winter league season.

I would like to pitch a couple of games with Águilas Cibaeñas of the Dominican Winter League so I can say goodbye to the game of baseball and to all those Dominican fans, because they deserve it,” Colon said.

The 49 year old Colon pitched in 21 MLB seasons from 1997-2018, for Cleveland, the Expos, White Sox, Angels, Red Sox, Yankees, A's, Mets, Braves, Twins and Rangers. He was a four-time All-Star and won the 2005 American League Cy Young Award with the Angels. In 17 career postseason appearances (10 starts) he posted a 3.49 ERA. He didn't allow an earned run in 3 1/3 innings out of the bullpen for the Mets in the 2015 World Series against the Royals.

ME AND JULIO — In other important Name Game news ...**Julio Urías** goes five weeks and 132 hitters without allowing a home run ... and then, on Aug. 22 ... gives up a homer to ... **Luis Urías**... in the first instance ever of a Urías homering off a Urías

A rookie at 32 years old, new Reds reliever **Fernando Cruz** certainly had to be more patient than most ballplayers before he finally made it to the Major Leagues. Walking into Great American Ball Park for the first time on Friday, Cruz quickly realized the wait was worth it.

Cruz, who was called up from Triple-A Louisville on Thursday when rosters were expanded to 28 players, entered Friday's 3-2 Reds win in the top of the sixth inning. He worked a perfect frame with two strikeouts, with both K's coming on sliders at the bottom of the zone where the hitters whiffed.

According to Elias Sports, Cruz was the oldest Reds player to make his big league debut since 38-year-old lefty pitcher/outfielder **Pat Scantlebury** pitched vs. the Cardinals on April 19, 1956.

Cruz was a sixth-round pick of the Royals -- as an infielder -- out of Puerto Rico all the way back in 2007, when he was 17. By 2011, he was converted to pitching and began to bounce around in and out of Minor League baseball. 500+ games in the minors, 200+ games in other countries, 40+ games in independent leagues.

Fastest pitches in the majors this year— **Jordan Hicks** of the Cardinals hit 103.8 on July 7, Twins rookie reliever **Jhoan Duran** hit 103.4 against the Red Sox this week.

Through Friday, Duran had a 1.87 earned run average and 74 strikeouts over 57⅓ innings (49 appearances).

Infielder **Hanser Alberto** has made six appearances on the mound for the Dodgers. He needs one more for the major league record by a non-pitcher. All six of his appearances have come in the ninth inning of games the Dodgers won by lopsided scores

The Boston Globe's **Bob Ryan**, ever the observant baseball fan, noted that when the Rays played at Fenway Park last Sunday, their starting lineup included players from seven countries: Colombia (**Harold Ramírez**), Cuba (**Randy Arozarena**, **Yandy Diaz**), the Dominican Republic (**Manuel Margot**, **Jose Siri**), Mexico (**Isaac Paredes**), Panama (**Christian Bethancourt**), the

United States (**Corey Kluber, Taylor Walls**), and Venezuela (**David Peralta**). The Rays also had **Ji-Man Choi** (South Korea) and **Yu Chang** (Taiwan) on their bench.

And another cool Globe observation-- **Serena Williams** won a US Open match on Aug. 29, 2001. **Albert Pujols** homered for the Cardinals that day. In other games, **Dante Bichette, Craig Biggio**, and **Vladimir Guerrero** had at least one hit. On Wednesday, 21 years later, Williams won a US Open match, Pujols homered for the Cardinals, and the sons of Bichette (**Bo**), Biggio (**Cavan**), and Guerrero (**Vladimir Jr.**) all had at least one hit

The MLB Players Association sent “authorization cards” to minor league players inviting them to vote on joining the union.

If 30 percent of the players agree, a formal vote will be held by the roughly 5,400 players. If it’s a high percentage of approval, MLB could agree to recognize the new union at that point rather than wait for a formal election run by the National Labor Relations Board.

The league might actually prefer a union as the minor leaguers would have to negotiate with MLB rather than filing lawsuits. That also could head off more attention from Congress regarding baseball’s antitrust exemption.

Because the schedule had to be adjusted for the lockout, the Dodgers end their season with six consecutive games against the last-place Rockies, all at home.

In all, the Dodgers end their season with 14 of 17 games at Dodger Stadium. The only road games are at San Diego, 2½ hours away by bus.

The Dodgers, barring some apocalyptic collapse, will have a bye for the first round of the playoffs and host the first two games of the Division Series.

So outside of three days, they will be home from Sept. 19 to Oct. 12.

Not bad for rookies:

Julio Rodriguez, Mariners 22 HRs, 23 stolen bases

Bobby Witt Jr., Royals 20 HRs, 26 stolen bases

ALBERT PUJOLS HAD A HUGE AUGUST

St. Louis Cardinals slugger **Albert Pujols** tagged his major league record 450th different pitcher for a home run, connecting off Cincinnati lefthander **Ross Detwiler** on Monday night. Pujols hit his 694th home run overall and broke **Barry Bonds'** mark for most pitchers as longball victims.

Coming off an impressive series victory over Atlanta, the Cardinals carried their streaking offense on the road with them to Cincinnati with a 13-4 victory in Monday's series opener at Great American Ball Park. They improved to 21-6 this month -- one of their finest Augusts in franchise history. Pujols (.407, first), **Nolan Arenado** (.371, third), second baseman **Brendan Donovan** (.368, fourth) and **Paul Goldschmidt** (.358, fifth) are four of the NL's top five hitters (with a minimum of 60 plate appearance) during August.

Albert Pujols -- who is continuing his farewell tour in yet another National League city that he's stung in years past -- hit career home run No. 694. The blast came off left-hander Ross Detwiler, marking the 450th pitcher Pujols has hit a homer against in his career and breaking a tie with Barry Bonds. The number is astounding since it's more than twice as many pitchers as Ruth homered off in his career. It also marked his 21st long ball at Great American Ball Park and puts him two away from tying **Alex Rodriguez** for the fourth-most homers all-time.

HRs off different pitchers (career total)

1. Albert Pujols, 450 (694)*
2. **Barry Bonds**, 449 (762)
3. Alex Rodriguez, 422 (696)
4. **Hank Aaron**, 310 (755)
5. **Babe Ruth**, 216 (714)

Albert Pujols Is Suddenly His Old Self Again—and Chasing 700 Career Home Runs

After a long fallow period in his career twilight, the slugging great is on a tear in which he is pursuing both history and a pennant with the St. Louis Cardinals

Tim Brown, Wall Street Journal



For 22 summers Albert Pujols has seen others come and go, mentors and friends and tough outs and a few pitchers he actually liked.

His time to go is near, too, whenever the St. Louis Cardinals are done, in five weeks or 10 or somewhere in between. For a lot of the past few years, it looked like one of the game's greatest hitters was going to disappear quietly, his powers greatly diminished.

Instead, these last days seem to him to be some of the happiest he can recall, surrounded as he is by warm memories wrapped in one more pennant race. Plus, he's raking.

"It's a blessing, man," he said, a phrase he repeats often.

Entering Monday's play, Pujols, 42, has 693 career home runs, three short of Alex Rodriguez on the all-time list and seven away from joining only Barry Bonds, Henry Aaron and Babe Ruth at 700 or more. His recent offensive surge suggests there is still some *maquina* in the man. The national conversation about home runs for the rest of the season may be less about whether Aaron Judge can hit 62, one more than Roger Maris did, and more about whether Albert Pujols can get to 700 in his career.

He has no precise explanation for how an expiring career explodes with seven home runs, 14 RBI and a .548 batting average across 13 days of his final August, beyond his explanation for every good day and every bad day before them. That is about the work he puts in, the faith he

carries and his willingness to accept the outcomes. It is the same commitment, he says, that a long time ago became a routine, that became a lifestyle and that became a Hall of Fame career.

It's the same as it was on an early April day in 2001 when **Tony La Russa** batted him sixth and gave him left field, the same as it was when he walked along a Wrigley Field concourse one afternoon this week to the entrance of the visitors' clubhouse. He pulled on the door. Pulled again. It was locked. He was the first to arrive.

Now it's almost time for something new, another chapter—raising his five children the rest of the way into adulthood in the wake of a trying divorce, providing for the people of his native Dominican Republic, perhaps leading a group of investors into franchise ownership.

But first he is wrangling a few more good at-bats, hoping to win a third championship in St. Louis and reminding himself to look around and breathe it in as he does.

