

BASEBALL TIDBITS APRIL 2021

APRIL 4, 2021

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

Lots of fun tidbits to celebrate opening day. And three wonkish items on spin rate, impact of age on pitchers and “stuff”. Have a great week.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

The Cy Young is a little bit like the Oscars: you need to be nominated some, and accrue a bit of a track record, before you win. In the last 15 years, no pitcher has taken home the Cy Young with fewer than 100 innings on their career ledger, and most Cy winners had been nominated in previous years.

Yankees celebrating the life of Whitey Ford with 16 on their sleeves. Ford pitched all of his 16 seasons for the Yankees, 236-106 record, 6 world series titles, led the majors in winning pct. three times, in ERA twice, threw 45 shutouts, 10-8 in 11 world series including 3 shutouts. Highest salary \$60K.

The top of the active HRs list is pretty easy with Pujols (662), Cabrera (487) Nelson Cruz (417) and Cano (334) but I was surprised that Jay Bruce of the Yankees is 5th with 318 ahead of my other guesses Stanton (312), Trout (9th at 302).

In-season managerial changes are becoming increasingly rare.

The last one to occur was at the 2018 All-Star break, when the Cardinals replaced Mike Matheny with Mike Shildt. Only three of the other current 30 managers — the Athletics’ Bob Melvin

(June 2011); Brewers' Craig Counsell (May 2015); and Braves' Brian Snitker (May 2016) — took over in the middle of a season.

The Seattle Pilots, Kansas City Royals, Montreal Expos and San Diego Padres were the four 1969 expansion teams that allowed Major League Baseball to go to (two) division play and playoffs for the first time. The Royals have won two World Series and played in a third. The Expos became the Washington Nationals and have won one World Series, in 2019. The Padres are the Padres, they've been in two World Series in 1984 and 1998, the latter enabling them to build Petco Park and move downtown. The Pilots moved to Milwaukee after one season, and in their 13th season as the Brewers got to the seventh game of the World Series with five Hall of Famers

LOTS OF NUMBERS

The 1990s Braves won the World Series on their fourth postseason attempt of the decade, in 1995, but in this century, October has brought only pain. The Braves have reached the postseason **12** times in the 2000s without breaking through to the World Series.

The last at-bat [Mike Trout](#) took in a playoff game occurred on Oct. 5, 2014, before a raucous crowd at Kauffman Stadium. Royals closer Greg Holland struck him out to end an inglorious October debut for Trout, who went **1-for-12** as the Angels were swept.

The Phillies haven't made the playoffs since 2011, longest of all NL teams. That streak might have ended in 2020, had it not been for the team's bullpen. A **7.06 ERA** — the worst in the sport since 1930 — tends to have that effect.

Yankees hope it is a good comeback. For a good chunk of the 2010s — from 2014 to 2018, to be specific — few pitchers could hang with Corey Kluber. He won two Cy Young Awards in Cleveland. Only Scherzer and Clayton Kershaw were worth more wins above replacement, according to FanGraphs. But Kluber has thrown only **36 2/3** innings since then, limited by a

fractured arm in 2019 and a torn back muscle in 2020. He logged only one inning with Texas last season.

MLB attendance has dropped incrementally from **79,484,718 in 2007 to 68,506,896** in 2019, the last full season when fans could walk through the turnstiles. The average age of the baseball television viewer is 15 years older than those who watch the NBA, eight years older than the NHL viewer, seven years older than the NFL viewer. The owners and players should consider this carefully as they conduct CBA negotiations.

Milwaukee Brewers-- From 2017-19, they averaged **90** wins and **2.8** million fans with one first-place finish and two second-place finishes.

17: Career Gold Gloves for catcher Yadier Molina (9) and third baseman Nolan Arenado (8), the only active players with at least eight such awards.

On opening day the Yankees had a runner on 3B with one out in the bottom of the 9th of a 2-2 game against Toronto. A squeeze might have been useful (Yankees failed to get the runner home and lost in the 10th). **0:** sacrifice bunts by the Reds in 2020 (Milwaukee and Tampa Bay also had none).

3: Cy Young Award winners (Trevor Bauer, Clayton Kershaw, David Price) and M.V.P. winners (Cody Bellinger, Mookie Betts, Kershaw) on the Dodgers' roster.

33: Regular-season games, of a possible 222, in which both Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton have played since 2019.

5.29: E.R.A. by the Orioles since 2018, highest in M.L.B.

183: Runs batted in by the A.L. M.V.P. Jose Abreu of the White Sox since 2019, most in M.L.B.

137: Wins by the Twins since 2019, most in the A.L.

637: Hits by Whit Merrifield of the Royals since 2017, most in the A.L.

