

BASEBALL TIDBITS MARCH 2021

MARCH 7, 2021

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

Good morning baseball fans. If you asked me a year ago if I would have cared how well Jameson Taillon in a pre-season game I would have guessed no.

Albert Pujols and Miguel Cabrera will leave an enormous void when they hang up their spikes. They rank 1-2 on the active lists for hits, home runs, doubles, runs scored, runs batted in and total bases. They have, collectively, amassed three World Series titles, five Most Valuable Player Awards and 21 All-Star appearances.

Robinson Cano is third amongst active players in hits, RBIs and runs scored. Nick Markakis and Yadier Molina are the other two active batters with over 2,000 hits. Interestingly, thanks to a high number of walks and an overall change in how the game is played, the 29-year-old Trout hasn't had even 150 hits in a season since 2016. With 1,380 career hits, Trout's making a run at 3,000 looks, for now, a long shot.

The drop-offs in active leaders of other categories are just as extreme.

In home runs, Pujols (662) and Cabrera (487) are comfortably ahead of Edwin Encarnacion (424), Nelson Cruz (417) and Braun (352). The top player who could reasonably be described as still in his prime is Giancarlo Stanton of the Yankees, whose 312 career homers have him less than halfway to Pujols at age 31.

Zack Greinke is a very accomplished Major League pitcher. He has 208 wins, 2,689 strikeouts, a 3.37 ERA, a Cy Young and six All-Star Game selections. As he enters the later stages of his career, he's coming up on a few big milestones -- 311 K's away from 3,000 and 12 wins away from passing Hall of Famers like John Smoltz, Pedro Martinez and Don Drysdale. He has 9 career HRs and 9 career stolen bases. If he can get at bats in interleague games and reach 10 & 10 he would join Bob Gibson (24 HRs/13 steals) as the only other pitcher since 1920 to reach 10 & 10.

Only one of the 30 current franchises has never had a player lead its league in home runs-- Houston Astros.

I would not have guessed that Whit Merrifield of the KC Royals led the majors in hits in 2018 and 2019.

Spencer Torkelson of the Tigers is the No. 3 prospect in baseball. He shattered the Arizona State freshman record for home runs with 25 in 2018. Previous record holder was Barry Bonds (11 in 1984).

Jon Lester

Jon Lester has 193 victories and more than 2,300 strikeouts to his credit. He's won nine games in the postseason, and his record in the Fall Classic is 4-1 with a 1.77 ERA. How great has his World Series performance been? Lester ranks in elite company among southpaws in the Fall Classic. Here is lowest WS ERA, Wins-Losses, Innings Pitched and titles by lefty starters:

PITCHER	ERA	W-L	IP	TITLES*
Madison Bumgarner	0.25	4-0	36.0	Three
Harry Brecheen	0.83	4-1	32.2	Two
Babe Ruth	0.87	3-0	31.0	Two
Sherry Smith	0.89	1-2	30.1	None
Sandy Koufax	0.95	4-3	57.0	Three
Mickey Lolich	1.67	3-0	27.0	One
Jon Lester	1.77	4-1	35.2	Three

*Titles won include only those World Series where that pitcher appeared.

Lester was a key factory every time his team won the Fall Classic, and an important figure for nine teams that went to the postseason.

It wasn't only in the World Series where Lester was dominant. He posted a 2.51 ERA in 154 innings and 22 starts. Twelve times he started Game One of a postseason series, and he famously pitched out of the bullpen in the epic Game Seven of the 2016 World Series, allowing one run in three innings.

Only six pitchers: Lester, Kershaw, Scherzer, Verlander, Greinke, and Hudson have won at least 175 games and also posted an ERA+ of at least 118. Four of those pitchers seem certain to hoist a Hall of Fame trophy some day: Kershaw, Verlander, Greinke, and Scherzer. ERA+ (Earned Run Average compared to his league and adjusted by team and ballpark context). Lester may win his 200th game in 2021, and he may also collect his 2,500th career strikeout. Should he accomplish that, he will become just the fourth pitcher in the Wild Card Era to do that, joining Zack Greinke, CC Sabathia, and Justin Verlander. One can argue that Lester, as a multi-World Champion and seminal October hero, would have a great argument for Cooperstown. According to our rankings here on Baseball Egg, Lester rates among the [Top 100 Pitchers of All-Time](#).

Should Lester pitch beyond 2021, he could possibly join Colon, Sabathia, Hudson, and Verlander as the only pitchers of this era to win 220 games.

Speaking of Tim Hudson. I had no idea he had 222 career wins. He won 20 only once, with the 2000 Oakland A's. In 17 seasons with Oakland, Atlanta and San Francisco he struck out 2080 batters, threw 13 shutouts, had an ERA of 3.49, pitched over 3,000 innings and went 222-133.

The last time a Manager of the Year won a World Series happened in 2005 when Ozzie Guillen won the award and his Chicago White Sox rolled.

Here is every time it has happened:

2005: Ozzie Guillen, White Sox won World Series

2003: Jack McKeon, Marlins won World Series

2002: Mike Scioscia, Angels won World Series

1998: Joe Torre, Yankees won World Series

1996: Joe Torre was co-manager of the year, Yankees won World Series

1991: Tom Kelly, Twins won World Series

1988: Tommy Lasorda, Dodgers won World Series

1984: Sparky Anderson, Dodgers won World Series

Highest elevation ballparks:

1. Coors Field, Denver: 5,211 feet
2. Chase Field, Phoenix: 1,059 feet
3. Truist Park, Atlanta: 997 feet
4. Kaufman Stadium, Kansas City: 886 feet
5. Target Field, Minneapolis, 840 feet

Looking back--Luis Gonzalez's absurd 2001 season for the Diamondbacks. That year, he hit .325/.429/.688 with 57 homers, 128 runs scored and 142 RBIs. He walked 100 times. 17 more times than he struck out. Great year but tough to compete in NL with Barry Bonds 73 HRs, Sammy Sosa 64 HRs and Jason Giambi hitting .342.

Chet Lemon was a really good ballplayer, a three-time All-Star, a superb center fielder who probably should have a Gold Glove or two, and a line-drive hitter who led the league in doubles once and hit 215 career home runs.

How good a hitter was Frank Thomas?

1993. 41 HRs, 128 RBIs, .317 average, MVP

1994. 38/101/.353, MVP

1995. 40/111/.308

1996. 40/134/.349

1997. 35/125/.347, batting champ

2000. 43/143/.328

In 2006, at age 38 and after two injury-wrecked seasons, Thomas hit .270/.381/.545 with 39 homers and 114 RBIs for Oakland. He finished fourth in the MVP voting.

Texas Rangers--Going back 25 years, they have reached the playoffs eight times and won two American League pennants. Their players have won five MVP awards, 23 Gold Gloves, 22 Silver Slugger Awards, and their manager was named Manager of the Year three times. They once drew almost 3.5 million people to the park in a season; in the American League this century only the New York Yankees drew more.

Colorado Rockies Thoughts

They always have at least one star. Always. Yes, of course, some of this has to do with the light air at Coors Field, but honestly, it's quite striking.

In 1993, their debut season, Andres Galarraga hit .370 and won the batting title.

In 1994, Galarraga and Dante Bichette both had good years.

In 1995, Bichette finished second in the MVP voting and [Larry Walker](#) came around.

From 1996-2001, and even 2002, Walker played like the Hall of Famer he became. Other stars included Ellis Burks, Vinny Castilla, Gallaraga, etc.

Then Todd Helton arrived and he played at a supercharged Hall-of-Fame level roughly from 1999-2009 or so. Preston Wilson had a 141-RBI season in there somewhere, Jeromy Burnitz hit 37 homers one year.

Then came Matt Holliday, who finished second in the MVP voting in 2007 when the Rockies went to the World Series. That was Troy Tulowitzki's rookie year; he was fantastic. Cargo, Carlos Gonzlález, showed up, won a batting title, hit 40 homers another season, won three Gold Gloves. In 2013, a 22-year-old kid named Nolan Arenado took over at third base, he was absurd and wonderful, and Charlie Blackmon started hitting like crazy, and there was Trevor Story, and we should probably put DJ LeMahieu in there, and you get the point. Well, there are three points, actually.

As you can see, none of them are pitchers. It goes without saying that no Rockies pitcher has ever won a Cy Young Award. In fact, only three Rockies pitchers have finished in the top five in Cy Young voting.

Pirates Thoughts

Manny Sanguillen. What a joy he was. There have always been free-swingers in the game, from Yogi Berra to Vlad Guerrero, but Sanguillen was something else — the way he swung at any and every pitch, balls over his head, balls in the dirt, balls tossed to the crowd after being autographed, balls umpires would discard and roll toward the dugout. In 1971, he unintentionally — and unwillingly — walked six times all year. He still hit .319. He always seemed to do that.

Those Pirates teams had tons of good hitters: Willie Stargell, Al Oliver, Mike Easler, Bill Madlock (won 2 of his 4 batting titles with Pittsburgh), Richie Zisk, Rich Hebner, Bob Robertson.

The Pirates last appeared in the World Series in 1979, which feels to me like the day before yesterday but was actually 42 years ago. Forty-two years before that, America was in the midst of the Great Depression. We are farther away from 1979 than they were from World War II.

In those 42 seasons, the Pirates had losing records — usually dramatically bad records — in 30 of them. They have not won a playoff series in those 42 seasons.

Brady vs. Trout

Tom Brady — has won seven Super Bowls.

The greatest player in baseball — that would be Trout — has won zero World Series ... and, in fact, has won *zero postseason games*. (for a bit of contrast, Mickey Mantle played in 12 world series).

The division-play era extends back over half a century, to 1969. In those 52 seasons, 10,022 different players have appeared in a major-league game, according to STATS Perform. You know what all 10,022 have in common? Not one of them has won seven rings. The last player to play for seven World Series champions? That would be Mantle, whose final season was 1968 and who never played in a single postseason game that wasn't known as "the World Series."

Trout turns 30 this year. Best WAR ages 20-29 in history: Hornsby-Cobb-Mantle-A-Rod-Ruth-Trout.

Did you know that of the top 15 position players since 1900 (via Wins Above Replacement), three of them never won a World Series? That would be Barry Bonds (No. 4), Ty Cobb (No. 6) and Ted Williams (No. 14).

Seattle Mariners (by Joe Posnanski of The Athletic)

The Seattle Mariners, as you probably know, are the only team in baseball that has not played in a World Series. I say, “You probably know this,” but there’s also a chance that you have never actually thought about it. Five teams have been added since 1977, when the Mariners and Toronto Blue Jays came on board. The Blue Jays won the World Series in 1992 and 1993.

The Florida Marlins came about in 1993. They won the World Series four years later.

The Colorado Rockies were added that same year. They reached the World Series in 2007, though you might not remember them because that Series against the Red Sox ended before it began.

In 1998, the Arizona Diamondbacks were added, and they won the World Series in 2001. The Tampa Bay Devil Rays were added too, they shortened that to Rays shortly afterward, and have reached two World Series.

In 2005, the Montreal Expos became the Washington Nationals; they won the World Series two years ago.

The Royals reached four World Series after the Mariners were born, the Astros reached three, the Padres and Rangers reached two, and the Angels and Brewers made it to one each (with the Angels winning theirs and the Brewers losing theirs).

And all the while, the Mariners have not only *not* reached the World Series, but they’ve also never come all that close. They’ve been to three American League Championship Series but never really threatened to win any of them. The 1995 Mariners did take out the burgeoning New York Yankees, which led to Buck Showalter getting fired, which led to Joe Torre getting hired. So you can thank the Mariners for that. Then they lost in six games to Cleveland.