"I'm just done," he said in an interview last week. "I just don't feel it in me anymore. You know what I mean? I don't want to stick around just for the paycheck, man. That love and passion that I have, that I've had since I was 5 years old for this game, I don't wanna ruin it for one more year or one more month. So that's why I decided it."

He also says there's no doubt that this is the end—even if he finishes the season one home run short of 700.

"That's why I announced it in spring training," Pujols said, "because I knew that I was going to probably have decent success and I didn't want to have in the back of my mind, 'Oh, I want to play one more year.' I'm done. So, no matter what, if I hit .300, 700 home runs, 699 home runs, it doesn't matter. I'm through with it, you know?"

The National League's Most Valuable Player as a Cardinal three times before he turned 30, he had once come as close as anyone to figuring out the game. Then a move to the Los Angeles Angels brought a decade that was not nearly as prolific. The pull of age, injuries, gravity and mediocre teams in Anaheim dulled his production.

He began to smile again during a five-month stay with the Los Angeles Dodgers that ended in the National League Championship Series last year, then circled back to the Cardinals for one final season with his friend Yadier Molina, fans who adored him and a place that felt like home.

"Where everything started," he said.

He batted .215 in the first half, then .403 in the second, reminding folks what it was like when Albert Pujols was young and in Cardinal red and living on the barrel of his bat.

And so for a few minutes several times a night, baseball crowds across the country lean into the last at-bats of one of the greatest hitters to ever play. It isn't just fans: at Dodger Stadium, the televisions in the home clubhouse are regularly tuned to Cardinals games.

"Guys are talking," said Dino Ebel, a coach with the Angels when Pujols was there and for the Dodgers when Pujols was there. "The bat speed is there. His weight is back. It's impressive."

When Pujols homered for No. 693, Ebel said, "Guys jumped up and hollered. Even umpires are saying, 'Man, I hope he gets 700.'"

"Even when we play against him and we're competing to win the division, I'm rooting for him to hit 700," said Milwaukee Brewers shortstop **Willy Adames**, a Dominican Republic native whose father's favorite player was Pujols. "He deserves that. I one-hundred percent hope he does it."

On a recent Saturday, Pujols entered a game in Arizona one base shy of **Stan Musial** for second in career total bases. He homered in his first at-bat, homered in his second, singled in his third and singled in his fourth. The baseball that moved him past Musial and behind only Aaron was retrieved and presented to Pujols. Nolan Arenado, the Cardinals third baseman, asked Pujols what it was for.

"In the dugout, we were all looking at each other, like, '*Whaat?*'" Arenado recalled with a laugh. "We couldn't comprehend what he was saying. Like, second *all-time*? Like, literally there's nobody else but *one guy*? So *No. 2*? So it's just him and whoever's in front of him? When you think of that stuff, it's just absurd to us, you know?"

Arenado already knows what he'll take away from the summer he played alongside Pujols.

"Obviously his work ethic at the older age," he said. "That he has the confidence that he has. I mean, he still thinks that nobody can beat him up there. You know, like he's still a killer. He's still thinks he can win every at-bat. He hates when he has to get pinch-hit for. He wants to play."

Pujols knows that the powerful lineup around him—including Paul Goldschmidt and Arenado and others—is helping to bring the pitches he is turning around. One day, he'd turned to pitcher Adam Wainwright, a fellow 40-something, and said of his productive teammates, "Hey, I remember when I used to have that kind of month. That kind of week," and they smiled at each other.

Now he's having that kind of month again. Even he can't quite believe it.

"If you would have asked me 22 years ago to picture this, I would have said, 'No. No way,'" he said. "I would have told you this can't happen."

His laugh filled the hallway.

“And here we are,” he said.

FIRST PLACE ON SEPTEMBER 1 MEANS SOMETHING.

Mlb.com

Since 1996 -- the first full season with at least one Wild Card in each league -- 120 of 150 eventual division champions held at least a share of their division lead entering September 1. That's 80 percent of division winners.

There has not been a season since 1996 where none of the division leaders entering September went on to win their divisions that year. In other words, history tells us that most of the six current leaders -- the Yankees, Guardians, Astros, Mets, Cardinals and Dodgers -- will win the division. But not necessarily all of them.

For those with comebacks in mind, the Elias Sports Bureau tells us that the largest division lead entering September for a team that did not win that division is 7 1/2 games by the 1995 Angels, who missed out on the playoffs entirely when the Yankees won that year's Wild Card and the Mariners won the division.

Largest division lead Entering September, did not win division (Since 1969)

1995 Angels: 7 1/2
1978 Red Sox: 6 1/2
2006 Tigers: 4 1/2
1969 Cubs: 4 1/2

What about eventual World Series winners? Since 1996, 16 of the 25 World Series winners, again, excluding 2020, led their divisions entering September.

History worth noting

The Dodgers lead the NL West by 18 1/2 games. That's tied for the fifth-largest lead entering September since divisions began in 1969. No team has led by that much entering September since Cleveland in 1999. In other words, it's been a while.

Largest division leads entering Sept. (since '69):

1995 Cleveland: 21 1/2 games
1999 Cleveland: 20 games
1980 Royals: 20 games
1986 Mets: 19 games

2022 Dodgers: 18 1/2 games
1975 Reds: 18 1/2 games

In New York, both teams lead by at least three games in their respective divisions – the Yankees by six and Mets by three. But the Yankees, who once led by 15 1/2, went 10-18 in August, a .357 win percentage that was their worst in a calendar month (min. five games) since September 1991 (9-19, .321), while the Mets have seen the Braves turn a once-10 1/2-game deficit into just three games.

It's only natural to wonder what the history might be.

Just seven teams since divisions began (1969) have had a 10+ game division lead, then had another team either tie or overtake them for 1st at some point, according to Elias:

2019 Twins* – largest lead: 11 1/2 games
2012 Yankees* – 10
2006 Tigers** – 10
1995 Angels – 11
1993 Giants – 10
1979 Astros – 10 1/2
1978 Red Sox – 10

*won division

**made playoffs as Wild Card

To be clear, the '19 Twins and '12 Yankees are on the above list because this is teams to tie for or lose their lead at any point – so, even if either team loses its lead and eventually regains it.

Thus, the largest blown lead in the divisional era by a team that did not go on to win that division is 11 games. If we expand prior to the divisional era, and look at league leads, the largest blown lead was the 1951 Dodgers' 13-game lead. You may recall that the Giants won the pennant that year.

Of course, that's also the difference worth noting here, which applies to the 1993 Giants, '79 Astros and '78 Red Sox above as well. There are three Wild Card spots per league this year – a far different type of field.

WORTH ANOTHER LOOK THROUGH THE BACK OF YOUR CLOSET.



A mint condition **Mickey Mantle** baseball card became the most valuable piece of sports memorabilia to be sold at auction, notching \$12.6 million early Sunday morning.

The card, issued by the collectible company Topps in 1952, features Mantle, the most powerful switch-hitter in baseball history. It would have been sold at the time in a wax-wrapped pack that cost either a penny or a nickel, said Chris Ivy, the director of sports auctions at Heritage Auctions, which sold the item.

The card surpassed the record of \$9.3 million achieved earlier this year by the jersey worn by Diego Maradona when he scored the goal known as the "Hand of God" in the 1986 World Cup.

According to Heritage Auctions, the Mantle card was graded a "Mint+ 9.5" out of 10 by Sportscard Guaranty Corporation, which authenticates and grades trading cards.

"It's almost perfectly centered top to bottom and left to right. It's got four sharp corners. The color is beautiful." Mr. Ivy added, "The fact that it remained in this condition for 70 years, prior to being graded, is truly a miracle."

According to Heritage Auctions, the card was purchased by an anonymous baseball fan from Rye, N.Y., from Anthony Giordano, the president of a recycling and solid waste business in New Jersey.

By phone, Mr. Giordano, 75, said that he had purchased the card in 1991 at a Father's Day baseball card show he was attending with his son at Madison Square Garden. He paid \$50,000, at the time a record for that specific card.