11: Playoff appearances in the 2000s for the A's, more than every other A.L. team except the Yankees (17).

459: Career starts by Zack Greinke of the Astros, most among active pitchers.

Seattle Mariners average of **43,200** fans per game in the team's last playoff season, 2001, but just **22,112** in 2019.

Here are the biggest contracts for shortstops and shortstops-turned-third basemen (e.g., Alex Rodriguez and Manny Machado) of all time:

Francisco Lindor, Mets, 2021 (10 years, \$341 million)

Fernando Tatis Jr., Padres, 2021 (14 years, \$340 million)

Manny Machado, Padres, 2019 (10 years, \$300 million)

Alex Rodriguez, Yankees, 2007 (10 years, \$275 million)

Alex Rodriguez, Rangers, 2000 (10 years, \$252 million)

Derek Jeter, Yankees, 2001 (10 years, \$189 million)

Troy Tulowitzki, Rockies, 2010 (10 years, \$157.75 million)

Xander Bogaerts, Red Sox, 2019 (6 years, \$120 million)

José Reyes, Marlins, 2011 (6 years, \$106 million)

7-2 Vegas odds Dodgers to win the World Series. Ahead of Yankees (11-2), White Sox and Padres (both 9-1), Braves and Mets (both 10-1). Pittsburgh Pirates are longest odds at 200-1.

.384 Batting Average for D.J. LeMahieu with runners in scoring position 2019-2020.

47 straight seasons with a winning home record. New York Yankees 1918-1964. All time longest streak.

28 straight seasons with a winning home record. New York Yankees 1993-2020. Second longest streak.

CELEBRATING OPENING DAY

Only two players with grand slams on two Opening Days--Sixto Lezcano for the Brewers (1978, '80) and Hanley Ramirez for the Marlins and Red Sox (2009, '15)

Walter Johnson threw 7 opening day shutouts. In 1926 he threw a 15 inning shutout over the A's. One of his 110 career shutouts.

Clayton Kershaw became the first hurler in 60 years to throw a shutout and hit a homer on Opening Day with a 3 hitter over the Giants in 2013.

Pretty good on opening day:

Raul Mondesi, RF, 1999 Dodgers

Stat line: 4-for-5, 2 HR, BB, 6 RBIs

Jim Presley, 3B, 1986 Mariners

Stat line: 3-for-4, 2 HR, HBP, 6 RBIs and became just the third player to hit a walk off grand slam on opening day -- Milwaukee's Sixto Lezcano (1980) and Oakland's Matt Olson (2020).

Kirk Gibson, RF, 1986 Tigers

Stat line: 4-for-4, 2 HR, 5 RBIs

Result: Tigers 6, Red Sox 5

Bob Gibson, SP, 1967 Cardinals

Stat line: 9 IP, 5 H, 0 R, 0 BB, 13 K

Game result: Cardinals 6, Giants 0

This season began a run of Gibson starting on Opening Day for nine straight years. He made the most of the assignment, outdueling fellow Hall of Famer Juan Marichal while becoming one of eight pitchers to [strike out at least 13](#) in a season opener. (Cleveland's Shane Bieber joined that exclusive list in 2020, when he [racked up 14 K's](#) in six innings against the Royals). Gibson was ready from the first pitch, striking out each of the first five batters he faced, including Willie Mays and Willie McCovey. He is still one of only two pitchers to strike out at least a dozen in an Opening Day shutout, setting up a season that ended with the righty earning World Series MVP honors.

Toronto Blue Jays have opened the season in a different home ball park three years in a row—Toronto, Buffalo and Dunedin, FL.

Nolan Ryan was 46 in 1993 as opening day pitcher. Only older pitcher was Jack Quinn, age 47 for the Brooklyn Robins in 1931.

Catfish Hunter was the youngest opening day starting pitcher in 1966 at age 20 for the A's.

In 14 opening day starts Randy Johnson struck out 107, most ever.

Bob Feller threw a no-hitter on opening day 1940.

Jimmy Key was 7-0 in opening day starts, best record all time.

Ken Griffey Jr., Adam Dunn and Frank Robinson all hit 8 opening day HRs.

Pete Rose had 31 opening day hits, all-time leader.

Mets have the best all time opening day winning pct with 39-20 record. Yankees are 66-52-1.

Largest opening day crowd at a new stadium—Rockies in 1993 with 80K at Mile High Stadium. Smallest opening day crowd at a new stadium was last season in Texas where covid made for 0 fans.

[Four players have gone deep three times on Opening Day](#), and three of these performances were against the Royals.