The 2000 Mariners won Game 1 of the ALCS against the Yankees, but they were blown out in the next three and again lost the series in six.

And then ... the 2001 Mariners, now, that’s an opera. Yes, I took the circuitous route just to spend some time talking about the 2001 Mariners — that team is endlessly fascinating to me.

Here's a big reason why: When you think of the 1990s Mariners, you naturally think about three of the greatest players in baseball history: [Ken Griffey Jr.](#), [Randy Johnson](#) and [Alex Rodriguez](#).

None of them were on the 2001 Mariners.

Instead, that team was this wonderful conglomeration of career years, last hurrahs and [Ichiro](#). Every so often, I go to that 2001 Mariners Baseball-Reference page and marvel at the absurdity of it all. Bret Boone drove in 141 RBIs? Arthur Rhodes went 8-0 with a 1.72 ERA? Jamie Moyer won 20 games for the first time at age 38? Mark McLemore, at age 36, as discussed above, stole 39 bases and hit nine triples? What the heck was even happening?

I give a lot of the credit to Ichiro — not only was he a great player, but he also brought an energy that was overwhelming. Every game was an event. Not only did the Mariners lead all of baseball in attendance — drawing more than 3.5 million people — but they also drew huge crowds on the road because people wanted to see Ichiro play. There was an electricity about that team, and it lasted all season. The Mariners led baseball in runs scored and the American League in ERA, Edgar Martinez had his last truly great season at age 38, Freddy García won the ERA title and Paul Abbott went 17-4. (Abbott would win five major-league games the rest of his career.)

That team signified to me what is possible in baseball when you have some great players, a lot of good players and this little bit of magic. They went 26-12 in one-run games, 34-10 in blowout games. They won the season series with every single team they played and had particular fun with the Angels, Rangers, Orioles and Twins (going 46-11 against those four teams). They won at least two-thirds of their games every single month.

If ever a team deserved a direct route to the World Series, it was that one. When you are 14 games better than any other team in the league, you shouldn't have to prove yourself in various short series. But this is how we have decided we like our baseball, and so the Mariners had to play a five-game series against a Cleveland team they finished 25 games ahead of in the standings. The Mariners barely survived that one, needing to win the last two games of the series just to advance.

Then they played a Yankees team they finished 21 games ahead of in the standings and had beaten six of the nine times they played during the season. The Mariners won Game 1 in a shutout. They got dismantled the rest of the way.

Top 20 Longest Post-Season On-Base Streaks since 1900

Including three Jeter streaks. This shows the top 30 and ties. A lot of great hitters were close behind with 15-16-17 straight games including—Mantle, Schmidt, Ripken Jr., Bernie Williams, Ruth, Foxx, Yaz, Reggie Jackson, Rose.

Lance Berkman 37 games

Manny Ramirez 37

Miguel Cabrera 31

Chase Utley 27

Carlos Ruiz 26

Jose Altuve 25

Daniel Murphy 25

Pablo Sandoval 25

Boog Powell 25

Carlos Beltran 24

Lou Gehrig 23

Ricky Henderson 22

Joe Morgan 22

Lorenzo Cain 21

Derek Jeter 21

Jeff Bagwell 21

Barry Bonds 21

Fred McGriff 21

Frank Schulte 21

Hunter Pence 20

Chuck Knoblauch 20

Dan Gladden	20
Albert Pujols	19
Ryan Howard	19
Derek Jeter	19
Pete Rose	19
Phil Rizzuto	19
Chris Taylor	18
Ellis Burks	18
Derek Jeter	18
David Justice	18
Hank Greenberg	18

MARCH 14, 2021

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

Ted Kluszewski. 6' 2" 225 pounds 1B for Cincinnati Reds known for his cut off sleeves to show his huge arms.

1953: .316/.380/.570, 40 homers, 34 strikeouts

1954: .326/.407/.642, 49 homers, 35 strikeouts

1955: .314/.382/.585, 47 homers, 40 strikeouts

There you go. Those are the last three seasons that a player hit 40-plus homers and struck out 40 or fewer times — that is, until Barry Bonds did it in 2004, the year he was intentionally walked 120 times.

Speaking of Cincinnati Reds, consider Joey Votto.

He won an MVP in 2010. He has led the league in on-base percentage seven times, has won a Gold Glove and he has a lifetime on-base percentage of .419, which is 14th in the history of modern baseball, just behind Mickey Mantle and just ahead of Stan Musial. He has 1908 career hits, 295 HRs and 966 RBIs. His .304 career average is 4th highest in MLB. Pretty strong.

From the “he was pretty good” file--John Mayberry. From 1972-75, he hit .277/.399/.493 with a 152 OPS+, drove in 100 RBIs three times, led the league in walks twice, led the league in OPS+ once and finished second in 1975 to Fred Lynn in the MVP balloting.

Oakland A's have never had a batting champion (I thought Carney Lansford won one. He hit .336 in 1989 but lost out to Kirby Puckett at .339).

Six of the last seven NL batting titles have been won by left-handed hitters. The lone right-hander in that group was the Rockies' DJ LeMahieu (.348 in 2016).

Only player to win an AL Rookie of the Year Award and an AL MVP Award as a Yankee in his career--catcher Thurman Munson (1970 ROY, 1976 MVP).

Five Padres pitchers have lead the National League in saves--Rollie Fingers (1977, '78), Mark Davis (1989), Trevor Hoffman (1998, 2006), Heath Bell (2009), Kirby Yates (2019).

Nick Markakis—better than I thought

He retired this week after a long career with Baltimore and Atlanta. I know I was surprised when I read his stats:

- Hit .288/.357/.423 with 1,119 runs, 514 doubles and 189 home runs in 2,154 big league games from 2006-20.
- Appeared in 2,074 games in right field, eighth most in MLB history.
- Markakis, 37, last played in the '20 postseason for Atlanta. He earned his lone All-Star nod, as well as his final Gold Glove and Silver Slugger Awards, for the Braves in 2018.
- With Baltimore, hit .290/.358/.435 across nine seasons.
- Played at least 155 games in seven of those campaigns, posting at least a .290 average and/or on-base percentage of at least .350 in six of them.
- Markakis won Gold Glove awards in 2011 and '14,

- With Atlanta on a four-year, \$44 million free-agent contract in 2015, ultimately hitting .283/.357/.402 over the next six seasons as the Braves rebuilt themselves into a force in the National League East.
- He earned his sole All-Star nod in 2018 and remained a respected clubhouse leader for an Atlanta team that claimed the past three NL East titles, reaching the NL Championship Series in 2020.
- In Orioles history, only four players played at least as many games as Markakis (1,365) and reached base at a higher clip (.358): Ken Singleton, Eddie Murray, Brady Anderson and Boog Powell.
- Markakis also holds the franchise records for games, starts and innings logged in right field, and the MLB record for consecutive errorless games by an outfielder (398).
- Only five right fielders recorded more career putouts in MLB history.
- Markakis' career total of 2,388 hits -- two more than Hall of Famer Ryne Sandberg -- ranks him 127th in MLB history.

Harper

Through his age-27 season, [Bryce Harper](#) has cracked more home runs than Willie Mays had at the same age. He has more hits than Pete Rose, he's hit more doubles than Barry Bonds, driven in more RBIs than Babe Ruth, scored more runs than Derek Jeter, and drawn more walks than Rickey Henderson. He has won an MVP award, a Rookie of the Year award, he's been an All-Star six times, and his 33.7 career WAR is better than more than 100 Hall of Famers at his age, all this even though he essentially lost the 2020 season.

in 2015 he had a season for the ages hitting .330/.460/.649 with a league-leading 42 homers and 118 runs scored. He was named MVP unanimously and there was reason to believe that he and Mike Trout would become the Mantle and Mays of their generation, battling hearts for the unofficial title of the greatest player in baseball.

Long Runs

Going into 2020, there were only seven players who had played 1,500 career games all with the same team. One of those, Elvis Andrus, was traded to Oakland this February. Another, Ryan

Braun, will not be back with Milwaukee after the team paid a buyout rather than pick up his 2021 option. Yet another, Ryan Zimmerman, sat out the 2020 season but is now trying to play again.

The other four: St. Louis' Yadier Molina; [Cincinnati's Joey Votto](#); New York's Brett Gardner; and Alex Gordon of the Royals.

Phillip and Phillips

It wasn't Will Smith pitching to Will Smith in last year's playoffs (an MLB first). The third-inning matchup would have otherwise been a footnote in the Orioles' [13-1 loss to the Pirates](#), had it not posed such a challenge for those scoring at home. What are we talking about? The name fun that occurred when Orioles righty [Evan Phillips](#) and Pirates infielder [Phillip Evans](#) squared off for the first time.

The at-bat, which resulted in a seven-pitch walk,

The two had never faced each other in the big leagues before.

Perhaps it's fitting that the situation involved the Pirates, who are no strangers to this sort of name fun. In 2018, Pirates infielders Kevin Kramer and Kevin Newman -- both of whom appeared in Sunday's exhibition -- made headlines by [creating the ultimate baseball "Seinfeld" tribute](#) in recent memory.

Tatis

Last night I caught an inning of a Padres-Diamondbacks spring training game. Noone out, Fernando Tatis Jr. of the Padres on 1B. Groundball off the pitcher's leg, charging 2B throws out the batter at 1B. Tatis never stops and goes first to third. Manny Machado comes to bat and pops to SS in shallow left. Tatis tags and scores ahead of the throw.

Juan Soto

Speaking of exciting young NL players. One reason it's so much fun to compare Soto and Williams is that, through their age-21 seasons, they have almost the same number of big-league plate appearances (1,349 for Soto, 1,338 for Williams). In fact, they're two of only 37 hitters in history who have made it to the plate at least 1,300 times through their age-21 season. You can find Hall of Famers and All-Stars all over that list. But guess who sits at the top of that group?

For 80 years, Ted Williams ranked No. 1 among all of them in walk rate. Now, however, those rankings look like this:

Walk percentage through age 21

Juan Soto	16.9%
Ted Williams	15.2%
Mel Ott	13.7%
Jimmie Foxx	13.7%

HR plus walk percentage. For 80 years, only one man in history could say he walked or homered in at least 20 percent of his trips to the plate at that age. Now there are two. Williams and Soto.

Now let's add in the refusal to swing-and-miss. In 2020, at age 21, Juan Soto had a season in which he walked 41 times — and struck out just 28 times! He did that while slugging .695 by the way.

So how rare is it for a hitter that young to have a season like that, even if it was only a 60-game season? Well, Ted Williams reached the big leagues in 1939. Here is every hitter, in the 82 seasons since, who had at least 10 more walks than strikeouts in a season while slugging .500 or better (minimum 40 walks):

Juan Soto	2020
Ted Williams	1939-40
Al Kaline	1955-56
Eddie Mathews	1953

OnBase percentage league leaders through age 21

Soto, Williams, Mel Ott, Jimmie Foxx, Shoeless Joe Jackson.

Cool Piece on the Baseball Card Market

Big money, big risk and Andre the Giant: Welcome to the sports card boom

On Amazon, one can find a dozen versions of a book that begins:

In reading the history of nations, we find that, like individuals, they have their whims and peculiarities; their seasons of excitement and recklessness, when they care not what they do. We find that whole communities suddenly fix their minds upon one object, and go mad in its pursuit; that millions of people become simultaneously impressed with one delusion, and run after it, till their attention is caught by some new folly more captivating than the first.