JAYSON STARK'S WEIRD STUFF

Another reason to subscribe to The Athletic

PUJOLS

the fact that **Albert Pujols** is one of the most dangerous hitters in August is the greatest triumph for old dudes in baseball since **Julio Franco** hit a home run off **Randy Johnson** *when he was 48 years old!*

How dangerous was Sir Albert last month? I'm not sure you've sufficiently comprehended just how dangerous:

He had a 1.224 OPS! Yes, Albert Pujols, age 42, had the highest OPS in August of any major-league hitter who got at least 65 plate appearances. That 1.224 OPS was 85 points higher than anybody else in the sport. Did I really just type that? In the modern era, only one other player that old has ever had a 1.200 OPS or better in any calendar month, according to Baseball-Reference/Stathead. And who'd have thunk it was **Barry Bonds** (1.349, in April 2007)?

He slugged .803! Can you imagine slugging .803 for a calendar month at 42 years old? Only Bonds (.814, April 2007) would be able to report back on that sensation. No one else their *age has even slugged .700* in any month. You know who had the best slugging percentage in the big leagues last month? Yessir. That Pujols guy. He had only two months slugging .800 *in his 20s* (and none in his 30s). But he just slugged .803 at 42. In real life.

He hit eight home runs! There was a time about a week ago when it looked like Pujols also had a chance to lead the major leagues in August homers. *At 42!* Alas, **Aaron Judge, Mookie Betts, Nolan Arenado, Paul Goldschmidt and Eugenio Suárez** decided to go and hit nine. Still ... want a list of players who haven't hit eight home runs in *any* month this season? Here are a few: **Freddie Freeman, Manny Machado, Juan Soto, José Ramírez and Alex Bregman**. Heard of them?

He hit five home runs in five games! Also, six home runs in eight games ... and seven in 10 games. Whoa. ... Albert spewed all those bombs from Aug. 10-22. It was quite a show. So let's think about how unlikely that blitz was.

Here are three guys who haven't hit five home runs in five games at any point this year: **Yordan Alvarez**, Betts and **Rafael Devers**. ... And how about three who haven't hit seven in 10 games at any point this year: **Pete Alonso**, **Shohei Ohtani** and **Vladdy Guerrero Jr.** ... What?

Now here come three who didn't hit seven *in their careers* at age 42 or beyond: **Willie Mays**, **Willie McCovey** and **Willie Stargell**. (I was in an all-Willie mood.) ... And finally, you know how many other men Pujols' age have ever hit seven in 10 games? Correct. That would be zero. **Ted Williams** used to be the record-holder, at age 41. Heard of him?

He had a 4-for-4, 2-HR game! C'mon. Stop it. Pujols was the oldest player ever to have one of those 4-for-4, two-homer games (Aug. 20 in Arizona). And only four other men ever had a game like that at any point after turning 40: **Stan Musial**, **Babe Ruth**, **Rickey Henderson** and Stargell. They sound familiar!

But hang on. There's one more:

He's out-Judge-ing Judge! This isn't an August thing, but you still need to know it.

- **OPS vs. left-handed pitchers in 2022:** Pujols 1.194, Aaron Judge 1.022.
- **Slugging percentage vs. LHP in 2022:** Pujols .781, Judge .664.

So wait: Judge is having a season for the history books ... *and Pujols beats him in OPS against left-handers by 172 points, and in slugging versus lefties by 117 points?*

POSITION PLAYERS PITCHING

If you've read this column much, you know that nobody enjoys a wacky position-player pitching appearance more than we do at Weird and Wild. But speaking from the standpoint of somebody who writes down *every frigging one of those appearances* in a handy spiral notebook

Holy **José Oquendo**! This is getting exhausting.

We ripped through our 100th position-player mystery-pitcher appearance of the season this week. (*Hell yeah, that's a record.*) And we're now up to an astonishing 103 of them, with almost five weeks left in the season. So here come Six Late-Breaking Things You Absolutely Need to Know About Position Players on the Mound (even though you probably weren't aware until now that you needed to know them).

Six of one, half-dozen of the other — Did anybody except the Weird and Wild column notice that on Aug. 23, *six* position players got to pitch — on one day? First time in history that's

happened. The old record was five in a day — set waay, waay back a whole 49 days earlier, on July 5.

All Hansers on deck — We've never seen a position player with a pitching niche quite like the Dodgers' Hanser Alberto. He has pitched six times this year. But that's not even the big news. The big news is, *the Dodgers have won all six games he's pitched in*. As I mentioned on Starkville this week, *they only won seven games Walker Buehler pitched in this year!*

The king and his Bethancourt — Then there's the Rays' **Christian Bethancourt**. On Aug. 23, he did something you don't see much: He pitched and caught in the same game ... *and his team won*. I could find only three other players in the Baseball-Reference database who had ever done that — but they were all gimmick games in which those guys played all nine positions. So that wasn't quite this!

The summer of 42 — Another thing you run across when you write down every one of these position-player appearances is stuff like what happened last Friday, when three mystery twirlers (**Whit Merrifield, Hunter Dozier and Austin Wynns**) served up home runs on the same day. That's not a record — since **Yadier Molina and Josh VanMeter** allowed *four in the same game* on May 22. But ...

You know what *is* a record? We've now had 42 bombs hit off position players this year. Yeah, 42 — including five just off VanMeter! That blows away the previous record of 32, set in 2019. But that doesn't begin to explain how wacky it is. Maybe this would: There were only eight home runs hit against position players *in the whole decade of the 2000s (2000-09)*. And now there are basically eight a month.

Family guys — Both Gordon brothers — **Nick Gordon and Dee Strange-Gordon** — have pitched this year. They have a 9.00 ERA in four appearances. Their dad, longtime smokeballer **Tom (Flash) Gordon**, had a couple of stretches in which his ERA didn't add up to 9.00 over *three* consecutive years. ... Phillies infielder **Nick Maton** pitched this week — and did something his brother Phil (an actual pitcher) hasn't done in any of his 54 appearances this season for the Astros: allow four hits in one appearance. ... And **Kody (Son of Roger) Clemens** pitched this week for the *fourth* time this year. The good news: His ERA is down to 4.50. The bad news: His father pitched 24 seasons in the big leagues — and only had an ERA that high once.

Franimal House — Finally, when I watched **Franmil Reyes** — all 6-foot-5, 265 (or whatever) pounds of him — saunter in to pitch for the Cubs on Aug. 23, how could I not wonder:

Is this the biggest position-player hulk ever to throw a pitch?

That's actually unanswerable, because these guys all lie about their weight. But let's just go with official heights and weights, because why not? If we're trusting those, Reyes ranks as the third hugest in the wild-card era, behind ...

Adam Dunn — 285 pounds (or whatever)

Pablo Sandoval — listed at (cough, cough) 268 pounds (give or take 100).

HOME RUNS IN A YEAR

JUDGE OF THE YEAR AWARD — I don't know if Aaron Judge is going to hit 61 home runs this *season*. But here's a little bulletin for the descendants of **Roger Maris**: This man has already hit 61 home runs this *year*.

By that, I mean the last calendar year. So I got curious about how many American Leaguers have done that (hit 61 or more) in *any* calendar year since Maris set the single-season AL home run record, with 61 in 1961. Here's that spectacular answer, courtesy of my friends from STATS Perform:

67 — Albert Belle (8/1/1995 – 7/31/1996)

66 — Ken Griffey Jr. (7/25/1997 – 7/24/1996)

63 — Alex Rodriguez (9/18/2001 – 9/17/2002)

62 — José Bautista (7/10/2010 – 7/9/2011)

62 — David Ortiz (8/28/2005 – 8/27/2006)

61 — Aaron Judge (9/1/2021 – 8/31/2022)

Bonus name-drop: Most recent National League hitters to do it: Giancarlo Stanton (2017-18) and Ryan Howard (2005-06).

YANKED FROM A NO-HITTER

Justin Verlander already had three no-hitters on his Hall of Fame application form when he went out to pitch on Aug. 23 against the Twins — and spun off six more hitless innings. But then his manager, **Dusty Baker**, officially resigned from the Old School Skipper Club — by pulling his ace after 91 pitches. Which meant ...

Verlander had just become only the second pitcher since 1900 to throw at least three no-hitters, *then get gonged in the middle of another no-hitter* (in the sixth inning or later). So who was the other? Ha. Who do *you* think was the other?

It was **Nolan Ryan**, of course. The king of the no-no's had already fired off *five* career no-hitters when he started for the Rangers on Opening Day 1990 — and then got pulled after five hitless innings and 91 pitches. Sacrilege! On one hand, Ryan is still reputed to have thrown 158 pitches in a 1974 no-hitter. On the other hand, *he was 43 years old* at the time this game rolled along.