Blue Jays slugger George Bell was the first to accomplish the feat, doing so in Toronto's 1988 season opener against Kansas City -- Bell's first game after winning the '87 American League MVP Award with a 47-homer season. Bell followed it up by going 5-for-5 in the Blue Jays' second game, but he faded thereafter and finished the year with a .751 OPS, down from .957 the previous season.

Tuffy Rhodes matched Bell with three homers against the Mets -- all off Dwight Gooden -- on Opening Day with the 1994 Cubs. The three dingers represented nearly a quarter of the homers (13) he hit in his entire Major League career. After playing his final MLB season in 1995, Rhodes went on to become a star in Japan, setting the Nippon Professional Baseball all-time home run record for a foreign-born player with 464.

More than a decade later, Dmitri Young blasted three homers for the Tigers in their 2005 season

Matt Davidson was the most recent to send three balls into the seats on Opening Day, crushing a trio of round-trippers for the White Sox against Kansas City on Opening Day in 2018.

Don Baylor went 4-for-4 with a homer, a triple and two doubles for the Orioles against the Brewers on Opening Day in '73. He is one of four players to have 4 opening days hits, first since 1954.

Only two players have driven in seven runs in a season opener.

The first was Brant Alyea, who went 4-for-4 with two homers and seven RBIs for the Twins on Opening Day against the White Sox in 1970. Alyea also had a two-homer, seven-RBI performance that September. Those two games made up 23% of his RBI total (61) for the entire season.

The Cubs' Corey Patterson also had seven RBIs on Opening Day in 2003, going yard twice against the Mets.

Most opening day strikeouts was Camilo Pascual's total of 15 strikeouts against the Red Sox in the Washington Senators' 1960 season opener. (I think I had about 20 Pascual baseball cards).

Pascual finished that season with a career-high 8.5 K/9 rate over 151 2/3 innings, then led the AL in strikeouts in each of the next three years. Runners up with 14 K's are Don Drysdale (also in 1960), Randy Johnson twice for the Mariners in '93 and '96 and Shane Bieber for the Indians in 2020.

I don't know how to explain what happened on Opening Day in Kansas City. But here goes:

HOW THE RANGERS STARTED THEIR SEASON: Double, double, walk, single, double, single, single. That's five runs (and zero outs) in the top of the first.

HOW THE ROYALS STARTED THEIR SEASON: Single, single, walk, walk, passed ball, walk, strikeout, single, single, pitching change, sac fly. That's also five runs on the board in the bottom of the first.

So what you had here was a game in which the first five hitters of the season scored a run — *for each team!* Oh, I've seen that happen — in my kids' tee-ball games. But in the big leagues? C'mon. That's ridiculous. And how ridiculous was it? Here goes:

THE 5-5 CLUB: How many Opening Days in history have featured both teams scoring at least five times in the first inning? The Elias Sports Bureau jumped on that one. And yep, that answer is none.

ONE MORE ADDENDUM: Think about what the Rangers did here. Their first seven batters of the season all reached base. Their first five batters of the season scored a run. *And they lost!* The only other team in history to score five in the first inning of the season and not win? Admiral Schlei's 1908 Cincinnati Reds. Unreal.

HOLD ON. YET ANOTHER ADDENDUM! While all this was going on, the Cardinals were scoring *six* runs in the top of the first inning of their season.

ReCap Royals: Never scored 5+ runs in their first inning of a season (1969-2020).
Rangers/Senators: Never scored 5+ runs in their first inning of a season (1961-2020). Cardinals: Never scored 6+ runs in their first inning of a season (modern era, 1900-2020).

Albert's rarefied double-double

We'd better get used to [Albert Pujols](#) making some kind of history every day this year. So why should Opening Day be any different?

OK, what did Albert do *this* time? It gets more amazing the more you think about it.

He spent the first 11 seasons of his career in St. Louis. He started on Opening Day in all 11 of them.

He just kicked off his 10th season with the Angels. He has started on all 10 Opening Days for them.

So how many other players in the history of baseball have started at least 10 openers for two different teams? You can probably guess the answer. Here is the entire list:

Albert Pujols.

Wow.

The Zack Attack

"Former Cy Young Wins on Opening Day" might not sound like the most shocking headline of 2021. But baseball is weird sometimes. And this column is eternally grateful for that.

Zack Greinke undoubtedly isn't quite that grateful. But when he beat the A's with six artful shutout innings Thursday, this was bigger news than you probably realized. That's because, until this particular trip to the mound, Greinke was a member of this really odd list, of 200-game winners in the modern era who had never won a game on Opening Day.