That paragraph could have been written about Cabbage Patch dolls in the 1980s and Beanie Babies a decade later, and definitely about the 1990s tech stocks bubble.

Yet the words are the introduction to a remarkable volume called “Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds” published in 1841 by the Scottish journalist Charles Mackay. It was an account of the economic bubbles, gimmicks and cons through history to that point, perhaps the most famous of which was a dramatic rise and crash in 17th-Century Dutch tulip bulb prices — the sort of thing economists debate still today.

Mackay died in 1889, but he’d likely recognize a 21st-Century asset boom: sports trading cards.

A solid market for vintage and new cards began ramping up in 2016 but then turned white-hot over the past 12 months of the pandemic. Especially rare cards are being scooped up as alternative assets by the ultrawealthy for millions of dollars, and there is skyrocketing demand from the public for almost anything card manufacturers Topps and Panini can put on store shelves. People hope to find a rare card that can be flipped for profit.

In response, there’s been a wave of card-industry investment by Wall Street, celebrities, and athletes.

That’s not to suggest the sports-card market is a financially dangerous bubble worthy of a new chapter in Mackay’s book, but there are warning signs. Speculators are buying rare and popular cards to resell rather than collect, which modern technology allows with greater ease than ever.

Experts and industry insiders do say they expect a market correction to occur at some point, but it’s impossible to predict when and to what degree.

“Asset pricing is very complex. Pundits who claim they’re good at it either have a crystal ball or inside information,” said University of Chicago economics professor and longtime card collector John List. “It’s easy to predict a bubble after it bursts. There is some sort of correction in all markets. That doesn’t mean profits will be wiped out completely.”

There will be casualties, though.

“There will be pockets of people getting burned. Some will lose a lot of money. Some will make money if they cash out prudently,” List said.

Countless Gen Xers with closets full of worthless 1988-92 Donruss, Fleer, Score and Topps baseball cards can attest to that.

List said he remains bullish on sports cards and cannot recall a market for them that's been this hot.

"Baseball cards are relatively stable assets that help you hedge the other parts of your portfolio," said List, who was short-listed for a 2015 Nobel Prize in economics. "It can give (investors) a reasonable asset to hedge their other positions that might be noteworthy in their portfolio. You have nostalgia, you have (cards as) art, and it's that combination that gives cards their magic."

Cards also are safer from peculiarities of the marketplace, List said, noting the recent GameStop share price manipulation by activist Redditors.

"Traders can short sell when a commodity price gets ahead of itself. Like with GameStop. That phenomenon happened in part because people were angry at short-sellers," List said. "In asset markets like sports cards, art and coins, it's impossible to short sell. Someone cannot come in and discipline the market."

The hyper-speculative card market seems to be unaffected, or unaware, of a federal probe that began in 2019 into potential fraud and card doctoring by major industry players, which *The Athletic's* Katie Strang [wrote about](#) last year.

Some of the ultrawealthy clearly see rare trading cards like the famed 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle as a legitimate alternative asset, not unlike a '63 Ferrari 250 GTO, a bottle of Cheval Blanc 1947 St-Emilion, or a Rolex Daytona.

It's that small cadre of buyers that sets the high-end prices for rare cards.

"With unique sports cards like Honus Wagner and the recent Mike Trout and LeBron sales, you need only one buyer to set the price," List said. "In most asset markets you need many buyers to set the price."

Mere mortals are left to chase the latest foil packs at Walmart and Target and on eBay in hopes of landing a rare, signed low-number modern card that can be resold for thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The resale market is where most of the money changes hands and serves as a canary-in-the-coal-mine for the industry's health.

In a year-end report, eBay said that 4 million more trading cards were sold on its platform in 2020 versus 2019, a 142 percent growth rate. Some of the transactions last year included \$560,000 for an autographed Tom Brady rookie card from 2000 and \$500,000 for a 1996 Kobe Bryant rookie. A 2018 card of Dallas Mavericks phenom Luka Doncic sold for \$230,100.

The resale giant's card sales weren't limited to sports. It said a "Magic: The Gathering" rare Black Lotus sold for \$511,100 while a 1999 Pokémon first edition "Holo Thick Stamp Shadowless Charizard" went for \$350,100.

Auction house and private sales in recent months have been [astronomical](#), led by [January's sale](#) of a near-perfect Topps '52 Mantle for an industry-record \$5.2 million. On Thursday, a Brady rookie card [sold for \\$1.32 million](#).

While modern-era cards of certain Hall of Famers are generating value, the old cards are safer long-term, experts say.

"Vintage stuff has a strong foundation. It's graded. That's why we're seeing the numbers we're seeing," said Chris Ivy, the director of sports at Texas-based Heritage Auctions, one of the industry's major auction houses.

Not that the public sheds tears for rich people losing money on bad investments, but there are card buyers taking risks, particularly on younger players who may become Hall of Famers — or who may get hurt or not pan out.

The latest risky eye-popping sale was an autographed 2018 rookie card of Doncic, the Mavericks' third-year star, for \$4.6 million this past weekend. It was a one-of-one card — the only one in existence — from Panini's National Treasures brand.

The buyer was collector Nick Fiorella.

"He believes that's going to be a \$10 million-plus card," said Jesse Craig, director of business development for card auction firm PWCC, who said he's known Fiorella for some time.

Doncic is an NBA MVP candidate, so the risky enormous price is understandable. Owners of rare cards of prospects without any professional resumes are trying to cash in, hoping there are investors willing to take a risk at future rewards. For example, there's currently a [\\$200,000 eBay listing](#) for an autographed one-of-one Bowman card of 2020 MLB No. 1 draft pick Spencer Torkelson, who has yet to reach the majors, or even play a minor-league game, for the Detroit Tigers.

"It's more dangerous when players are still active," Ivy said. "Anything could happen. Injuries or other issues that stop them from playing. Or they just don't pan out."

Regardless of how Doncic and Torkelson's careers unfold, blue-chip cards have proven to be a solid investment. From January 2008 through December 2020, the top professionally graded cards have shown a nearly 400 percent return on investment compared to 160 percent for the S&P 500, according to the [PWCC 100 Index](#).

Still, card prices rise and fall like any commodity or asset.

“It’s a market. There will be ebbs and flows. It will not be all roses like it has been the past 12 months,” Craig said.

Even during the current boom, there have been declines. Craig said basketball cards fell 20 to 30 percent when last season ended because a swath of newer investors got spooked by the normal cyclical decline that occurs between seasons (which he said is usually 10-15 percent).

It’s since recovered and Craig’s optimism has grown — which isn’t surprising since he stands to benefit from a healthy trading card industry.

“I am more bullish now on this market than I ever have been,” he said. “I see healthy, sustainable growth for our market.”

The risk, Craig said, is people stretching themselves for expensive cards beyond their means because they “don’t understand the nuances of it. It’s not the stock market. It’s a tangible asset class.”

Unlike Beanie Babies and Dutch tulip bulbs, there are aspects to the sports card industry that make comparisons to past booms and busts especially difficult. The sports collectibles market also has grown more complex because of [the rise of purely digital collectibles like NBA Top Shot](#). Nearly \$330 million worth of blockchain-based licensed video highlights have [sold](#) in the past month — and they exist only as a digital commodity (a non-fungible token) without a physical aspect.

Industry experts and analysts are cautious but intrigued by cryptocurrency and blockchain’s potential as both a public ledger of transactions and its ability to prevent fraudulent duplication. It’s a technology whose applications are only just being explored, even if the value of something like NBA Top Shot [collapses](#).

“I think blockchain is here to stay because it serves an important purpose,” List said. “Bitcoin has investment potential. The other stuff is too early to tell. I am keeping away from it.”

Another collectibles trend getting attention is fractional ownership, which allows the non-wealthy to buy ownership shares of cards, like a stock. Investors are buying a physical item, but they will never possess it physically.

Ezra Levine, CEO of the SEC-regulated Collectable app that allows people to buy fractional ownership shares in blue-chip cards and sports paraphernalia, said the booming market is safe for investment-grade vintage and rare items.

Speculators in more commonplace modern cards face greater risk, he said. And while he's someone whose business hinges on blue-chip value rather than the commonplace sales, he makes a fair point.

"Demand continues to far outweigh supply at the upper end of the industry. Until that dynamic shifts, the trend should continue," he said.

His app has modern and vintage cards, but also things like game-used items and even late pro wrestler Andre the Giant's 60-inch jockstrap (priced at \$10 a share).

"There will certainly be losers once the market takes a downturn, and it will at some point. Many collectors, particularly those prospecting or investing in less rare stuff will get burned once the euphoria ends," Levine said.

There are other players in the cards-as-alternative-asset spaces like Alt, which bills itself as a platform to manage cards and other assets not unlike the cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase. Alt's own investment fund also bought LeBron James and Giannis Antetokounmpo cards at \$1.8 million each last year.

Additionally, there are a host of sites and services that [track card news and prices](#), giving consumers information unfathomable in the old days of collecting.

Clearly, baseball cards have come a long way since they were a nickel at the soda fountain. How did we get here?

Helping sustain the boom are people with free time on their hands during the pandemic, and perhaps some stimulus cash or just money not spent during lockdown, industry observers say. And the teenagers during the 1980s-90s "junk wax" era of worthless over-produced cards are now in middle age and have money to spend — returning to a hobby they once abandoned.

The junk wax era was one type of bubble, and it burst in part because of the 1994 MLB lockout that saw the World Series canceled. That turned people off a hobby that was clearly over-saturated, leaving people with basements filled with cards they're unable to offload.

A series of bankruptcies and acquisitions by card makers winnowed out the industry, which eventually adopted production discipline. Now, instead of printing presses churning out literally billions of each card annually, the production runs are lower. The number of licenses from leagues to use team names and logos, which proliferated in the 1990s, has been reduced to one per card maker: Topps (MLB, MLS), Panini (NBA, NFL, WNBA, NASCAR) and Upper Deck (NHL).

Perhaps most importantly, the card companies focused on artificial scarcity.

They create limited-edition, sometimes one-of-one, cards that collectors chase in retail packs and boxes. Some are signed, some include snatches of a jersey embedded in the card. Collectors seek them out for many reasons: the thrill of the hunt, to cherish a favorite player, as a little cardboard lottery ticket to flip for a profit.

The rise of social media also helped birth the trend of people buying into [box breaks](#), which further fueled the industry's rebirth. The concept is simple: An owner of a box of cards sells buyers an opportunity to own whatever comes out of the case — a pack, a player, a team, etc. — and they open them live online.

The rise of professional third-party card-grading services has helped undergird the current hot market. The most desired cards are mint-gem 10s, which are perfect — although human fallibility by those doing the grading can make it an imperfect science.

“Third-party product certification is an integral part of this market. You can verify quality,” List said. “Back (in the 1970s and ’80s) it was dealers with informational advantage over buyers. That made the market very unfair. It skewed trades with ordinary consumers who didn’t know they were getting fleeced.”

Graded cards can be found on online resale and retail sites, at card shows, and at the few remaining baseball card shops. The junk wax era bust is said to have reduced the number of U.S. trading card stores from 10,000 in the 1990s to a few hundred today. A few entrepreneurs are getting back into brick-and-mortar retail to take advantage of the card boom.

One is NFL linebacker Cassius Marsh, who most recently was with the Steelers. He opened a trading card store with a business partner in suburban Los Angeles last month. Cash Cards Unlimited specializes in Pokémon, “Magic: The Gathering,” and sports cards, and Marsh said he’s been stacking up cases of cards for years in anticipation of a retail operation.