STICKING AROUND

Marlins workhorse **Sandy Alcántara** had something happen to him last weekend that felt like a scene from a 1992 flashback. Here was the situation:

Two outs in the ninth inning. Bases loaded. One-run lead over the Dodgers. One hundred eight pitches already emptied from his tank. And his trusty manager, **Don Mattingly**, actually *left him in the game!*

I know what you're thinking: *Bet that hasn't happened in a while.* Hey, good call!

- Last time any team left any starter in with a one-run lead, bases loaded and two outs in the ninth: *10 years ago!* That was **Lucas Harrell**, of the 2012 Astros, with a 1-0 lead but “only” 107 pitches thrown. He then whiffed the next hitter to finish the deal.
- Last time it happened *with that many pitches* (or more): On April 16, 2012, positive-thinking Tigers manager **Jim Leyland** let Verlander keep going with 131 pitches! Verlander then punched out **Alex Gordon**. Ball game.
- But amazingly, we've seen this only two other times in the 21st century! One was **Clayton Kershaw** (119 pitches) on April 21, 2011. (Oops! Kershaw blew that lead three pitches later.) The other: **Bartolo Colon** (135 pitches) on July 18, 2002. (He got a game-ending groundball one pitch later.) And that's it.

So how'd it work out for Mattingly and Alcántara? Perfection!

RECORDS ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN

WASN'T THAT A-MAYS-ING — Here's a standing ovation from the Weird and Wild column for the Mets, for retiring **Willie Mays'** No. 24 last weekend. We're even willing to overlook the slight technicality that, in between Mays' exit from Queens and that number retirement, they'd once handed No. 24 to **Kelvin Torve**.

But here's how that honor made it into the Weird and Wild column. The Mets retired Mays' number *50 years after the Giants retired it*, in 1972. And I spent way too much time confirming that broke this goofy record:

Longest gap between the same player having his number retired by two teams!

Previous record-holder: **Frank Robinson**, 26 years (Orioles in 1972, Reds in 1998).

Previous runner-up: **Reggie Jackson**, 11 years (Yankees/A's).

Can this record ever be broken? Please discuss.

STREAKING

ALL THE COREY DETAILS — **Corey Dickerson** and the Cardinals rolled into Wrigley Field last week, and some stunning Weirdness and Wildness busted out. Dickerson made an out in his first at-bat of the series. And then ...

Got 10 hits in a row: Back-to-back four-hit games, then two more hits to kick off the next day. Let's mull the meaning of this.

You know who never had two straight four-hit games at Wrigley? Would you believe **Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, Ryne Sandberg, Ron Santo, Mark Grace** and, basically, *everybody who ever played for the Cubs ... except ...* the only Cub ever to do this: the unforgettable (until now) **Randy Jackson** (on April 15-17, 1954).

You know who did? Five visiting players in Wrigley history have had back-to-back four-hit games in the same series: **Ozzie Smith** (Aug. 10-11, 1983), **Juan Samuel** (Aug. 17-18, 1985), Hard-Hittin' **Mike Benjamin** (June 13-14, 1995), **Ray Durham** (June 12-13, 1999) and Dickerson. In other words ... three Cardinals *and only one Cub*.

Strange But True addendum! Only 11 other players in the modern era have ever gotten hits in 10 straight at-bats (or more). You know what separates Dickerson from all those other guys? He's the only one who had his streak come to an end *but still wound up on base* (thanks to an out at the plate).

30 – 30

WELCOME TO THE 30-30 CLUB (NOT THAT ONE) — **Mookie Betts** hit his 30th homer for the Dodgers this week. **Anthony Rizzo** hit his 30th for the Yankees. That made them fun trivia questions waiting to happen. Store these away.

Hit 30 homers in a season for the Cubs and Yankees: Rizzo and ... **Alfonso Soriano**.

Hit 30 homers in a season for the Red Sox and Dodgers: Mookie and ... **Reggie Smith**.

You're welcome.

STRANGENESS IN ARIZONA

DESERT WEIRD/WILD STORM — As my friend (and loyal reader) Dan Heisman pointed out, that Diamondbacks-Phillies series in Arizona this week was as Weird and Wild as it gets. Here's why:

Game 1: Phillies score the first seven runs.

Games 1 and 2: Diamondbacks score the next 22 runs and outscore the Phillies 25-3.

Game 3: Phillies outscore the Diamondbacks 18-1 before the Diamondbacks score in the ninth to lose by 16 — in a game in which they somehow outhomered the team that blew them out.

That means these two teams alternated life on the wrong end of three streaks in which they were outscored by 46 runs — in one series. So that's bizarre enough. But then, in that final game Wednesday ...

The Phillies got 29 at-bats with men in scoring position (going 15 for 29)! Only one team in the Baseball Savant database (2008-22) has had more than 29 at-bats with RISP in any game. That was the Red Sox, with 32 on Sept. 15, 2017. But they kind of cheated — by playing 15 innings that day!

All nine Phillies starters had a multi-hit game! So how many times had that happened in the modern history of their franchise? If you guessed none, you win.

The Diamondbacks gave up no homers, lost by 16 runs and still outhomered the team that crushed them! Does this seem challenging to do? You have no idea. The last NL team to pull it off did so more than 80 years ago. That was the Giants, on Aug. 17, 1941 ... in an 18-2 loss to ... (who else?) *the Phillies!*

PENN PALS

The Red Sox just finished up a road trip to two cities in Pennsylvania. So what's so Weird and Wild about that? Only the fact that neither of those cities was Philadelphia.

Instead, they visited Pittsburgh and Williamsport. So since my records are a little sketchy of that old 1884 Altoona Mountain Citys juggernaut in the Union League, I asked STATS how many other teams had ever visited two Pennsylvania cities not named Philadelphia on the same trip. That answer is: The 2017 Cardinals, who also toured Pittsburgh and Williamsport. No cheesesteaks for them!

MORE STRANGE STUFF

THE HEADLINE: *Nationals end historic streak — of 43 straight games without a win by a starting pitcher.*

THE STRANGE BUT TRUE PART: So which starting pitcher ended that streak? It was the guy with the most *losses* (17) in the majors — **Patrick Corbin**, because of course it was!

THE HEADLINE: *A's end historic streak — of 81 games in a row without a triple.*

THE STRANGE BUT TRUE PART: And who hit that triple? It was *the catcher* — **Shea Langeliers**, because ... baseball!

DALLAS' LUCKY SEVENS — **Dallas Keuchel** got hauled out of limbo last Saturday to make an emergency start for the Rangers. A couple of hours later, his pitching line looked like this:

5.1 IP, 11 H, 7 R, 7 ER, 1 BB, 1 K, one 8.84 ERA on the old stat sheet.

So what's so Strange But True about that? Oh, only that it means Keuchel now has somehow allowed at least seven earned runs in a game this year for *three* teams (White Sox, Diamondbacks, Rangers). Does that seem hard?

Well, it's so hard that you know how many other pitchers could make that claim since earned runs became an official stat in 1913? Yep. That would be none, according to Baseball-Reference/Stathead.

BEWARE OF ZOMBIES (PART ONE) — When Zombie Runners roam the Baseball Earth, can Strange But Trueness be far behind? You know the answer to that.

So we start with a nutty Yankees-Mariners game on Aug. 9 in Seattle. Yeah, that's a while ago, but this is a Zombified Strange But True all-timer.

Thanks to extra-inning Yankees base running that's too bizarre to recap quickly here, the Yankees did a thing we've been waiting for three years now: They unfurled those mathematically challenging two-up, three-down innings *two innings in a row* (11th and 12th). They can thank an innovation that used to be impossible but not anymore: *The old leadoff double play* — two of them!

According to Katie Sharp, they're the first team ever to fire up two of those two-up, three-down innings in the same game. But that's not even the Strange But True part. The Strange But True part is ... the Yankees came to bat in the 10th, 11th and 12th innings, made nine outs *and Aaron Judge never batted* — or even made it out to second base as the Zombie Runner.

Baseball — in the Zombie Runner era!

BEWARE OF ZOMBIES (PART TWO) — Meanwhile in Chicago, there was this unfathomable game: Brewers-Cubs on Aug. 20 at Wrigley. And what made that one so Strange But True?