Phil Niekro	318
Jim Kaat	283
Eppa Rixey	266
Andy Pettitte	256
Three Finger Brown	239
Joe Niekro	221
Wilbur Cooper	216
John Smoltz	213
Eddie Cicotte	209
Zack Greinke	208
Orel Hershisser	204

But then ... 18 seasons, 460 starts, five Opening Day starts and one Cy Young deep into what might just be a Hall of Fame career, Zack Greinke won an opener. And our friends at STATS tell us he's just the third pitcher in modern history to win at least 200 of the other kind of games before he won an Opening Day game. The others: Jerry Reuss (211 wins, then won on Opening Day in 1989) and Burleigh Grimes (207, then won in 1929).

Baseball has no rhyme. Baseball has no reason. But baseball never stops churning out notes like this one!

In other news...

And all this *also* happened on this weird and wild Opening Day.

MADBUM-DIEGO: Does this sound kind of familiar? Madison Bumgarner started on Opening Day against the Padres — *for the third straight year*. That in itself isn't a record. Félix Hernández somehow started against Oakland on *four* consecutive Opening Days (2010-13). But here, according to STATS, is what makes MadBum historic: In the modern era, only one other pitcher ever started against any team on at least three straight Opening Days — for more than one team: Wes Ferrell, for the Red Sox and Senators, against the Philadelphia A's, from 1936-38.

THE DUO-FECTA: The ghost-runner-on-second extra-inning rule is back. So here's to one of my favorite weird extra-inning-rule inventions — the two-up, three-down inning. We saw several of those last year. But this one was the first *in the history of Opening Days*. The Braves opened the top of the 10th inning in Philly with the ghost runner on second. Then came: [Freddie Freeman](#) groundout, [Marcell Ozuna](#) fly-ball double play, with [Roman Quinn](#) throwing out the go-ahead ghost runner at the plate. So if you're counting along at home, that's two batters — but three outs. Remember when that seemed impossible?

A BRONX TALE: It isn't often you can say that something happened in a Yankees game that has never, ever happened in any Yankees game before. But thanks to the extra-inning rule, we could say that Thursday. For the first time ever, the Yankees lost a game on a *leadoff* RBI double. [Randal Grichuk](#) was the first batter in extra innings. He then thumped a double to score the ghost runner, Jonathan Davis. Baseball – in 2021!

LORDS OF THE FLIES: Hits by the Cubs on Opening Day: Two. Sacrifice flies by the Cubs on Opening Day: *Three*. So how many other teams, since sac flies became an official stat, have finished a game with at least two hits but more sac flies than hits? That would be zero.

TAYLOR SHOP: As the great Sam Mellinger, of Kansas City Star fame, was kind enough to point out, the Royals may have given up eight runs in the first three innings Thursday, but it was actually weirder and wilder than that. That would be because two of those first nine outs consisted of their new center fielder, [Michael A. Taylor](#), throwing out runners at the plate. And how many outfield assists did Royals center fielders have all last season? Exactly one — by Brett (Mr. October) Phillips.

THE BIG 10: Reds ace [Luis Castillo](#) felt like a savvy outside-the-box Cy Young pick this year — until the season started. Then he gave up (gasp) 10 runs on Opening Day! According to Stathead, he's just the third pitcher to cough up double-digit runs in an opener in the last 74 seasons. The others: Early Wynn for the 1948 Senators and Roberto Hernández (then known as Fausto Carmona) for the 2011 Indians.

FOUR BETTER OR WORSE: The good news for the Diamondbacks was, they hit four home runs in one inning (the fifth). And no team had ever done that on any Opening Day in nearly a century and a half of Major League Baseball. Alas, there was only one piece of bad news: They hit four in an inning *and lost*. Our friends at [sportradar.com](#) track four-homer innings back to 1974. That's nearly half a century. Want to guess how many other teams in that time hit four bombs in one inning on the road and lost? Uh-huh. Zero! They'd gone 31-0 – until Thursday.

LEAVE IT TO BIEBER: [Shane Bieber](#) on Opening Day last year: 14 strikeouts. Shane Bieber on Opening Day this year: 12 strikeouts. The complete list of pitchers in history with more than one 12-plus whiff game on Opening Day, according to MLB.com's ever-inquisitive Sarah Langs: Nolan Ryan, Bob Gibson, Randy Johnson ... and Shane Bieber. And no one has ever done it two Opening Days in a row. Not even those guys!

POP QUIZ: Finally, [Joey Votto](#) made it into the batter's box 223 times last year. Want to guess how many times he hit a pop-up in the infield? If you know your Joey Votto trivia, you know that answer is zero. Well, it isn't 2020 anymore. So what do you think he did in his very first trip to the plate in 2021? Yessir. He popped up to [Nolan Arenado](#). Baseball!

But hang on. We're not even done here. You'll never believe what transpired in Votto's fourth at-bat of the season. Yup. He popped up to Yadier Molina.