His timing worked out well.

“It made perfect sense to do sports and it’s been doing great for us,” Marsh said.

He said he likes that kids are getting back into cards, for collecting or flipping, which he sees as a good economic indicator.

“We’re in the infancy of this explosion. It’s a sign for where the market is headed. It’s just the beginning. A lot of these cards are going to continue to climb. It’s popular with more than just the old-school collectors. Business is putting money behind it,” Marsh said.

He’s correct that Wall Street is taking notice and lending the sports collectible further legitimacy for investors. Billionaire hedge fund tycoon Steve Cohen, who bought the New York Mets this year, is part of a consortium that paid \$850 million last month for Collectors Universe

Inc., parent company of Professional Sports Authenticator, an industry leader for grading cards and collectibles.

Also buying in with Cohen were The Chernin Group, Arizona Diamondbacks owner Ken Kendrick, noted card baron Nat Turner, and athletes Kevin Durant, Deshaun Watson, Larry Fitzgerald, Kelvin Beachum and Andy Roddick.

Many institutional investors also are collectors.

“They’re business owners, they work in financial services. Captains of industry,” Ivy, the auctioneer, said. “We’re seeing a lot of growth from those type of people. Interest rates are low, money is cheap right now. One way to hedge against inflation is to buy hard assets. And it’s fun. You can’t hang IBM stock on the wall, but you can hang a Babe Ruth bat on the wall, and it’s a conversation piece.”

Chernin Group along with Durant, Watson and other notable names such as agent Rich Kleiman, Mavs owner Mark Cuban, YouTuber/boxer Logan Paul and media personality Bill Simmons are also part of a group spending \$40 million to own a chunk of another major sports card and memorabilia player, New Jersey-based Goldin Auctions.

Goldin sold more than \$30 million in cards and merchandise in its annual winter auction recently, and founder Ken Goldin said the company will do more than \$200 million in sales in 2021. The company did \$27 million in sales in 2019 and that grew to \$103 million last year.

“What we’ve seen is a drastic, enormous, unprecedented demand for product without the supply to manage it,” he said. “This is as large of a snowball as I’ve seen in my 40 years of doing this.”

International demand also is sustaining the market, Goldin said. About 40 percent of his basketball sales are from overseas buyers, and soccer is now at 70 percent. Foreign buyers want more cards and collectibles than are available, he said.

“That is an extremely large pipeline that needs to be filled,” Goldin said.

While popular and rare vintage cards will retain value regardless of an industry bubble deflation, modern products are more volatile in value because of artificial scarcity, which is entirely up to Topps, Panini and other makers.

Topps said it’s keenly aware of the white-hot market and bubble risks — and learned its lessons.

“I wouldn’t quite call it concern, but rather excitement towards managing the challenge and making sure that Topps gets it right,” said Emily Kless, a spokeswoman for Topps, via email.

“The group at Topps is passionate about keeping our hobby in a great place for all to enjoy and paying careful mind to the trends of the market.”

The alternative to the junk wax overproduction era was diversification and the artificial scarcity of chase cards, even if that leaves retail consumers frustrated that they cannot readily find cards at Walmart and Target.

“The Topps team does a careful job at paying attention to the market trends and adjusting accordingly. While we are well aware that some of our products are more difficult to find than others, we certainly do not want history to repeat itself and start to over-produce product. Topps continues to aim to create outstanding products for every type of collector, while maintaining a respectful balance between supply and demand,” Kless said.

A popular sports card industry chronicler on Twitter called [Card Purchaser](#) (he asked *The Athletic* not to use his name because people in his real life don’t know he runs the account), is keeping a close eye on the bubble risk.

“Many collectors have returned to collecting over the last year for the first time since childhood and some of those will stick around for the rest of their lives. Others are just joining in at the thoughts of quick profits and will leave when the easy money stops flowing,” he said. “It’s hard to predict when it will slow down or if it will suddenly crash, but there will always be individual cards or sealed boxes that hold their value.”

If the market does correct, that will allow those unable to get in now to start buying product, he added.

“Collectors who can’t find product in stores and can’t afford the current resale prices will be able to re-enter the hobby if demand for cards falls. This may help to stop a major sudden crash as people who were priced out can start buying again,” he said.

He also said the probe into the card-trimming allegations is more of an issue for the highest-value cards rather than a concern for everyday collectors.

“I see a few people that repeatedly say they’ll never use PSA or PWCC ... but I think most of that took place before the COVID card boom. It’s definitely a bigger concern with the higher-value cards,” he said.

Financial advisor Jamie Catherwood, who specializes in the study of historic asset bubbles and finance history, said the card boom reminds him of a medieval craze for religious relics connected to saints and martyrs, such as bones, wood splinters, and snatches of cloth.

One example he noted was King Louis IX of France, a 13th-Century religious zealot who spent an enormous sum on the purported crown of thorns that sat atop Jesus Christ's head during his crucifixion — a relic still displayed today in Paris. The major churches of Europe jockeyed for their own relics.

Kings and cathedrals could afford madcap spending on hobbies and fanaticism. Peasants and modest churches could not. The same thing applies to the sports collectibles market today, Catherwood said.

"The people that are over-extending themselves are potentially going to be left hurting," he said. "I don't know what the thing to prick this bubble will be."

Even if there is a series of price corrections on par with past crashes, sports cards will remain a part of our culture, he added.

"Just because the sports card marketing might have a downturn in the near future, that doesn't mean the industry is going to disappear," Catherwood said.

MARCH 21, 2021

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

Good morning. Opening Day fast approaches. Some fun facts this week plus two pieces from The Athletic—Peter Gammon on the potential impact of a deadened ball and a mystery in Cleveland. Stay safe out there.

One year with the team—Pretty good performance

Adrián Beltré, 2010 Red Sox

.321 49 2B, 28 HRs

Alfonso Soriano, 2006 Nationals

46 HRs, 41 SBs joining Jose Canseco, Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez as MLB's only 40-40 players.

Ivan Rodriguez, 2003 Marlins

started 134 games behind the plate for the Marlins and produced a 120 OPS+. He then proceeded to bat .313/.390/.522 with 17 RBIs in 17 postseason games, earning MVP honors in the NL Championship Series on the way to a World Series championship.

Kevin Brown, 1998 Padres

Brown went 18-7 with a 2.38 ERA (164 ERA+) over a whopping 257 innings. Brown then helped pitch San Diego into the World Series before signing MLB's first \$100 million contract with the Dodgers.

Jack Morris, 1991 Twins

stellar regular-season performance (18-12, 125 ERA+ in 35 starts), which came after the Minnesota native signed a one-year deal with his hometown team. Rather, it's because Morris went 4-0 with a 2.23 ERA in five postseason starts and was named World Series MVP after throwing a 10-inning shutout to win his iconic Game 7 duel with the Braves' John Smoltz.

Rich "Goose" Gossage, 1977 Pirates

The 25-year-old Gossage responded with one of the 10 best seasons ever produced by a reliever, at least going by WAR. In a much different era of bullpen usage, Gossage churned out 133 innings with a 1.62 ERA, struck out 151 and combined 11 wins with 26 saves. A free agent the next offseason, he signed with the Yankees and never started another game, on his way to the Hall of Fame.

Rogers Hornsby, 1927 Giants and '28 Braves

Hornsby won six batting titles, two Triple Crowns and an MVP Award over his first 12 seasons, all with the Cardinals. In 1926, as a player-manager, Hornsby's numbers fell, but he piloted St. Louis to a championship. Despite that, contract negotiations broke down and Hornsby was swapped for the Giants' Frankie Frisch. He responded by returning to form, with a .361/.448/.586 line. Yet Hornsby quickly wore out his welcome again and was sent packing for Boston. In his one season with the Braves before another trade -- this one to the Cubs -- he slashed .387/.498/.632 (202 OPS+), leading the NL in each category. His two seasons in New York and Boston resulted in a combined total of 18.9 WAR.

Alfonso Soriano

Soriano only played one season for the Nationals, 2006, when Jim Bowden (now of *The Athletic*) was general manager and Frank Robinson manager. The team was still playing at RFK stadium. And Soriano had one of the craziest years in baseball history. He became the only player in baseball history to have a 40-40-40 season — 40 homers, 40 doubles and 40 stolen bases.

And at the same time, this is wild, he only hit .277 — it's the lowest average for any player ever with 40 homers and 40 doubles. This is because he struck out 160 times. He stole those 41 bases but he was caught 17 times. He accomplished all this despite having an utterly miserable September. It is one of the strangest great seasons in recent memory.

Juan Soto

Last week's newsletter talked about Juan Soto's HR + Walk rate as comparable with Ted Williams. Was Juan Soto's walk rate plus HRs by age 21 with 1300 too restrictive a filter that made him look artificially good? If you change the filters to 1,000 plate appearances and say first three seasons rather than age 21:

Best walk rate plus home run rate through first three seasons (min. 1,000 plate appearance):

1. Aaron Judge, 24.7 percent
2. Ted Williams, 23.8 percent
3. Frank Thomas, 23.2 percent

4. Juan Soto, 23.1 percent
5. Adam Dunn, 23.0 percent

Still pretty strong company for Soto but how about Judge?

Adam Wainwright

Adam Wainwright of the Cardinals. 2007. At age 25 he finally got a chance to start in the big leagues — this was during the George W. Bush era, the year of the first iPhone.

Since then he's missed an entire season after blowing out his elbow while pitching batting practice at spring training. He came back. He missed almost another entire season after rupturing his Achilles while batting. He came back. I mean this guy is like Monty Python's Black Knight. He has kept coming back season after season — admit it, there must have been a dozen times in the past decade or more that you were *sure* that Wainwright had retired.

But he kept going, coming reasonably close to FOUR Cy Young Awards. He finished third to Tim Lincecum in 2009 despite getting the most first-place votes. He finished second to Roy Halladay in 2010 despite having a slightly better ERA and FIP. He finished second to Clayton Kershaw in 2013 and, realistically, had no argument for first but was still great. He finished third to Kershaw in 2014, again, no real first-place argument but still, I mean, four top-three finishes in the Cy Young balloting ... I mean, not only is that good, it's historic. He has the highest Cy Young share of any pitcher not to win the award (this is a formula based on the number of Cy Young Award points a player receives).

Highest Cy Young Share among non-winners:

1. Adam Wainwright, 1.97
2. Chris Sale, 1.88
3. Curt Schilling, 1.85
4. Dan Quisenberry, 1.49
5. Nolan Ryan, 1.48

In addition to all that, Wainwright is a delight, a solid teammate, a good guy to talk baseball with, and even though his stuff is no longer elite, he can still spin the curveball and he knows how to pitch and he still loves playing. You root for a guy like that.

Pretty Close

Brett Gardner .259 BA, 5350 AB, 539 RBI, 270 SB, 129 HR, .743 OPS, 43.0 WAR

Roy White .271 BA, 6650 AB, 758 RBI, 233 SB, 160 HR, .764 OPS, 46.8 WAR

Two Cy Young Awards

Would you have named all of the following: Tim Lincecum , Bret Saberhagen, Denny McLain, Corey Kluber , Johan Santana.

Miscellaneous Stuff

If Max Scherzer retired tomorrow--175-93, 3.21 ERA, 132 ERA+, 2,784 strikeouts, 641 walks, 3 Cy Young Awards.

Most seasons with 200+ innings pitched and 200+ strikeouts since 2000--Justin Verlander (9 such seasons).