The Brewers led the game in the ninth inning ... and the 10th inning ... and the 11th inning — *and they lost.*

Are we used to these games yet? According to STATS, in the pre-Zombie times, there had been exactly one game in the entire modern era in which a team held a lead in the ninth, 10th and 11th innings and still lost. That was Marlins-Phillies on July 24, 1998.

And now that's happened to five teams in these Zombie times, including ... *four just this year:*

Braves vs. Brewers (May 18) ... Cubs vs. White Sox (May 29) ... Blue Jays vs. White Sox (June 21) ... and then again to those Brewers.

But we promise it's not just a Chicago-Milwaukee thing, as evidenced by ...

BEWARE OF ZOMBIES (PART THREE) — Then you had the Angels, in their visit to the always innovative Trop to face the Rays on Aug. 24. They took the lead in the eighth. They took the lead in the 10th. They took the lead yet again in the 11th. And (yep) *they lost.*

Rarified pre-Zombie history: That had happened to only six teams in the modern era, nearly 120 seasons of it, according to STATS.

Not rarified post-Zombie history: It's now happened *eight* times in three seasons — and remember, one of those seasons was only 60 games and this one isn't finished yet.

So on one hand, these Zombie Runners are capable of turning extra innings into the wildest overtime in sports. On the other hand, it sure is complicating the art of tracking the Strange But Trueness of every week!

WHIT'S UP WITH THAT — Let's ask again: How Strange But True is baseball? This strange ...

Aug. 21 at Yankee Stadium: **Andrew Benintendi** (Yankees) and **Whit Merrifield** (Blue Jays) hit home runs in the same game.

April 2021 through July 2022: Benintendi and Merrifield were teammates with the Royals for more than 200 games. How many times do they homer in the same game as Royals players?

You've got it. That would be none!

REINCARNATION IS AN ACTUAL THING — Finally, I'm nominating this as the Strangest But Truest inning of 2022.

Aug. 17 in Cleveland. Eighth inning. Tigers leading the Guardians 4-2. **Andrew Chafin** on the hill. Whereupon ...

He strikes out the first hitter (**Owen Miller**) ... then strikes out the second hitter (**Andrés Giménez**) ... then strikes out the third hitter (**Luke Maile**) ... except this happens.

Oops. A whiff/wild pitch keeps the inning alive. And then what? The Guardians go single, double, single, double, double, double, intentional walk, single. That's what. So to recap ...

The Guardians' first three hitters strike out — *and then they score six runs in that same inning!*

Ever seen that before? Of course you haven't. The Elias Sports Bureau looked at every big inning back to the beginning of the expansion era (1961). And this was the first inning in those six decades in which any team scored six runs (or more) *after its first three hitters struck out*.

And ohbytheway, since that happened, the Guardians have played 101 theoretically normal innings. Want to take a wild guess how many times they've scored six runs (or more) in any of those "normal" innings? Right you are. That would be none.

COMPARING ERAS WITH JOE SHEEHAN

(his newsletter is worth checking out—stuff like this 4-5 days a week)

I want to use **Rod Carew**, whose Hall of Fame career ended almost 40 years ago, to illustrate changes in the game that don't get enough attention, particularly when old players have the mic.

Rod Carew came up with the Twins in 1967 as a slap-hitting second baseman, and in a season dominated by pitchers, he won the AL's Rookie of the Year award with a .292/.341/.409 line (113 OPS+). In a ten-team league with no interleague play, Carew faced 103 pitchers, 18 of them at least ten times. Familiarity was good to Carew. He hit .305 against those 18 hurlers, many of whom were among the league's best pitchers.

As Carew would no doubt tell you, there aren't many hitters like him today. Let's pick someone close, say, **Jose Ramirez**. We're about 80% through the 2022 season, and Ramirez has about 40 PA fewer than Carew did in 1967, so it's a fair comparison. With a month left, Ramirez has faced 208 pitchers -- more than twice as many as Carew did as a rookie. Carew faced seven pitchers at least 15 times and 18 pitchers at least ten times. Ramirez has faced one pitcher, **Drew Hutchison**, more than nine times (11). That number should rise in September, but so will the raw number of pitchers Ramirez will face.

The differences in those numbers are in part due to a greater number of opponents. Ramirez's Guardians will face 20 this year, again more than twice the number Carew's Twins did in 1967. They're also, however, due to changes in pitcher usage. In 1967, pitchers were asked to work deeper into games than they are today because the distribution of talent was such that tired starting pitchers were, for the most part, still better than fresh relievers. As I have written before, there was a third-time-around penalty for starters in the 1960s; teams just didn't have the statistics to prove it or the depth to act upon it.

'Twas Ever Thus (splits by time facing a pitcher, 1967)

	AVG	OBP	SLG	K%
First	.228	.294	.335	19.9%
Second	.242	.300	.356	15.7%
Third	.256	.316	.391	13.3%
Fourth	.261	.314	.386	13.2%

Man, look at those strikeout rates drop. (As many researchers have noted, the lack of slippage in the fourth-time-around numbers is mostly selection/survivor bias, with the sample dominated by the best pitchers having good days, often against weak opponents.)

Carew, in 1967, had 35 hits when facing a starter for a third time or more. Ramirez has just 90 *plate appearances* this year with a comparable advantage. Carew also had five hits when facing a reliever for a second or third time in a game. Ramirez has three such plate appearances.

Modern hitters hardly ever face tired pitchers. Over his career, Rod Carew faced what we'll call Tired Pitchers -- starters past the second time around, relievers past the first -- in more than a third of his career plate appearances. He got a third of his career hits, 1,022, against them. Jose Ramirez, coming along 45 years later, has faced just 18% Tired Pitchers, and has just 213 hits against them. The league-level numbers are instructive.

Third Time's a Charm...ingly New Pitcher (Tired Pitcher PA and H as % of all)

	PA%	H%
1967	26.9%	28.9%
1982	27.6%	29.4%
1997	22.3%	23.6%
2012	20.0%	20.9%
2022	13.7%	15.1%

As you can see, the percentage of opportunities against Tired Pitchers was pretty much constant during Rod Carew's career. Those opportunities steadily declined after he retired, and hitters in 2022 now get about half as many chances against that group.

I'm fond of saying, "It's the pitchers, not the hitters," and that's literally true. Unmentioned in that pithy phrase is that it's the pitcher usage, too. The steady reduction in individual pitcher workloads has allowed pitchers to work at max effort most of the time. That reduction, given the same need to fill 1440 innings in 2022 as in 1967, has led to more pitchers on a gameday roster and more pitchers being moved on and off those rosters. As well, pitchers who knew that their job demanded working deep into games treated the early innings differently than pitchers who expect to face 18 batters and no more.

Let's do this with home runs. **Albert Pujols** has been all over the news this August with a hot streak that has unexpectedly put 700 career homers in play. He has 693 career homers, with 191 of them (28%) coming against TPs, and 24% of his career plate appearances against them. Henry Aaron, to pick a name from that same part of the leaderboard, had 32% of his career PAs against TPs, and 36% of his homers, 270, against them. That's 80 extra homers that can be attributed, in part, to facing pitchers Pujols is far less likely to face.

Trust me when I tell you I am not writing this to denigrate the baseball accomplishments of Carew or **Hank Aaron** or anyone else. No one picks his day of birth, so we evaluate players as they played in their time. What I am very much looking to denigrate is the failure of former players, be it Carew today or **Rich Gossage** tomorrow or any color analyst anywhere on Wednesday, to properly acknowledge that hitting a baseball is harder now than it was when they played. In a 19-year career, Carew faced 716 pitchers, most of whom were asked, as part of their job, to pitch to a lot of hitters in each game. Ramirez, in barely nine years, has faced 899 pitchers, with the endurance part of their job no longer required.

So when someone whose career ended before the USSR did, who is now nearly twice as old as he was when he last tried to hit the 84-mph heat he feasted upon, who never faced an Edgertronic-honed slider, complains about modern hitters, I don't think we should give it much weight. Carew's complaints, shared by many, show a fundamental lack of understanding of modern pitching, modern pitcher development, modern pitcher usage. They show a fundamental lack of understanding of what hitters in 2022 face, and why they hit the way that they do.

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

(Part 2) baseballegg.com

Dan Holmes

Robin Roberts, 1926

The National League's best pitcher between World War II and the 1960s, Roberts was tough, durable, and had impeccable control. He won 286 games, and 20 or more in six straight seasons. He's the greatest pitcher in Phillies history.