What do Phil Neikro (318 wins), Jim Kaat (283), Andy Pettitte (256), John Smoltz (213), Orel Hershiser (204) have in common? Never won on opening day.

Félix Hernández somehow started against Oakland on *four* consecutive Opening Days (2010-13).

Chicago cubs had three sacrifice flies and just two hits. First time ever a team had more sac flies than hits on opening day.

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Pitchers with 12 or more strikeouts on opening day-- Nolan Ryan, Bob Gibson, Randy Johnson ... and Shane Bieber. Bieber struck out 14 last year and 12 this year to become the only pitcher ever to do it twice.

You may have read that Yermín Mercedes of the White Sox started the season going 8 for 8, best all time. He had one MLB at bat prior to this. One of the 8 hits was his first HR. Five of the 8 hits were with two strikes.

The White Sox record for consecutive hits is 10, which is shared by Frank Thomas (1997), Rip Radcliff (1938) and Harry McCurdy (1926). The [Major League record is 11](#), held by Dustin Pedroia (2016) and Bernie Williams (2002).

MILESTONES ON THE HORIZON

Miguel Cabrera needs 134 hits to reach 3,000, 13 HRs to reach 500. If he reaches both milestones he will join Hank Aaron, Alex Rodriguez, Albert Pujols, Willie Mays, Rafael Palmeiro and Eddie Murray. His .313 career average would put him behind just Ruth, Williams and Foxx amongst 500 HR hitters.

[Albert Pujols](#): has a shot to reach ninth all time in hits, third in total bases and extra-base hits this year. He needs 83 hits to pass

Paul Molitor: 3,319

Eddie Collins: 3,314

Willie Mays: 3,283

Eddie Murray: 3,255

Nap Lajoie: 3,252

Pujols enters the year with 5,923 career total bases, trailing only Barry Bonds (5,976), Mays (6,066), Stan Musial (6,134) and Hank Aaron (6,856). And he has 1,347 career extra-base hits, fifth behind only Babe Ruth (1,356), Musial (1,377), Bonds (1,440) and Aaron (1,477).

Max Scherzer is 216 K's short of 3,000.

Jon Lester is 7 wins shy of 200.

Aroldis Chapman is 24 saves short of 300.

Clayton Kershaw needs 170 K's to pass Don Sutton as all-time Dodgers leader.

Yadier Molina enters the year 11 games shy of 2,000 caught for his career, 37 shy of passing Jason Kendall for fifth all-time and 68 shy of passing Gary Carter for fourth.

Joey Votto enters the year with 295 career homers and 966 RBIs. He's already second among Canadian-born players all-time in home runs, but reaching an even 300 would put him in rarefied air on the list with Hall of Famer Larry Walker, who hit 383. Votto is third on the all-time RBI list among Canadian-born players, trailing Justin Morneau (985) and Walker (1,311).

THEY COME, THEY GO

It's interesting to look at the 9 best players in baseball the last five seasons. This list is by Baseball-Reference WAR, but I agree with the general order.

1. [Mike Trout](#). Of course. He will probably spend his entire career with the Angels.
2. Mookie Betts. Traded to Los Angeles last year.
3. Nolan Arenado. Traded to St. Louis this year.
4. José Ramírez. Signed an extremely team-friendly deal with Cleveland and will probably stay for the foreseeable future — the team has affordable club options on him through the 2023 season.
5. Francisco Lindor. Obviously traded to the Mets this year.
6. Freddie Freeman. As of right now, he will become a free agent at the end of the season — but there seems to be player and team interest in an extension.
7. [José Altuve](#). Looks like a Houston lifer — signed a seven-year deal that will go through the 2024 season and he has full no-trade protection.
8. Anthony Rendon. Signed with the Angels before last season after starring for Washington.
9. Christian Yelich. Dumped by the Marlins, he is now an icon in Milwaukee.

So as you can see, most of these players have switched teams while in their primes. You can ask whether or not this is good for the game as a whole — my guess is that it isn't, especially because the players moved for money reasons. I believe there's a real hunger among baseball fans to have stars who become synonymous with the franchise: Al Kaline with the Tigers, Ernie Banks with the Cubs, Tony Gwynn with the Padres, Cal Ripken with the Orioles, Derek Jeter with the Yankees, George Brett with the Royals, on and on. This is undoubtedly true in every team sport, but I think it's particularly true for baseball because there are so many games, played every day — these players become a part of our lives in deeper ways.

JAYSON STARK-NUMBERS

Everything he writes is excellent.

Total pitches thrown in the last full season (2019): 732,511.

Total pitches thrown in 2020, in the 60-game edition: 263,583.