Al Leiter, who pitched in the major leagues for 19 seasons, 382 major league starts, won 162 games, made 11 post-season starts and earned World Series rings with the Blue Jays and Marlins.

Jacoby Ellsbury of the Red Sox (52 SB led AL in 2013)

was the last player to lead a league in stolen bases the year his team won the World Series.

Dave Parker wore No. 39 for six teams in his 19-year career. The only player in baseball for whom No. 39 is retired is Dodgers Hall of Famer Roy Campanella. Bonus points if you knew that Parker played for Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Oakland, Toronto, Milwaukee and the Angels.

Batters have hit a home run on the first pitch of the season twice in history—Dwight Evans off Jack Morris in 1986 and Ian Happ off Jose Urena in 2018.

Nolan Ryan struck out a ton of batters but he also struggled with control. From 1966-1972 he averaged 5.7 walks per nine innings. Opening Day 1974 he went 8 innings against the White Sox, gave up 4 hits, 2 runs and struck out 5. He also walked 10—most opening day walks in a regulation game ever.

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far...

Craig Biggio, Vladimir Guerrero and Dante Bichette combined for 7,556 hits, more than 1,000 home runs, more than 4,100 runs and 20 All-Star Games. If you put their careers together, they led the league in plate appearances seven times, runs three times, hits three times, doubles three times, homers once, RBIs once, stolen bases once, total bases three times and hit-by-pitch five times, though all of those plunk-leader seasons belonged to Biggio.

Two of them, Biggio and Vlady, are in the Hall of Fame. Bichette got just three Hall of Fame votes, but that too is an accomplishment of high order.

All three of them were indelible players. Biggio was scrappy and indestructible; one season, he did not hit into a single double play. Bichette was a swing-for-the-fences force who patterned his game after Reggie Jackson. And Guerrero was, you know, one of a kind, a free-wheeling force of nature who golfed pitches in the dirt, overhead smashed pitches over his head, unleashed throws that boggled the mind (and, often, boggled cutoff men) and ran the bases with a wild abandon that made the heart race.

It's stunning to think that their three sons make up three-fourths of the infield for the Toronto Blue Jays.

Ron Hassey

Catcher Ron Hassey caught two perfect games—1991 Dennis Martinez (Orioles) and 1981 Len Barker (Indians).

And more Hassey for Yankees fans:

In December of 1985, the Yankees traded Hassey to the Chicago White Sox. He was shipped out along with Joe Cowley for Britt Burns, Glen Braxton, and Mike Soper. Burns was the big get as he was tagged as the next ace, coming off of an 18 win season—yes, the wins were more important than the 3.96 ERA or mediocre strikeout rate—and was just 27 years old. Burns would come with a hip condition that would cost him his career. It appeared the Yankees were duped.

Two months later, the White Sox and Yankees made another trade. This time the Yankees sent Glen Braxton, Neil Allen, and Scott Bradley to the White Sox in exchange for Chris Alvarez, Eric Schmidt, Matt Winters, and...Ron Hassey.

In a span of two months, Hassey was traded away and traded for by the Yankees. He would start out his second season as a Yankee quite fast. In 64 games, he would hit .298/.381/.466 with a career-best 25 doubles and 9 home runs.

Bizarre would kick in again.

On July 30th, the Yankees and White Sox would strike another deal. Once again, the Yankees traded Hassey back to the White Sox along with Carlos Martinez for Ron Kittle, Joel Skinner, and Wayne Tolleson. Hassey would excel for the White Sox for the remainder of the 1986 season, slashing at a .353/.437/.500 rate. His Yankees career would finish with 156 games played, a .297/.374/.491 slash line along with 30 doubles and 19 home runs in 458 at-bats. The Yankees would struggle to find an offensive catcher for the next half decade until Mike Stanley came along.

Foul ball after foul ball after foul ball

In case you missed it. Mets-Cardinals last Sunday. Mets' Luis Guillorme did something that just might be unprecedented: He saw 22 pitches in a single turn at the plate.

The odd event came in the fifth inning in Port St. Lucie, Fla., against the hard-throwing Cardinals reliever Jordan Hicks. Guillorme fell behind on a called strike and a swinging strike. Then, over the course of 20 pitches, he swatted 16 fouls and took four pitches out of the strike zone, earning a satisfying trot to first

Since pitch-count data became official in 1988, the most pitches in a single plate appearance is 21, by [Brandon Belt of the San Francisco Giants](#) against Jaime Barria of the Los Angeles Angels in 2018. That resulted in a flyout. It was also the first day that umpires would be enforcing the three-batter-minimum rule for pitchers in spring training. The Cardinals had planned to use Hicks for only 20 pitches or so.

"I thought, prior to the inning, 'What happens if he has high pitch counts?'" Cardinals Manager Mike Shildt said. "That got answered pretty immediately."

Hicks was not injured, but Shildt and a trainer appealed successfully to the umpires to let his workday end after one exhausting duel.

100 Wins x 2 Teams

I will spot you Pete Alexander who won 190 games for the Phillies and 128 for the Cubs from 1911 to 1930. Name the other 7 pitchers who won 100 games for two teams.

Lefty Grove	195 with A's	105 Red Sox
Nolan Ryan	138 Angels	106 Astros
Dennis Martinez	108 Orioles	100 Expos
Greg Maddux	133 Cubs	194 Braves
Randy Johnson	130 Mariners	118 Diamondbacks
Mike Mussina	147 Orioles	123 Yankees
CC Sabathia	106 Indians	134 Yankees

And looking at the stats of a few of those pitchers:

Nolan Ryan

Career: 1966, 1968-1993; 324-292 record with seven no-hitters and 11 strikeout titles. Ryan had a 300-strikeout season when he was 25, and his sixth and final 300-K season when he was 42. He never managed to win the Cy Young, but he finished in the top five six times.

Greg Maddux

Career: 1986-2008; 355-227 record, four Cy Youngs (consecutive), and 16 Gold Gloves. Over the span of three seasons (1993-95), Maddux went 55-18 with a 1.90 ERA, which was less than half the average ERA for his league.

Randy Johnson

Career: 1988-2009; 303-166 record. Big Unit won five Cy Young Awards, four of them after the age of 35. He ranks second all-time in strikeouts, and he tossed a perfect game.

HISTORY LESSON

Not many people know this but the Milwaukee Brewers were one of the original American League teams — this Brewers team does not actually go back to that one. The American League was founded on March 5, 1900, in Milwaukee, at the Republican House hotel. There's a cool marker on the spot to commemorate the moment. There were five essential people there at that meeting — three of them are in the Baseball Hall of Fame: Connie Mack, Charlie Comiskey and Ban Johnson.

The other two were Milwaukee lawyers and brothers: Henry and Matthew Killilea. They were owners of a minor-league team called the Milwaukee Brewers. They were big people in baseball; in fact, they had hired Mack to manage their minor-league team.

And now, they all had the big idea of going Major League, of challenging the dominance of the National League. The original members of the American League were the Chicago White Stockings; Cleveland Bluebirds; Detroit Tigers; Baltimore Orioles; Philadelphia Athletics; Washington Senators and, yes, the Milwaukee Brewers.

But the original Brewers lasted only a year in Milwaukee before they moved to St. Louis. Ironically, the Baltimore Orioles only lasted two years in Baltimore — I say “ironically” because the Brewers who became the St. Louis Browns eventually became the Baltimore Orioles. Life is a circle.

Gammons: Impact of new deadened ball isn't yet known, but it could be dramatic

The late Cy Young Award winner and executive Mike Flanagan explained the kinetic chain of baseball action by standing on a mound, baseball in his left hand, and saying, “nothing happens until I throw his ball. I am the proactor. The hitter and the fielders, the baserunners and umpires are reactors. And nothing happens until I throw this baseball.”

Baseball has its dead ball history, its lively ball era during The Great Depression, spitballs, scuffballs, puffballs, balls that were diced on Elston Howard's shinpad buckles and thrown back to Whitey Ford and Eddie Lopat, Slippery Elm balls, sandpaper balls, loosened seam balls like the one Denny Doyle threw into the dugout in the seventh game of the '75 World Series and, most often discussed, juiced balls. Did Peter Ueberroth really order the balls juiced in 1987 when rookie Mark McGwire hit 49 homers, George Bell 48, Dwight Evans and Darrell Evans 34 apiece, and Matt Nokes 32? And what about when an MLB-record 6,776 home runs were hit in 2019?

Now, in 2021, a new type of baseball is being promised. “Deadened” is the prospective adjective, without any way to accurately forecast its impact on the game. Does that mean there will be a long-term change, rethinking the practice of Joey Gallo-style launch angle and moving towards D.J. LeMahieu's line drives? Will it mean that with the prospect of fewer home runs that defense — particularly in the outfield — gets prioritized? Will there be an increased emphasis on speed, baserunning, bunting and situational hitting?

“Right now it's too early to tell,” says Boston hitting coach Tim Hyers. “Hitters are just working on getting at-bats and fine-tuning their swings.”

Conspiracy theories about the baseballs have been like UFO and deep state theories. I've had several general managers say MLB won't begin using the new balls until Opening Day, April 1.

“They say the new baseballs will only cut distances down two or three feet, but there are players worried that when we get into April it will be six to 10 feet,” says one general manager.

That is the spring concern around batting cages, centered on the theory one coach mentioned: “That owners know they pay the big bucks to the guys who hit homers, and when you start looking at next winter’s free agents — think about the shortstops alone — 10 feet will mean more profits in owners’ pockets.”

We hear from hitters who think some players will try to alter their swings for contact after working on launch angles all winter and getting off to bad starts, particularly since without an unusually warm April, they’re likely in for a month of “39 and drizzling,” which Don Zimmer used to say was the only forecast in New England until May Day.

The distance between teams’ baseball operations departments and the Commissioner’s Office has grown since the game stopped last March due to the pandemic. The New York office obviously has had to prioritize issues like scheduling, the protocols, the governance, rosters, playoffs ... on and on, all with echoed ownership concerns about lost revenues.

MLB Executive VP of Economics and Operations Morgan Sword is considered by most club executives to be one who listens and understands. His words carry weight, and that’s true when it comes to these balls as well.

“Whether it’s realized or not, a lot of the new baseballs are in use right now,” says Sword. “Teams have been using the supplies of balls that we had given them before spring training last season. There was no set order to deaden balls. For a number of seasons, Rawlings has made the balls under a set of specs. The actual production may cause slight differences. There has been a reset of spec requirements, but the essential specs remain in place.

“With all the tests that have been done, there should be only microscopic changes in the performance of the balls.”

In time, we’ll know precisely about the drag on the balls and the normal carry. There are people in the game who would like the balls to be deadened and get back to a game with balls put in play and all the action that goes with that. If it is a cold April with the winds blowing in from Lake Michigan, Boston Harbor and the flatlands of the I-70 to Kansas City, and there’s plenty of snow in Denver, we will hear a lot about the new baseballs. Most of our livelihoods don’t depend on the flight of the baseball; Jorge Soler’s does.

One American League pitching coach suggests that if the new balls are, in fact, ready and perhaps on the scene now, clubs should begin using them in earnest the last week-to-10 days of spring training, like say starting on Monday, March 22. Since spring training ended prematurely last March 15, no one in baseball has had anything close to a normal existence. Remember when on non-pitching days Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine and John Smoltz would be at Disney’s Wild World of Sports at first light and on the golf course by 11? Or Bob Veale in a rowboat

surrounded by alligators in Winter Haven's scenic Lake Lulu because he dozed off in the hot sun and the oars floated away? There are high-ranking baseball executives who are Zooming this spring from home.