Also born in 1926: **Duke Snider**

Richie Ashburn, 1927

Another great Phillies, and member of the 1950 Whiz Kids, like **Robin Roberts**. Ashburn was a pesky leadoff batter (no other position in the lineup can be called pesky), and he was probably the best defensive center fielder since **Tris Speaker**.

Others: **Billy Pierce**

Whitey Ford, 1928

"He was 'The Chairman of the Board.' He could do it all. He was a tremendous pitcher. He could hit and he could bunt. He was an excellent fielder and he had a great pickoff move." — teammate **Bobby Richardson**

Elston Howard, 1929

Howard was a great athlete who starred in every sport in high school and was a standout in the Negro Leagues playing for **Buck O'Neil**. He was considered the perfect black player to break the Yankees color line because he was a "Yankee type," meaning he was quiet, respectful, and not too flashy.

Dick Groat, 1930

Groat is a member of the College Basketball Hall of Fame, he was a guard for Duke, and he remains the only player in NCAA history to lead the nation in scoring and assists in the same season. Despite his talent on the hardcourt, he chose to pursue baseball because well, the NBA was not such a big thing in the early 1950s. **Branch Rickey** was president of the Pirates at that time and he made Groat a lucrative offer to join the team directly off the college campus. Groat played shortstop for Pittsburgh just three days after completing his course work in college, getting two hits in his first start. Minus two years when he was serving in the Korean War, Groat was at short for the Bucs for the next decade.

Willie Mays, 1931

The greatest living player (as of 2022).

Maury Wills, 1932

It took eight and a half seasons in the minor leagues before Maury Wills got a chance to show what he could do in the majors. His path was blocked by **Pee Wee Reese**, but Maury was ready for prime time in 1956 when he was 23 years old and in his sixth professional season. Give him those extra three seasons and maybe 450 hits and 120 stolen bases, and Wills is over 2,500 hits and 700 stolen bases. He won an MVP Award (deserved or not), single-handedly brought the speed game back to the game, and he played on three World Championship teams. Do those three extra years push Wills over the tipping point and into Cooperstown? Probably.

Rocky Colavito, 1933

Born in the Bronx, the muscular Colavito was Cleveland's right fielder when he was 21 years old, hitting 21 homers as a rookie. It was the first of 11 straight years he hit at least 20 homers.

Also born in 1933: **Norm Cash**

Hank Aaron, 1934

This has to be the best year for baseball babies: 1934 when three of the ten greatest right fielders in history entered the world.

As much as Aaron is still remembered, it's possible The Hammer is underrated. He was far more than a simple home run hitter: Aaron won a batting title, he routinely had 200 hits, and early in his career he was a superb baserunner. He still ranks among the top five players to ever appear on a diamond. He was the last negro leaguer to still be active in the major leagues.

Others born in 1934: **Al Kaline, Roberto Clemente**

Frank Robinson, 1935

Another top ten right fielder. Robinson was the first black manager, and he was basically Hank Aaron Lite: he could do essentially everything Henry could do, but maybe 5% less. A truly fantastic baseball player and leader.

Also born this year: **Bob Gibson**

Harmon Killebrew, 1936

In high school in Idaho, Killebrew was a good basketball player, and he probably could have become an NFL linebacker if not for a knee injury. He reportedly hit .890 his senior season. The Senators made him a bonus baby, and within a few years "Killer" was scaring the hell out of pitchers in the American League.

Also born in 1936: **Don Drysdale**

[Brooks Robinson, 1937](#)

Came on to the big stage after his brilliant performance in the 1970 World Series, but Brooks Robinson was the best defensive third baseman in baseball the moment he took over at the hot corner for the Orioles in the late 1950s. Thing is: he's the best third baseman to ever play the position.

Others born in 1937: **Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda**

[Willie McCovey, 1938](#)

"If you pitch to him," **Sparky Anderson** said, "he'll ruin baseball. He'd hit 80 home runs. There's no comparison between McCovey and anybody else in the league."

The years and the commonplace nature of home run hitters has obscured the greatness of McCovey, who was a fearsome slugger. He's probably one of the five best left-handed sluggers in baseball history.

Also born in 1938: **Billy Williams, Gaylord Perry, Tony Oliva**

[Carl Yastrzemski, 1939](#)

Some guys rise to the occasion. In his 17 postseason games, the final 12 games of the 1967 pennant race, and the 1978 AL East playoff (the 30 most important games of his career), Yaz hit .430 (49-for-114) with 10 homers, 29 RBIs, and 31 runs scored.

Players also born to their mothers in 1939: **Phil Niekro, Lou Brock**

[Ron Santo, 1940](#)

Was Santo better than **Brooks Robinson**? He was at his peak, whether measured by three-year, five-year, or seven-year increments. Whereas Robinson derived 75% of his value from his defense, Santo was closer to a 50/50 player. His defense was excellent, but he could hit the ball out of the park too. Players like Robinson, who are clearly greater at one thing, are usually overrated a bit. While players blessed with many diverse skills tend to be underrated. Another example of this phenomenon would be the comparison between **Ozzie Smith and Alan Trammell**.

Also born in 1940: **Willie Stargell, Luis Tiant**

[Pete Rose, 1941](#)

Pete Rose had this thing he did during the game that irritated his teammates. Pete would face a right-handed pitcher, let's say, batting left-handed, and after getting a hit he'd say, "This guy's got nothing." His teammates who were right-handed batters would tell Pete to switch to the right side next time to see what kind of stuff the pitcher had.

[Dick Allen, 1942](#)

From his rookie year through 1974, a span of 11 seasons, Allen ranked second in baseball in slugging to Henry Aaron. He ranked fifth in on-base percentage and second in OPS. Only six players scored more runs or drove in more runs than Allen, and all of them are in the Hall of Fame. He out-slugged ten future Hall of Famers who were his contemporaries, including Frank Robinson, **Carl Yastrzemski, Willie McCovey, Harmon Killebrew, and Roberto Clemente.**

Others born in 1942: **Tony Perez, Fergie Jenkins, Bert Campaneris, Jim Wynn**

[Joe Morgan, 1943](#)

Morgan was small, only about 5'7 and 160 pounds. Remember that runt, David Eckstein, how he looked so out of place at shortstop for the Angels in the early 2000s? Eckstein was ten pounds heavier than Little Joe. But small as he was, Morgan could do it all: run, hit, hit for power, catch the ball, all the things you want. We rate Little Joe as the greatest second baseman of all-time.

Also born in 1943: **Tommy John**

[Tom Seaver, 1944](#)

In 1969, Seaver was remarkable, he started 35 games and in 24 of them he allowed zero, one, or two runs. He won 25 games, threw five shutouts, and got better as the season drew to a close. Seaver went 7-0 after August 31st with seven complete games, three shutouts, a 0.71 ERA, and he did not allow a home run. He pitched ten innings in his Game Four victory in the World Series, helping the "miracle" become reality for the Mets.

That was an amazing season, and Seaver had like four of those years and three or four more not far off it.

Others born in 1944: **Steve Carlton**

Rod Carew, 1945

Won seven batting titles, including six in a seven-year span. Twice he was hitting .400 in July. He was the best bunter of his generation, but also one of the best baserunners. And there may have been no one born after World War II who could hit a baseball as perfectly as Carew.

Others born this year: **Jim Palmer, Don Sutton**

Reggie Jackson, 1946

Did anyone ever have more knack for drama than Reggie? In Game Six of the 1977 World Series in The Bronx, Jackson hit home runs in each of his last three at-bats, on three pitches. In that famous game, Reggie only saw three strikes and hit each of them over an outfield fence. Talk about drama.

A lot of people know that story, but there's a postscript. Let's fast forward six months to the next game the Yankees played at Yankee Stadium: Opening Day at The House That Ruth Built in April of 1978. Every fan who entered the stadium was given a REGGIE! bar, an oval confection of peanuts dipped in caramel and smothered with chocolate. In his first at-bat, Reggie came to the plate with runners on first and second. Facing knuckleballer **Wilbur Wood**, Jackson smacked a three-run homer, picking up where he left off the previous October. When he returned to his position in right field, fans threw hundreds of REGGIE! bars onto the field.

Others: **Bobby Bonds**

Johnny Bench, 1947

Apparently, people were making baby catchers in 1947, a year that possibly rivals 1934 for the best ballplayers born in one calendar term.