The difference? It comes to an incredible 468,928 pitches. So the moral of that story is simple: Somebody has to throw every darned one of those pitches. And that's scaring the heck out of teams across the continent.

If workloads rebound to the same level as 2019, the average team will have to throw between 15,000 and 16,000 more pitches this year than last year.

How does that affect starters? The league leader in pitches in 2019 (Trevor Bauer) threw 3,687 in that 162-game season. The league leader last year (Lance Lynn) threw "only" 1,408 pitches. In other words, we're looking at your classic inning-eating starters having to throw 2,000 more pitches than they did last season.

How does that affect staffs as a whole? In 2019, 270 different pitchers threw at least 1,000 pitches. Last year, just 39 did. So we're going from about one per team to nine per team.

How about bullpens? In 2019, 82 relief pitchers threw at least 1,000 pitches. No relievers anywhere threw more than about half that many last year. But what's really eye-opening is the impact on a workhorse closer. Liam Hendriks threw nearly 1,000 more pitches in the 2019 regular season (1,311) than he threw last year (370).

How many home runs did No. 2 hitters launch in the major leagues last year? That would be 332. We ask because the next question is: How many home runs were hit by No. 3 hitters? That answer is 289. And how many other seasons have there been in the live-ball era in which 2-hole hitters outhomered 3-hole hitters? Right you are. None, of course.

236 is the batting average of left-handed hitters since 2018 when they've come to bat and found at least one infielder somewhere on the outfield grass. We bring this up because that's about to become illegal in double-A this year. And let's just say Major League Baseball will be paying close attention.

24.4% of batted balls were hit to the opposite field, that is the fewest since records were kept starting in 2002.

Only 50.5 percent of all pitches thrown last year were fastballs – the lowest percentage ever recorded. And now a number that was even more unfathomable: If you prorate last year's numbers over a full season, there would have been *20,000 fewer fastballs thrown in "hitters' counts" than 10 years earlier.*

In 2002, when FanGraphs began logging Zone Percentage, 54.2 percent of all pitches thrown were in the strike zone. Now it's 41.2. So how does that translate? It means hitters are seeing nearly 90,000 fewer balls a year in the zone now than then.

the 3300 Hit Club? Just nine hitters whose careers began since 1900 have joined that club – only four of them in the last four decades: Pete Rose, Derek Jeter, Carl Yastrzemski and Paul Molitor. You know how many of the 300 Hit Club were first basemen? Right. None of them. Pujols is 20 hits away from passing Eddie Murray for the all-time lead among players whose primary position was first base.

3300/600 – Pujols got that 600-homer thing out of the way four years ago. Let's assume he doesn't have it in him to muster the 38 homers he would need to join the 700-Homer Association. But whatever. You know how many men who ever lived have ended their career with at least 3300 hits and 600 home runs? Exactly one: Henry Aaron.

31 – Has anyone mentioned that if Sir Albert gets 31 extra-base hits this year – and he has never played a full season where he didn't – he'll own more extra-base hits (1,378) than all but two men who ever played baseball? He needs 10 more to pass some old-timer named Babe Ruth, and then 21 more to pass the great Stan Musial. And at that point only Aaron (1,477) and Barry Bonds (1,440) would stand ahead of him.

ROGERS HORNSBY

Former commissioner Fay Vincent wrote a piece on Hornsby in WSJ this week.

I submit humbly that there is another record that will never be broken: From 1921-25 Rogers Hornsby, the St. Louis Cardinals second baseman, hit for an average of over .400.

In those five remarkable seasons, Hornsby hit .397, .401, .384, .424 and .403—an average of .402.

Hornsby, whose .358 career average puts him second only to Ty Cobb, was so intense about the art of hitting he refused to go to the movies. He worried the flickering light on the screen might hurt his eyesight. Genius often comes wrapped in eccentricities.

AARON JUDGE

Aaron Judge is turning 29 in April

Three years Fresno State, late first round draft pick

a year in Class A ball, a year in Double A, a year in Triple A.

Age 25 in 2017 rookie season in 2017, hitting .284/.422/.627 with 52 homers, a league-leading 127 walks and 128 runs scored.

112 games in 2018

102 games in 2019,

2020 28 games and hit nine home runs

Calf strains, oblique strains, wrist sprains, shoulder injuries, rib injuries. He needs to get healthy soon to turn potential into a great career.

THE MAGIC OF JACOB DEGROM

I realize this is an overplayed bit, but over the last three seasons, deGrom's record is 25-19. This is his record despite having a 2.10 ERA over those three seasons. This, of course, is Exhibit A why you shouldn't give even a second thought to a pitcher's won-loss record.