There is the question that no one can yet answer: When will baseball be back to quasi-normal, with 15-20,000 fans in the stands, players allowed to take a morning walk without permission from the club or pitchers allowed to celebrate a shutout with a postgame meal and beer in a restaurant? Several managers have stressed how difficult it has been for players to connect with one another amidst restricted pregame time in the clubhouse or without group postgame cooldown periods.

Hit at 2:30 on the road? No. Early between-start bullpen and one hour run around the warning tracks? [Throwing into the pillows at the Hotel Pfister will have to do.](#)

In a March 6 piece in the Boston Globe, Michael Silverman quoted owner and technologist advocate Ted Leonsis as saying "this will be the scar tissue for our generation and it will last for about a thousand days."

Baseball generally considers gameday revenues to be 40 percent of its gross, which may not be close to achievable in 2021, but the sport has new, lucrative media deals and ongoing creative media concepts. Problem is, there has been no indication that the MLB Players Association and MLB owners can trust one another enough to reach a new labor agreement in time to begin the 2022 season on schedule.

"It's so crazy right now that both sides want the designated hitter and the owners want the expanded postseason and they can't get anywhere on it," says one National League GM. "Everyone understands that both sides right now are sincere about saying there will be no DH or expanded playoffs in 2021, but in today's baseball world all finalities are subject to change. Most every club I talk to believes that in the final week of spring training the owners will re-examine post-season profit potentials, make it worth it for the union and we'll have the designated hitter. And that's not fair for small market National League teams who might have built their teams differently."

If in the sunsets of the weeks in Florida and Arizona the DH returns in the National League, it's going to help teams like the Dodgers and Padres, who are built on depth. It helps the Mets, who want Pete Alonso and Dominic Smith in the lineup regularly. It helps the Nationals give Kyle Schwarber and Josh Bell more DH time. It helps the Cardinals with Matt Carpenter's role. Maybe it helps the Reds solve some defensive issues, as hard as they've worked on defense this spring. It may allow Milwaukee to let Lorenzo Cain stay out of the outfield as his strained calf builds back to normal in the April weather. The Braves can use Marcell Ozuna as their DH and by mid-season hope they have a speed-oriented outfield defense with Ronald Acuña, Cristian Pache and Drew Waters.

Pitching is already thin enough. The DH prevents pitchers from silly injuries running and sliding, as much as we all want to see Madison Bumgarner, Michael Lorenzen and Zack Greinke hit.

There are a lot of uniformed, organizational and MLB people who would prefer to see baseballs — “deadened” makes them sound like the old watersoaked balls we had to use as kids — with lessened hops. Scrape away those who think it will save on payrolls, and there is legitimate concern about the boredom of swing-and-miss, three-true-outcome baseball games. Preaching the need for increased contact, triples, defense, et. al is fine; every hitting guru is selling launch angle, but they all teach different hitting truths (one says the top hand is the power hand, Ted Williams always said the bottom hand was the power hand because it was closest to the contact point of ball hitting the bat and that the dominant hand better absorbed that shock). American League pitching coaches generally believe LeMahieu is one of the best hitters in the league, but, hey, when he was breaking in with the Rockies, Dan O’Dowd and Walt Weiss were virtual lonesome cowboys in their belief in the young LSU infielder O’Dowd had acquired from the Cubs for two former first-round picks — one of whom batted a career .229, while the other never pitched in the big leagues.

Meanwhile, the strikeout rates keep climbing: 18 percent in 2010, 19.9 percent in 2015, 23.4 percent in 2020.

Velocity rates continue to climb as well, and anytime you read about showcase pitchers, it always begins with maximum velo, not outs recorded on first-pitch velo. Or the Tommy John/100+ mph pitch ratio for young pitchers from ages 17-to-21. One GM ticked off “Colt Griffin, Tyler Kolek, Michael Kopech,” and I felt sorry for all of them. Since Statcast began in 2008, four-seam fastball velocity has increased every season except 2016-18, when the 93.2 average held; in 2008, the average fastball velocity was 91.9; in 2019, the last full season, it was 93.4.

As starting pitcher innings decrease, the number of 1-2 inning appearances increases. “There are a lot of games when you see six, seven or eight one-inning relievers throwing max effort stuff for three outs,” says one general manager.

That starting pitchers aren’t going as long as they used to is not news to anybody. But the degree of change has been drastic.

Change in SP outing length, by percent

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>% of starts longer than 6 innings</u>	<u>% of starts 3 innings or less</u>
2010	64.2%	5.1%
2014	63.4%	4.1%

2016	54.3%	6.4%
2018	46.9%	9.4%
2020	46.8%	9.4%

There have been many suggestions on how to hit high heat, beginning with the Houston Astros' philosophy of hunting fastballs in a zone of choice from the first pitch. Whatever they did in 2017, in the last four seasons they have had the lowest team strikeout rate (18.5 percent), scored more runs than any team but the Yankees and ranked first in wRC+, while in that four-year stretch ranking 14th in exit velocity, for those who think exit velocity equals great hitting.

The Commissioner's Office, which has to study the future demographics for the sport, has encouraged suggestions. One is to limit the number of pitchers on an active roster to 11 or 12, forcing pitchers to get more outs and having to be less specialized, which theoretically encourages *pitching*, not showcase throwing radar gun competitions that resemble axe-throwing contests, and might re-emphasize the importance of early-count outs. Another is the use of the pitch clock.

General managers across the board believe the Commissioner's Office must crack down on pitchers' usage of illegal substances to create spin and all its ramifications. Such enforcement isn't going to prevent Max Scherzer, Gerrit Cole or other extraordinary pitchers like Trevor Bauer from being what they are; it's relative, and as long as they are healthy, they are going to relatively be in that top-2 percent class. But when nearly a quarter of outs are strikeouts, dead-time baseball can be flipped off in favor of the English Premier League or a Blackrock Cork hurling match.

When the Orioles pitching development made them consistent contenders in the 1966-83 span, they were raised on four-man rotations, command and the art of damage control. Earl Weaver usually opened seasons with eight-man staffs. Jim Palmer was one of the greatest pitchers who ever lived, beginning with the 1966 World Series at the age of 20, and, after an arm injury, he returned to full form for a nine-year run from 1970-78 in which he pitched in 332 games, completing 50.6 percent of them. He won 20 games eight times, earned three Cy Youngs and averaged 5.2 strikeouts per 9 innings.

Later in his career, he won a game in which, as pitching coach Ray Miller joyfully pointed out with his chart, he hit every number on the radar gun from 68 to 92.

Think about that.

There have been suggestions to limit shifts; the one that may make the most sense is to insist there are four players in what is nominally considered the infield on every pitch, although hitters have shown little inclination to reincarnate Wee Willie Keeler's "hit 'em where they

aren't" philosophy. Since Wee Willie was inducted into the Hall of Fame two years before Pearl Harbor, that's understandable, and there were players in the 1980s who thought Babe Ruth was a fictional character.

Flanagan was, as usual, right: nothing happens in baseball until the pitcher does something with the ball — at least, unless there's a pitcher walking in from the bullpen. Adjustments will be made. It may be that teams value contact-hitting multi-sport athletes like Boston College centerfielder/shortstop Sal Frelick (career 33 walks, 22 strikeouts) more highly than the high-strikeout risk, high-reward power hitters. Maybe pitchers begin to go back to the two seamer, sinker, varied arsenal and zone-first pitch strike approach to pitching.

Maybe the owners and players will actually come to the realization that it's in everyone's best interest to figure out how to make the game more watchable. And all the while the Commissioner's Office, clubs and the MLBPA closely monitor what Rawlings does within the specs of how baseballs are best manufactured.

Full recovery in the United States appears to be slower than we might hope, and the goal for the start of the New Normal could be 2023, a year after a Basic Agreement — lockout or no lockout — is sculpted and most of the shortstops are signed. Who knows how we're watching the games by then, but what will be important regardless is the entertainment value of the game. They can do whatever's necessary to the ball, but can they agree on what happens to the ball when it leaves pitchers' hands?

Where in the world is Shorty Gallagher?

My friends and family suggest I might have a splash of OCD. In my retired years this sort of quest might be in my future. If you like history and baseball cards this 5 minute story by Zack Meisel who covers the Indians for The Athletic is a fun read.

When Randy Kula stepped into Shady Oak Delicatessen, a weathered-brick general store in Garfield Heights, Ohio, where the inescapable aroma of owner Rosie's salami sandwich filled the air, he and his twin brother, Robby, rushed to the wooden counter.

Under the cash register, concealed from customers, sat stacks of baseball cards. If the Kula boys could convince their frugal parents to fork over a few nickels, a grumpy Rosie would hand each kid a pack of the 2 1/2 by 3 1/2-inch cardboard rectangles.

On those spring and summer days when the kids proved persuasive, that quarter-mile march home along Turney Road resembled a championship parade route. With their house in sight, they'd race to the back porch or to a bedroom where, one at a time, they tore through the plastic wrapping to reveal the identity of the larger-than-life figure on each card.

Robby always wished for a member of the Red Sox, especially Carl Yastrzemski. Randy beseeched the baseball gods to deliver him Cleveland Indians, especially his hero, Ken Harrelson.

One day, when he was 7, Randy unwrapped his first two packs, which each included a black-and-white deckle-edged Harrelson card. A major score. Two years later, Randy's neighbor possessed the only prize he coveted: the very last edition of a Harrelson card, commemorating his final major-league season.

Randy compared the neighbor, four years his senior, to Sid from "Toy Story," the sort of "creepy, punky" teen who derived pleasure from watching the world burn. The neighbor challenged Randy to a game of 12 Blocks — their version of Around The World, a jump-shot competition — in the Kula driveway, with ownership of the Harrelson card at stake. Randy won, and "Sid" retrieved the card. He motioned to surrender it to Randy but instead ripped it to shreds. He handed over a pile of worthless scraps of cardboard.

"I was traumatized," Randy says.

When Shady Oak was sold out of new sets, Rosie offered the boys some long-forgotten packs that had been collecting dust in the back of the store. Typically, the packs included a piece of pink bubble gum. On one occasion, the gum was yellow. As it crumbled in their mouths, the boys realized it was not banana flavored. It was six years old.

On a more fruitful day, Rosie supplied them with packs that included cards of Hall of Famers Stan Musial and Casey Stengel.

"Better than Christmas," Randy says.

On summer evenings, when Randy's dad returned home from work — to this day, the family isn't sure what "inventory control at a premier industrial corporation" entailed — he would toss Wiffle balls to his kids in the backyard. Randy regularly listened to the Indians' radio broadcasts and treasured Pete Franklin's interviews with rookies or budding prospects.

Harrelson broke his leg during spring training in 1970, about a week before Randy's birthday, a crushing blow to the psyche of a baseball-crazed kid. Randy joined a Harrelson fan club and wrote a letter expressing his admiration for the charismatic slugger. Harrelson mailed back two autographed pictures.

Randy also cherishes a faded Cleveland Press photo of the All-Star right fielder arriving in the rain at Hopkins Airport to join his new team in 1969 after a trade from his brother's beloved Red Sox. The collection of photos and cards eventually served as the spark for his singular self-

assignment: locating a photo of every player to appear in a game for Cleveland's baseball franchise.

When he was 27, Randy set out to compile photos of those who played for the club after 1914. When he began to swiftly check off the names on his spreadsheet, he stretched the start date to 1901, the year the team helped to usher in the American League.