Others born in 1947: **Nolan Ryan, Carlton Fisk, Thurman Munson**

Steve Garvey, 1948

Do you love or hate Steve Garvey? If you were a Dodgers fan, you liked all those runs he drove in during the playoffs. But he also had some weird stuff happen to him off the field.

Others born in 1948: **Ron Cey, George Foster, Dave Concepcion**

Mike Schmidt, 1949

Clearly the greatest third baseman ever. Somewhat lost among his 500+ home runs is the fact that Schmidt was an excellent defender at the hot corner. He perfected the "come in on a slow roller and fire the ball across your body" play that every third baseman has to make now.

Ron Guidry, 1950

Guidry might have been as valuable to his team in 1978 as any pitcher has ever been. That year he won 14 times after a Yankee loss. When the Yanks fell 14 games behind the Red Sox in July, their record was 48-42. Guidry's mark was 14-1, meaning the Yanks were an embarrassing 34-41 when their star lefty wasn't getting the decision. The team crawled back, caught the Red Sox, and triumphed in a famous one-game playoff in Fenway Park (Guidry won that game too).

Also born in 1950: **Ken Griffey Sr.**

Dave Winfield, 1951

At 6'6 and 220 pounds with long legs and a giant wingspan, Winfield was unlike anyone else in the big leagues. He looked like a power forward wearing tight pants. In his fourth full season he was an All-Star. The next year he hit .300 for the first time, and the next year he led the league in runs batted in. He was 28 years old when he hit the free agent market. That's when George Steinbrenner entered his life, and nothing was ever the same again, though Winfield kept being a great ballplayer.

Other future ballplayers who were in diapers in 1951: **Bert Blyleven, Dwight Evans, Goose Gossage**

Fred Lynn, 1952

Folks forget how great a player Lynn was. And he was a superstar for a long, long time. He won the MVP as a rookie in 1975, and four years later he had an even better year.

George Brett, 1953

People loved George Brett because he was a superstar who acted like the last guy off the bench. He was lavished with attention, but he preferred the company of Regular Joes. He was unaffected by wealth and fame. He won batting titles in three different decades, had more than 3,000 hits, and he was one of the greatest postseason performers in history.

Andre Dawson, 1954

A five-tool player who could change games by the sheer force of his talent.

Other humans who arrived on Planet Earth in 1954: **Gary Carter, Ozzie Smith**

Robin Yount, 1955

"He's probably the most unselfish player I can imagine, going about his job year in and year out." — **Paul Molitor**

Paul Molitor, 1956

Random fact about Molitor: he and Robin Yount and **Jim Gantner** played more games together than any three teammates in baseball history.

Others born in 1956: **Eddie Murray, Dale Murphy**

Lou Whitaker, 1957

Whitaker was 38 when he retired and he was still a fine ballplayer. He had the best final three seasons of any second baseman in history, though by that time he was essentially a platoon player. Nevertheless, when he retired he was doing everything he was good at: the powerful arm, covering ground at second, drawing walks, hitting for power, and driving in runs. Sweet Lou might be the only second baseman in baseball history who had a full career and never had a bad season.

Other players born in 1957: **Dave Stieb, Lee Smith**

Rickey Henderson, 1958

After Rickey Henderson broke the career record for runs scored, he asked the Padres if he could have home plate as a keepsake. Home plate is set deep into the ground, held in place by a pole a few feet long. To unearth home plate, the Padres had to schedule it for the offseason because Rickey had scored the record-setting run in the final homestand of the year. A few days after the season, the Padres had a small number of staff on hand to dig up the trophy. Rickey waited patiently with officials from the San Diego front office as a member of the grounds procured his prize. When the plate was retrieved, Henderson took it in his hands and held it above his head. He circled the field, making mock crowd noises and yelling "RICKEY HENDERSON! THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME!"

Others who arrived in 1958: **Wade Boggs, Alan Trammell**

Tim Lincecum, 1959

What are the chances that the two greatest leadoff hitters in history would debut in the same season, 11 weeks apart? Probably the same as two of the greatest center fielders to ever play the game making their debut six weeks apart in 1951 (**Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays**), or two of the five greatest third basemen being drafted with successive picks in the same draft (**Mike Schmidt, George Brett**). These clusters happen sometimes.

Others born in 1959: **Ryne Sandberg**

Cal Ripken Jr., 1960

The first great player born in the 1960s, Cal Ripken Jr. is simultaneously a legend and also one of the most overrated players ever. Yes, he is the best shortstop to ever play the game. But he didn't save baseball with his streak. That's hogwash. Sure, he was a gamer and tough. But demanding that he play every day (every inning for a long time) was selfish. But, even if he was the second best Junior in baseball for most of his career, he was noteworthy.

Other great players born in 1960: **Tony Gwynn, Kirby Puckett**

Don Mattingly, 1961

In 1995 when he finally got to the playoffs for the first time, "Donnie Baseball" mustered the old magic and banged out ten hits and a homer in five games against Seattle. The final play of his career was when he watched Ken Griffey Jr. slide home with the winning run to eliminate the Yankees. Mattingly was free to sign with any team in 1996, but he sat out, refusing an offer from the Orioles in the middle of the season. He watched from his easy chair as the Yankees won the World Series that fall. The following January he officially retired.

Roger Clemens, 1962

You know him, and you know what he did.

Others born in 1962: **Eric Davis, Darryl Strawberry**

Randy Johnson, 1963

A great case can be made for Johnson being the best pitcher ever. Once he tamed his fastball, he was as unhittable as any hurler since **Sandy Koufax**.

Others born in 1963: **David Cone, Edgar Martinez**

Barry Bonds, 1964

You know him, you know what he did.

Others born in 1964: **Rafael Palmeiro, Barry Larkin, Bret Saberhagen**

Craig Biggio, 1965

Bill James once rated Biggio the greatest second baseman of all-time. He wasn't, but he was good for a while, and accomplished quite a bit in the regular season for the Astros, whether he was playing second, catching, or in the outfield.

Also born in 1965: **Matt Williams**

Greg Maddux, 1966

From 1993 to 1995, Maddux might have been as dialed-in as any pitcher ever. Encompassing his last 13 starts in 1993 and the entirety of the 1994 and 1995 seasons, Maddux made 66 starts in the regular season. This was his entrée to Atlanta, in the heart of what became known as The Steroid Era, when run scoring was on the rise, and batters were smacking homers at a record pace. In those 66 starts, Maddux allowed two earned runs or less in 58 of them. He had 62 quality starts (at least six innings and three earned runs or less) out of the 66 total starts. The league ERA over those three years was 4.14, or about 2 ½ runs higher than Maddux (1.58).

Also born in 1966: **Larry Walker, Albert Belle, Curt Schilling, Tom Glavine**

John Smoltz, 1967

Smoltz had difficulty throwing a baseball slow, always did. Early in his career he was a two-pitch pitcher: fastball and curve. **Greg Maddux and Tom Glavine** showed him how they threw the change, but every time Smoltz threw it, the pitch went too fast. Finally, Smoltz taught himself the split-finger fastball, which he was able to throw six to seven miles per hour slower than his fastball but with the same arm action. He credited the splitter with helping him win his Cy Young Award.

Also born in 1967: **Kenny Lofton**

Frank Thomas, 1968

A banner year for future ballplayers, legit and not.

Big Hurt is among the ten greatest right-handed hitters in history. He probably should have won 4-5 Most Valuable Player Awards. He had 3-4 seasons just as good or better than the years he won it (1993 and 1994).

Also born in 1968: **Jeff Bagwell, Sammy Sosa, Mike Piazza, Roberto Alomar, Gary Sheffield, Mike Mussina**

Ken Griffey Jr., 1969

Junior Griffey will be remembered for three things: the swing, backwards hat, and his smile. His swing was the most famous in baseball since **Ted Williams**, and for the first 12 years of his career “The Kid” was nearly as great as the original. Griffey won four home run titles and an MVP award before he was 30 years old.

Also born this year: **Mariano Rivera**

Jim Thome, 1970

Another Baby named James born in 1970: **Jim Edmonds**

Pedro Martinez, 1971

For a while, Pedro was as great a pitcher as anyone ever has been. What's amazing is how small he was, only 165-170 pounds during his most dominant years. Martinez didn't just beat teams, he terrified them. "Other teams don't like that he has no fear out there," teammate **Carl Everett** said, "He's not going to kiss anyone's butt and pitch a certain way that will get approval."