However, I think it's worth talking about won-loss record here just to explore how rare it is for a pitcher to give up so few runs and win so few games. The crescendo of the deGrom madness happened in 2018 when he went 10-9 with a 1.70 ERA. There really hasn't been another season like that one in recent baseball history. The closest examples would be:

- Dave Roberts, in 1971, went 14-17 with a 2.10 ERA for the San Diego Padres. This is quite incredible but when you consider context — run-scoring was way down in '71, Roberts pitched in an extreme pitcher's park and was pretty close to unhittable at home — it doesn't quite measure up to the deGrom madness.

- Bob Veale went 13-14 with a 2.05 ERA in 1968. But, you know, that was 1968, the year of the pitcher, when a 2.05 ERA tied him for ninth place in the league.
- Sam McDowell in that same year went 15-14 with a 1.81 ERA, but again the 1968 principles apply. His 1.81 ERA didn't lead the league or even his own team.
- In 1966, Gary Peters went 12-10 with a 1.98 ERA for the Chicago White Sox. That too involved an extreme pitcher's park (the White Sox as a team had a 2.68 ERA) and very few runs being scored.

And so on — most of the pitchers with extremely low ERAs and relatively poor winning percentages are from the 1960s, when those ERAs are probably deceiving.

But, OK, a pitcher can have one unlucky year. What makes deGrom so unusual is that in 2019 he won his second Cy Young Award with a 2.43 ERA and an 11-8 record. Last year he had a 2.38 ERA and a 4-2 record. What gives? Even if we understand that pitcher wins and losses are not a particularly useful statistic, you would still expect there to be some correlation between not giving up runs and winning games, right?

So let's break it down a bit. In those three years, deGrom made 76 starts, of which the Mets won just 36. That's ludicrous — the Mets went 36-40 in the games started by the best pitcher in baseball the last three years.

How did they do it? OK, well the 19 games deGrom lost he generally did not pitch at his best. Yes, of course, he did have some hard-luck losses — he gave up two or fewer runs in seven of those 19 games. But his ERA in the 19 losses is a not-bad-but-not-deGrom-like 3.98 and he gave up several unearned runs as well.

Then, as you might expect, he was all but unhittable in his 25 wins. His ERA for those games is a minuscule 1.12. This is worth noting: deGrom did not get a single cheap win in the last three years. He did not give up more than two earned runs in *any* of his victories and gave up zero or one run in 20 of them.

So that leads us to the many, many no-decisions — 32 in total. And this is where it gets incredible. Nine times, deGrom did not give up a single earned run in a start and he still got a no-decision. Ten more times he gave up one run in a start, and he got a no-decision.

He has a 1.85 ERA in those 36 no-decisions and yet he left the game tied in 20 of those games.

He also left the game ahead 10 times (once by five runs) only to watch the Mets blow the lead.

This, frankly, is a work of art.

MLB will use Statcast, lab testing to catch pitchers doctoring baseball, but punishments

Analytics are everywhere, but potentially using Statcast to punish cheating players seems to be a new frontier.

To combat pitcher use of foreign substances, Major League Baseball this season will collect baseballs for testing at an outside laboratory and will track which pitchers threw those that test positive. The league is also directing security personnel assigned to each team to watch for potential violations. On top of that, the commissioner's office will use Statcast data to "to analyze changes in spin rates of pitchers suspected of using foreign substances," per a memo sent to all 30 teams on Tuesday. The memo was first reported by the New York Post.

Tacky substances help pitchers get a superior grip on the ball, which allows them to add more spin and make pitches move more dramatically — ultimately making them more effective. The league's Statcast analysis "will include comparisons of spin rates to career norms for players, and changes observed during or immediately following certain game circumstances."

Perhaps most significantly, MLB signaled that it is prepared to attempt to punish players based on these new methods of gathering evidence. In the past, pitchers typically have been disciplined for the use of foreign substances when an umpire has caught them on the field. "To be clear, players are subject to discipline by the Commissioner's Office for violating the Official Baseball Rules regardless of whether evidence of the violation has been discovered during or following a game," wrote Michael Hill, MLB's senior vice president of on-field operations.

The Major League Baseball Players Association had no comment Wednesday morning. The union has the ability to challenge any discipline the commissioner's office attempts to issue, and it seems unlikely that the Players Association would choose to not challenge league attempts to punish players based on these new forms of evidence.

In a phone call with the Players Association about three weeks ago, MLB said it planned to ramp up its monitoring of the use of substances in order to better understand the issue, a league source said. The union did not raise any issues at that time.

However, the union had no role in the drafting of the memo and as of Wednesday had not received a copy from the league. Whether there will be any disagreements over discipline or the scope of MLB's authority remains to be seen.

Some discipline could be issued in 2021, depending on what evidence is found, but the league also considers these initial efforts to be about fact-finding. MLB does not want to create an on-field circus this year with constant suspensions or discipline.