He had no sense of how long it would take to locate 1,917 photos of players past and present, dead and alive, mainstays and transients. He had no idea if it were achievable at all. As he filled chestnut-colored binders, the undertaking called for creativity. It tested his patience. It delivered him impasse after impasse. Yet he couldn't get enough.

Amidst the thankless monotony of developing computer software, Randy's mind often drifted to those vacant spaces in his collection. Eventually, there was only one spot left.

By 2 p.m., a prisoner in his work cubicle, Randy's eyes would be glued to the clock as he painstakingly counted down the minutes until he could dash home to renew his search for the one former Cleveland baseball player who has captivated him, stumped him, agonized him and fueled him for the last 30 years.

Shorty Gallagher.

Every item in Randy Kula's collection — sorted in alphabetical order, by year — tells a tale, beginning with Bock Baker, who pitched in one game (and served up 23 hits) for Cleveland in 1901. In his photo, Baker is seated as part of a team portrait, with his arms crossed atop his knees.

Randy has transformed into a de facto historian. He can relay that Zaza Harvey, a member of the 1901 and '02 teams, was a proficient hitter. (He batted .352 in 57 games.) He marvels at the background stories, though, more than the statistics. He was mesmerized by the mystery of Malachi Hogan, whom the Society of American Baseball Research confirmed in recent months to be the Harry Hogan who had previously been credited with playing one game for Cleveland in 1901.

He learned that Pete Appleton, who pitched for the club from 1930-32, abandoned his original surname, Jablonowski, which loosely translated to "apple" in Polish. And that Quincy Troupe offered some advice to Bob Feller about his changeup and pitch usage in 1952. After throwing a gem, the occasionally prickly pitcher thanked the catcher for his input. Randy once attended Indians fantasy camp in Goodyear, Arizona, a baseball expedition with former franchise icons, and he told Feller all about his venture. His Feller photo is autographed in navy ink.

Randy blitzed through website searches, scoured old Reach and Spalding baseball guides and frequented the Fairview Park library to study microfilm until his head started spinning. He pored over copies of The Plain Dealer, which printed a daily contest in 1923 asking readers to identify 10 big-leaguers by their portraits. The newspaper also ran opening day features such as "Meet your new Indians players," which usually supplied Randy with a few missing entries.

Randy narrowed the number of unoccupied slots in his binders to 100 and then 80 and then 50 and with each mini-feat, the chase became more enrapturing.

“There was always that wanting more,” he says. “I had to reach the finish line somehow.”

Randy morphed from casual researcher into stubborn sleuth. A mindless online search would no longer return sufficient results, but those blank spaces in the plastic pages demanded attention.

To find a photo of O.T. Harstad, who pitched for the Indians in 1915, Randy penned a letter to the hurler’s daughter, Dorothy Fenner. Her response arrived in the mail in April 2003, a standard white envelope brimming with fortune.

In cursive prose, Dorothy revealed that her family preserves Harstad’s memorabilia in “Dad’s Baseball Box,” which includes newspaper clippings, pennants and team pictures. She tucked a pair of photos of her father in the envelope for Randy to add to his stockpile, along with a copy of a first-person piece Harstad contributed to Sports Collectors Digest in July 1985, four months before he died. The article highlights how he battled Ty Cobb in his first major-league inning and includes a portrait of Harstad sporting baggy, knee-high pants as he finishes his throwing motion.

He was a splendid man; we remember him as a professional serving others for 50 years as a dentist. And yet the memory to others is that he played professional baseball with the Cleveland Indians! Thank you for writing. I’ll add your letter to Dad’s Baseball Box.

— Dorothy Harstad Fenner

“I was touched by that. Like, wow,” Randy says. “This is my favorite one.”

Randy requested information from the special collections department at Harvard Law School about graduate Al Cypert, who logged one at-bat — a strikeout — for the Cleveland Naps in June 1914. Cypert later worked as a district attorney and as an athletic department bigwig for the University of Arkansas. A Harvard employee sent Randy more than 20 pages of material on Cypert. The third baseman’s photo depicts him in his college uniform, with the word “Arkansas” stitched vertically onto the jersey top beside the outline of a razorback.

In 2004, Randy contacted Jim Finley, a columnist for the Baytown Sun, a newspaper in southeast Texas. Finley had published a piece recounting his Little League days with the Old Ocean Buccaneers under coach Vern Underhill, who pitched in 15 games for Cleveland in 1927-28. Underhill’s son, Vance, played on that Little League team, and Finley connected him with Randy. Vance, who taught mathematics at Texas A&M University-Commerce, supplied Randy with a photo of his father.

He would divulge each tale of triumph at the Kula family’s annual Thanksgiving football game and annual golf outing. With each conquest, the process grew more enthralling.

“Once the ball started rolling,” he says, “I couldn’t stop.”

Now, though, when he steps into his home office, the binders stare back at him, as if they're hounding him to finish what he started. If only it were so simple.

Thirty years ago, this began as a harmless manner of soaking up free time on a Saturday morning, an activity that equipped Randy with heaps of knowledge useful only at a sports bar's trivia night. For the last 16 years, however, the mission has shifted to a single purpose: Find that one, final, elusive player.

As it reads on a beer glass his son's girlfriend gave him last Christmas:

Where in the world is Shorty Gallagher?

Charles William "Shorty" Gallagher played for the Cleveland Blues for one day, a doubleheader on Aug. 13, 1901, against the Chicago White Sox. He entered the first game in right field but did not record a plate appearance. He batted four times in the second game, going hitless with a strikeout. And that was it, his entire major-league career wrapped up into a tidy Tuesday afternoon at League Park. The local newspaper mentioned Shorty's name the following day but didn't include a photo.

One day last year, Randy's older brother, Ken, conducted his own online search and [spotted a website](#) that pinpointed the location of Shorty's gravesite. Ken was about to send the link to his brother when he noticed Randy was the one who had uploaded the photo of the headstone.

Randy's chat with a supervisor at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Detroit produced a photo of the small, gray tablet that barely peeks out from the surrounding grass. It contains only Shorty's name and date of death: June 23, 1924. A nearby church presented Randy a list of six Gallaghers in the area, but only one returned Randy's messages. In 2008, a John J. Gallagher reviewed his family history and insisted he was of no relation.

I hope that you find Charles somewhere, however I cannot help with your quest.

Randy studied censuses. He outlined a family tree. He called high schools in search of a 19th century yearbook. He scribbled the names, birth years and occupations of every Gallagher relative onto an index card. He parsed minor-league box scores from the 1890s and tabulated his own logs of Shorty's daily statistics with defunct outfits such as the Stratford Poets, the Grand Rapids Woodworkers and the Paterson Silk Weavers.

He feels a sense of accomplishment in chronicling Shorty's 1-for-4 effort — including a triple — for the Wheeling Stogies on July 9, 1901, even though it doesn't aid his cause.

"My wife thinks I'm nuts," Randy says. "I really think she does."

"It's true," Mary Lou, his wife of 32 years, confirms. "I don't know how anyone can spend that much time on the same project and not lose interest in it."

Randy scripted a timeline of Shorty's life, detailing each stop along the baseball journey, from the Iron and Oil League to the Canadian League to his big-league cameo. Over the course of a decade, Shorty played for teams in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, West Virginia, Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, Indiana, Louisiana and Ontario. Randy referenced newspapers and magazines from each territory during those periods. Shorty's name surfaced, but no photo. The baseball nomad never stuck around one place long enough.

As his searches came up empty, Randy bided time by upgrading other photos in his arsenal. If he couldn't find Shorty Gallagher, he could at least secure a higher-quality image of Smoky Joe Wood or Shoeless Joe Jackson or one that better accented Albert Belle's bulging biceps.

He also procured a photo of every player to suit up for the Cleveland Rams, the city's AFL/NFL franchise from 1936-45. Norm Olsen was the most difficult to find. Randy prepared for a futile, hours-long examination of the library's digital archives one day. He walked out, photo of Olsen in hand, within five minutes.

With Shorty, Randy has clung to moral victories, such as a recent discovery of his 1896 statistics with the Wheeling Nailers. Randy can recall minutiae about Shorty's life, can pin him in a particular town on a certain day, yet he doesn't know what the guy looked like. He's simultaneously conducting a manic chase and running in place. He's searching day and night for an invisible man.

Randy wonders if there's an old, wood-cut baseball team photo somewhere, buried beneath stacks of junk in someone's garage. He uncovered a team photo of the 1902 Stogies, but by then Shorty had moved on to the New Orleans Pelicans.

"Somebody," he says, "has to have a photo of this guy."

Gallagher gets his own, green folder, separate from the binders, the box containing leftover photos and the mountains of printouts that document three decades of research, correspondence and wilting hope.

As he sits at his oval-shaped kitchen table, Randy shuffles through 43 pages of Shorty research. He has 26 old box scores from a Sporting Life publication and 12 PDF files full of specifics about Shorty's career. Randy suggests Shorty deserved more of an opportunity in the majors, but he points to commentary about his substandard hitting to explain why that never came to pass. He imagines watching in person a guy who was described in the papers as playing a brilliant center field and being "electrifying" on the bases.

The pursuit of Shorty has occupied so much of his mental bandwidth for so long that Randy can't even remember the identity of the next-to-last missing player. Shorty is always lurking in the back of his mind — he just doesn't have a face to visualize.

"I have to keep trying somehow," he says. "I don't know who else to reach out to."

He contemplates reviewing newspaper files from the 1890s, articles and box scores he has already attacked with Sharpies and highlighters, in an effort to spark new ideas. He regularly plummets to depths of Google few researchers have ever visited. He has considered driving to Michigan, finding a library and exploring their archives. He even joked with a friend that he could pay someone to exhume the body and snap a picture of the remains.

On a typical summer evening, Randy opens his laptop in his living room, where he half-listens to the Indians' TV broadcast while continuing his quest to find Shorty.

How would he react if he finally unearthed the missing puzzle piece?

Randy chuckles, pauses for a few seconds and then trips over his words. He says he would "shout it from the mountaintops." He would pour a beer, likely an Irish stout in honor of Shorty's heritage.

And then what?

He could initiate a new pursuit, maybe photos of Browns players or colorizing old black-and-white snapshots. He could upgrade more photos in his baseball selection. None of those options, though, offers the sort of odyssey that has carried him for three decades.

So, as Randy contemplates his next move to crack the Shorty cold case, a thought enters his mind. Does he need to find Shorty?

The search is what makes him feel like that carefree kid running up to Rosie's counter at the Shady Oak Delicatessen, throwing down his nickels and then strutting home and tearing open a fresh pack of cards. The joy is in the anticipation, the possibility.

"In a weird way," he says, "sometimes I'm not sure I want it to end."

MARCH 28, 2021

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

One week 'til Opening Day. All our teams are tied for first place.

RIP Pete Kosty, Wesleyan baseball coach for 28 years. A great baseball man even if he was foolish enough to let me pitch in four varsity games. Twice NCAA Division III coach of the year. 478 wins.

Miscellaneous Stuff

Before 2016, major league teams had never averaged eight strikeouts per game. Now they've done it five seasons in a row. The two highest home run rates in history have come in the last two years. Stolen bases haven't been as rare in almost five decades, and in 2019 — the last full season — games averaged a record 3 hours 10 minutes.

In 20 playoff games last year, Randy Arozarena hit .377/.453/.831 with 10 home runs, 19 runs and 14 RBIs. Arozarena pulled off his magic over four series — he was incredible in each and every one of them. Toronto couldn't get him out, he obliterated the Yankees, he hit four home runs in the ALCS against Houston, and he was the singular figure in the World Series against the Dodgers.