Also born this year: **Ivan Rodriguez, Billy Wagner**

Chipper Jones, 1972

"I always said Chipper was the kind of guy who could fall out of bed and go 3-for-4. He had that kind of talent." — **Tom Glavine**

"He fought through every at-bat, he had a plan for every pitch he was going to see. I never played with a guy who prepared better than Chipper." — **Mark Teixeira**

Others born in 1972: **Manny Ramirez, Andy Pettitte**

Ichiro Suzuki, 1973

In 1996, when Ichiro was 22 years old he played in an exhibition series against a team of MLB stars. He hit .333 with six stolen bases, throwing out two baserunners who had probably never imagined the skinny Japanese outfielder could throw like that. Two years later, when he was 24 years old, Ichiro played another exhibition series against stars from the United States and hit .380 with seven stolen bases. After that series, **Sammy Sosa** called him the best outfielder he'd ever seen. Three years after that Ichiro was dominating baseball in the U.S., clearly an elite player from day one.

Also born in 1973: **Todd Helton, Nomar Garciaparra**

Derek Jeter, 1974

It's not possible that Jeter could really be as insufferable as he comes across in that documentary titled "The Captain." During his career, Jeter was criticized for being boring and not saying enough to the media. Maybe that wasn't really him?

Alex Rodriguez, 1975

“No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.” — from *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Others born in 1975: **Vlad Guerrero Sr., David Ortiz**

Lance Berkman, 1976

Either the second-best first baseman in Houston Astros history, or the best left fielder in Astros history. Either way, the guy could rake.

Carlos Beltran, 1977

Beltran was a great teammate, a strong leader, and immensely talented. He was hired to manage the Mets one year after his retirement as a player, though he never managed a game because of his central role in The Great Houston Sign-Stealing Scandal. Prior to that mess, Beltran had been highly respected in the game, almost regal. He was sort of like the **Mariano Rivera** of the outfield. But the sign-stealing fiasco has washed away his patina.

Others born in 1977: **Andruw Jones, Roy Halladay, Roy Oswalt**

Chase Utley, 1978

Also born in 1978, because of course he was: **Jimmy Rollins**

Adrian Beltre, 1979

Beltre was an entertainer who happened to play baseball. He had a playful sense of humor, and in the three primary cities in which he played, Beltre became a fan favorite. One of the singular unique players of his generation, Beltre never forgot that he was playing a game.

Also born in 1979: **Johan Santana**

Albert Pujols, 1980

Not many people are talking about it, but Pujols has most likely now supplanted Lou Gehrig as the greatest first baseman in history.

Others born in 1980: **CC Sabathia**

Adam Wainwright, 1981

We recently mused over the idea that Wainwright might be the most popular pitcher in Cardinals franchise history.

Other noteworthy players born in 1981: **Josh Hamilton, Curtis Granderson**

David Wright, 1982

When the Mets finally got a great third baseman, he was really, really great, and as beloved as any Met since **Keith Hernandez**.

Others born in 1982: **Robinson Canó**

Miguel Cabrera, 1983

A lot of great ballplayers, future Hall of Famers, were born in 1983. Verlander will most likely end up with the most WAR of any baby born that year.

Others born in 1983: **Justin Verlander, Zack Greinke, Joe Mauer, Joey Votto**

Max Scherzer, 1984

Now seems likely to end up among the twenty best pitchers in history, based on the numbers. Mad Max also has the narrative too.

Josh Donaldson, 1985

In his first five full seasons, Donaldson was an offensive machine, averaging 67 extra-base hits and 87 walks. He also rated above average as a defender. He suffered injuries and missed most of the 2018 season, but he bounced back and smacked 37 homers in his one season with Atlanta.

Others born in 1985: **Evan Longoria, David Price**

Andrew McCutchen, 1986

May be the best center fielder in Pirates history. What do you think?

Also born in 1986: **Felix Hernandez**

Buster Posey, 1987

Yadier Molina and Joe Mauer? No, it's Buster who will be the catcher of his generation and the first two decades of the 21st century.

Others born in the same year: **Paul Goldschmidt**

Clayton Kershaw, 1988

Doesn't seem like Kershaw and **Jacob deGrom** are the same age, does it? deGrom didn't make his debut until he was 26 years old. By that time, Kershaw had 79 wins and more than 1,200 strikeouts.

Others born in 1988: Jacob deGrom

Freddie Freeman, 1989

When he isn't crying, Freeman is a helluva hitter. You miss Atlanta, Freddie? *Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn.*

Others born in 1989: **Anthony Rizzo, Madison Bumgarner**

Jose Altuve, 1990

One of the most unique ballplayers we've ever seen, for his size and offensive punch, Altuve has a chance to become the greatest "little ballplayer" in history. He's a full inch shorter than Joe Morgan, the current holder of that title. Morgan won two MVP awards, and Altuve has one. The "Pocket Cannon" has an outside chance to reach 3,000 hits and he could eclipse Morgan's total of home runs plus stolen bases. Morgan was a better defender and he was still a really good player late into his 30s, so it'll be a challenge for Altuve to eclipse "Little Joe," but not impossible.

Others born in 1990: **Gerrit Cole**

Mike Trout, 1991

duh

Bryce Harper, 1992

Here's a hot take: with Trout's back problems, Harper could end up with a more valuable career.

Others born in 1992: **Mookie Betts, Manny Machado, Jose Ramirez, Aaron Judge, Xander Bogaerts**

[Francisco Lindor, 1993](#)

Here's an odd possibility: as a rookie Lindor led the league in sacrifice hits, and after a few years he's become a power threat. If he were to lead the league in homers, he would be the first player in history to lead the league in sacrifice hits and home runs.

[Shohei Ohtani, 1994](#)

Certainly among the greatest Japanese players, and possibly the best either here or in his native country.

Others born in 1994: **Carlos Correa, Alex Bregman, Corey Seager**

[Sandy Alcantara, 1995](#)

It's still possible someone else could emerge as the best ballplayer to be born in '95.

Others born in the same year: **Shane Bieber, Cody Bellinger**

[Rafael Devers, 1996](#)

[Ronald Acuna Jr., 1997](#)

Also born in 1997: **Yordan Alvarez**

[Juan Soto, 1998](#)

I suppose he could possibly become the greatest player born in the 1990s, but **Mike Trout** has a big headstart.

[Vladimir Guerrero Jr., 1999](#)

Fernando Tatis Jr. was also born in 1999, but he seems to have an allergy to playing baseball games.

[Julio Rodriguez, 2000](#)

[Wander Franco, 2001](#)

Could also be **Michael Harris**, we just don't know yet.

[Jordan Lawlar, 2002](#)

At 19 in 2022, this kid should probably be playing shortstop for the Diamondbacks already. Has a very high ceiling.

Jasson Domínguez, 2003

Dominican-born outfielder prospect in the Yankees farm system.

Jackson Chourio, 2004

Another center fielder, this one from Venezuela, and expected to fill that position for the Brewers for many years when this teenager is ready.

The best ballplayers born in each decade:

- 1860s: **Ed Delahanty**
- 1870s: **Honus Wagner**
- 1880s: **Ty Cobb**
- 1890s: **Babe Ruth**
- 1900s: **Martín Dihigo**
- 1910s: **Ted Williams**
- 1920s: **Stan Musial**
- 1930s: **Willie Mays**
- 1940s: **Tom Seaver**
- 1950s: **Rickey Henderson**
- 1960s: **Barry Bonds**
- 1970s: **Chipper Jones or Pedro Martinez**
- 1980s: **Albert Pujols**
- 1990s: **Mike Trout**
- 2000s: **Julio Rodriguez (maybe)**

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Since 1934 there have been 12 back-to-back MVP seasons. The years and league are below—how many can you name?

2012-2013 AL	Miguel Cabrera
2008-2009 NL	Albert Pujols
2001-2002-2003-2004 NL	Barry Bonds
1993-1994 AL	Frank Thomas
1992-1993 NL	Barry Bonds
1982-1983 NL	Dale Murphy

1980-1981 NL	Mike Schmidt
1975-1976 NL	Joe Morgan
1958-1959 NL	Ernie Banks
1956-1957 AL	Mickey Mantle
1954-1955 AL	Yogi Berra
1944-1945 AL	Hal Newhouser

HOUSEKEEPING

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