Carlos Beltrán in 2004 when he was playing for the Astros and in the National League Division and Championship Series hit eight homers in 12 games, stole six bases without getting caught and scored 21 runs.

In case you missed it, Pirates infielder Kevin Newman has been refusing to make outs this spring, and it's reaching historic levels.

After going 3-for-4 with a double in Saturday's [7-4 loss](#) to the Red Sox in seven innings, Newman's batting average has inflated to an incredible .714 mark. In 34 plate appearances this spring, he hasn't struck out once.

In Celebration of Opening Day

Here's a look at the career leaders in a number of Opening Day statistical categories, with some help from the Elias Sports Bureau, with each stat going back to the start of the Modern Era (1900), unless otherwise noted. The active leader in each category is listed as well.

PITCHING

Starts: Tom Seaver (16)

Seaver was as impressive on Opening Day as he was prolific, allowing two or fewer runs in eight of those starts and going seven-plus innings in eight as well. He had a 2.13 ERA in his [team-record 11 Opening Day starts for the Mets](#). Jack Morris, Walter Johnson, Randy Johnson and Steve Carlton are tied for second with 14 each.

Active leader entering 2021: Justin Verlander (12)

Strikeouts: Randy Johnson (107)

Johnson racked up all these K's over the course of 14 Opening Day starts in his career. That's 26 more than any other pitcher. Seaver is second with 81.

Johnson had four 10-strikeout games on Opening Day, the most all-time. Bob Gibson, Pedro Martínez, Félix Hernández and Max Scherzer are tied for second with three each.

Active leader: Verlander (76)

Wins: Walter Johnson (nine)

Johnson is third in Opening Day strikeouts (79) and tied for second in starts, so it shouldn't be a surprise to see him atop another list. The Big Train finished with one more season-opening victory than Pete Alexander and Morris. His total included wins on five straight Opening Days from 1913-17, a stretch that included five complete games, three shutouts and a total of three runs allowed.

Active leaders: Clayton Kershaw & Justin Verlander (five)

ERA: Clayton Kershaw (1.05)

Kershaw's 1.05 ERA is the lowest among pitchers with more than five Opening Day starts since

earned runs became official in both leagues in 1913. He's made eight Opening Day starts and allowed more than one earned run just once, when he allowed three in 2015. Kershaw is [scheduled to make his ninth season-opening start](#) on April 1, putting that sparkling ERA on the line against the Rockies at Coors Field.

HITTING

Games played: Pete Rose (23)

Rose's Opening Day games spanned from 1963-85, a 23-season streak which began against the Pirates and concluded against the Expos -- a team that didn't even exist when he played his first opener. Carl Yastrzemski and Hank Aaron are tied for second with 22 each. But neither of them, nor Rose, played in the most wins. That distinction belongs to Babe Ruth and Brooks Robinson, with 15 each.

Active leader: Albert Pujols (20)

Home Runs: Adam Dunn, Ken Griffey Jr., Frank Robinson (eight)

This trio shares the record, but they each got there in different ways. Robinson hit exactly one home run in eight different Opening Day games. Griffey had a two-homer game in 1997, then hit one in six other games. And Dunn had two different Opening Day games with two homers, in 2005 and '07, and one each in four other games.

Dunn is one of seven players on record (since 1904) with two multihomer games on Opening Day, along with Joe Torre, Xavier Nady, Raul Mondesi, Eddie Mathews, Juan González and Pujols, who has a chance to claim that record all for himself if he has another multihomer performance.

Active leaders: Albert Pujols, Bryce Harper (five)

Batting Average: Gabby Hartnett, Adrián González, Jeff Kent (.467)

Hartnett and González had identical 21-for-45 showings on Opening Day, while Kent went 28-for-60. That tied all three for the highest average in season openers, with a minimum of 50 career plate appearances. Hartnett set the standard, with his Opening Day appearances coming between 1922-41, then Kent matched it from 1993-2008 and González from 2006-18. Each slugged mightily on Opening Day as well, with slugging percentages all above .730.

Active leader (min 30 PA): Nolan Arenado (.370)

Hits: Pete Rose (31)

Rose recorded at least one hit in 17 different Opening Day games and had multiple hits in 11 of those, putting him three ahead of Joe Judge, Kent and Yastrzemski on the overall list.

With two hits this year, Pujols would land in a tie for 25th-most Opening Day hits since at least 1904 with 22. Notable players with exactly 22 Opening Day hits include Rickey Henderson, Lou

Gehrig, Ted Williams and Vladimir Guerrero.

Active leader: Albert Pujols (20)

RBIs: Adam Dunn (21)

Dunn had five RBIs on Opening Day in 2005, and four in each of '09 and '11. The rest of the top four includes Guerrero (19), Robinson (18) and Kent (18), before a large tie for fifth.

Active leader: Albert Pujols (15)

Cy Young Thoughts

Last week I listed several (to me) unlikely two time Cy Young winners: Would you have named all of the following: Tim Lincecum , Bret Saberhagen, Denny McLain, Corey Kluber , Johan Santana?

The Cy Young Award started in 1956. The top winners are an elite group of pitchers:

Roger Clemens 7

Randy Johnson 5

Greg Maddux, Steve Carlton 4

Tom Seaver, Pedro Martinez, Jim Palmer, Sandy Koufax, Clayton Kershaw, Max Scherzer 3.

The two time winners beyond those listed above are pretty strong:

Bob Gibson, Gaylord Perry, Tom Glavine, Roy Halladay, Jacob deGrom

First rookie to win a Cy Young Award was Dodgers' Fernando Valenzuela (1981)

Eight Pitchers Who were Free Agents the Year after winning the Cy Young:

Trevor Bauer, the 2020 National League Cy Young Award winner, was a free agent before he announced he was joining the Dodgers on a three year deal after adding a very notable honor to his résumé.

Bauer had a great season, posting the second-lowest ERA in the Majors and lowest in the NL, at 1.73. His contract-year performance was already on the way to netting him a notable deal on the free-agent market. But his situation of being a free agent who won a Cy Young Award is unique.

He was the eighth pitcher to be a free agent in the offseason immediately following a Cy Young Award win, and just the fourth to change teams, with the other four all re-signing with the team they'd won the award with.

And in addition to the four Cy Young Award-winning free agents to change teams, there have also been four pitchers (David Cone, Pedro Martinez, Roger Clemens, R.A. Dickey) to be traded in the offseason following a Cy Young Award-winning season.

Here's a look at the seven previous Cy Young winners to be free agents in the offseason after winning the award, in reverse chronological order by the year in which they won the award, and where they ended up signing.

2004: Roger Clemens, Astros

Re-signed with HOU

Clemens was in his age-41 season when he won the seventh and final Cy Young Award of his career. The Texas-raised hurler had signed as a free agent on a one-year deal with the Astros entering 2004, following a five-year tenure with the Yankees and an initial retirement announcement after 2003. He had a 2.98 ERA and 212 strikeouts in '04, beating Randy Johnson and teammate Roy Oswalt for the award.

He became a free agent after the season, and at the time of the award announcement, had not formally stated whether he planned to pitch in 2005 or not. As the offseason progressed, he made it known he did want to pitch, and returned to the Astros on a one-year, \$18 million deal. At the time, it was the largest total value for any one-year contract in history.

1996: John Smoltz, Braves

Re-signed with ATL

Smoltz won his first and only Cy Young Award in 1996, in a year where he had a 2.94 ERA in 253 2/3 innings. He led the Majors with 276 strikeouts and received all but two of the 28 available first-place votes for NL Cy Young, beating out Kevin Brown. At 29 years old, Smoltz was set to be a free agent for the first time following the season.

He re-signed with the Braves relatively quickly, inking a new contract in late November. At four years and \$31 million, it was, at the time, the largest contract for a pitcher in baseball history by

both total value and average annual value. It was superseded by another Braves pitcher a few months later, when the team gave Tom Glavine a four-year, \$34 million extension.

1992: Greg Maddux, Cubs

Signed with ATL

Speaking of that vaunted Braves rotation, Maddux joined it following his first Cy Young Award. In 1992 he had a 2.18 ERA in a Major League-leading 268 innings for the Cubs as a 26-year-old with free agency on the immediate horizon. Maddux received a \$34 million offer from the Yankees, but signed with the Braves -- on the heels of back-to-back World Series appearances -- instead, for \$28 million. That total value still set the record for the largest pitcher contract at the time.

Maddux's 1992 award was his first of four straight, which established a record matched only once since, by Randy Johnson. He's also the only pitcher to win two consecutive Cy Young Awards with two different teams.

1990: Bob Welch, A's

Re-signed with OAK

As a 33-year-old in 1990, Welch had a 2.95 ERA, 127 strikeouts and 27 wins in 35 starts. He won the AL Cy Young, receiving 15 of 28 first-place votes, ahead of Roger Clemens -- who had a 1.93 ERA and 209 strikeouts.

In December, Welch re-signed with the A's for four years and \$13 million. He made 35 starts again in 1991, but never posted an ERA below 3.25 again, finishing his career after 1994 in Oakland.

1989: Mark Davis, Padres

Signed with KC

Davis, who began his career primarily as a starter, made 70 appearances in 1989, all in relief. It was his second season pitching exclusively out of the bullpen. In '89, he recorded 44 saves and had a 1.85 ERA. He received 19 of 24 first-place votes for the award, beating out second and third place finishers Mike Scott and Greg Maddux.

In December, Davis signed with the Royals, netting a four-year, \$13 million contract. Davis joined none other than fellow 1989 Cy Young Award winner Bret Saberhagen on the Royals' staff, marking the first time a team entered a season with both reigning winners from the previous season.

1984: Rick Sutcliffe, Cubs

Re-signed with CHC

Sutcliffe became the first -- and to this point only -- pitcher to win a Cy Young Award after an in-season trade after he joined the Cubs on June 13 from the Indians. After posting a 5.15 ERA in 15 starts with the Indians, he went on a strong run in Chicago, with a 2.69 ERA in 20 starts for the Cubs, going 16-1. He won the NL award unanimously, then headed into free agency.

In December, Sutcliffe chose to re-sign with the Cubs, after receiving offers from the Padres, among other teams. He got a five-year, \$9.5 million deal, which was -- this may sound familiar -- the largest by total value for a pitcher at the time.

1974: Catfish Hunter, A's

Signed with NYY

Hunter threw 318 1/3 innings in 1974, posting an AL-leading 2.49 ERA and a Major League-leading 0.99 WHIP. He beat out Fergie Jenkins for the award, receiving 12 of 24 first-place votes. Hunter became a free agent following the season, but not in the way we are used to. And unlike the others listed above, he did not play the season "heading into free agency" the way we would recognize now.

In November 1974, he claimed that his contract had been violated, telling A's ownership that he hadn't been paid part of his contract, which was meant to go into an insurance annuity. The case went to an arbitrator, who ruled that the contract had indeed been violated. That made him a free agent, the first big-time name to hit the open market in this way in the modern era after Curt Flood's Supreme Court case.

Hunter signed a five-year deal with the Yankees worth more than \$3 million, the first multi-million dollar contract in total value in history.

And for all the stars and Hall of Famers who won it, there are more than a few who make one blink: Dean Chance, Lamar Hoyt, Pat Hetgen, Dallas Keuchel, Mike McCormick, Randy Jones, John Denny, Steve Bedrosian.