It was not immediately known which substances MLB will be testing baseballs for. But, by reviewing them, MLB hopes to be able to pinpoint which are most prevalently used and problematic. By the same token, MLB plans to study spin rates to figure out what thresholds for change suggest a red flag: i.e., whether adding 200 RPM from one time period to the next on a certain pitch is the problem, or 300, and so forth. It was not immediately clear if MLB has a target figure at this point.

Another unknown: The sample size MLB will use to determine spin-rate jumps. Presumably, a pitcher will have to throw some minimum number of innings in the big leagues for a baseline to be confidently established. Some pitchers may have been using substances for years, making calculating their effective jump more difficult.

Commissioner Rob Manfred is making a push to improve the sport's gameplay on the premise that there is currently too little action. Pitchers' use of foreign substances is relevant to that end: More effective pitches mean a lesser chance the ball is put in play.

Technically, pitchers have long been outlawed from loading up the ball, but a permissive culture has grown under Manfred's watch, one buoyed by an oft-repeated narrative that hitters don't mind pitchers enhancing their grip. Theoretically, better grip for pitchers means better accuracy, and therefore, a reduced chance the ball goes astray and hits a batter. Hit by pitches, however, are slightly up the past three years, to the highest rates in the sport's history. The way pitchers are taught to throw today — up in the zone with four-seam fastballs — actually could lead to more pitches up around the head area, which are the most dangerous. When pitchers were taught to throw low and away, prior to the Statcast era, missed pitches might have been more likely to end up in the dirt.

MLB has come to believe that clubs cannot effectively police themselves on this issue. Managers will hesitate to point out when they suspect a pitcher may be using a foreign substance, because that will lead the manager in the opposing dugout to do the same.

In November, [The Athletic's Eno Sarris spoke with nearly 20 major-league hitters, pitchers and pitching coaches](#), finding a consensus opinion that “a large majority of big-league pitchers right now are using some sort of extra-grip substance to impart more spin.”

“It's better than steroids,” a player development executive told Sarris about the benefits of using foreign substances.

Pitcher [Trevor Bauer](#), after making comments about how pitchers could increase spin rate (and nodding at Astros pitchers), ended up doing a sort of public experiment, [as Sarris noted](#), when [he added spin rate to his fastball](#) for one inning in 2018. Last season, Bauer had the highest spin rate of any four-seam fastball in baseball, and spin rates on his secondary pitches also jumped.

In addition to a lack of league action, clubs' enablement has contributed to the use of foreign substances across the sport. “This memorandum must be distributed to each Club's entire

coaching, training and clubhouse staff, and proof of distribution must be provided to our office,” Hill wrote in Tuesday’s memo.

The Angels in 2020 fired longtime visiting clubhouse manager Brian “Bubba” Harkins for suspicion of supplying foreign substances, including a solution of melted-down pine tar, to opposing pitchers. Harkins brought a lawsuit against the Angels and MLB claiming he was scapegoated. The lawsuit was dismissed, but [Harkins claimed MLB has evidence](#) that a slew of stars, including [Gerrit Cole](#), [Félix Hernández](#), [Corey Kluber](#), [Max Scherzer](#), [Justin Verlander](#) and [Adam Wainwright](#) used foreign substances he supplied to improve their grip on the ball. Harkins [detailed text message exchanges](#) with some pitchers.

Manfred has already seen [a massive cheating scandal](#) unfold on his watch with electronic sign-stealing. There is a philosophical argument for cracking down on another form of cheating, even if it does not as readily leave players and fans in an uproar.

At the same time, the league does not seem intent on disciplining literally anyone who uses substances. Rather, MLB wants to find pitchers who clearly use the substances for a large enhancement in the quality of their stuff, not just grip. If and when MLB starts issuing punishments, the commissioner’s office might also have evidence that other pitchers are using substances to less pronounced results.

This process, then, could lead back to an existing core question: How much cheating is OK?

“Why is it that the American public and the baseball authorities think that loading up a pitch or loading up a ball is sort of good old American cheating, but it’s not something that we should get very agitated about?” former commissioner Fay Vincent asked in a November interview. “When in fact any form of cheating is like any form of tax fraud. You can’t have a little tax fraud that’s OK, because if you do that, pretty soon you have a misunderstanding of the difference between little and big. So if you’re going to say ‘We’re going to let people do little things that are cheating such as scuffing up the ball,’ or having Whitey Ford have a ring that had a thing that he could cut the ball with — I mean, I love Whitey Ford, but Whitey Ford was cheating. And it’s very hard.

“I think the real problem is to try to persuade people that little cheating is still cheating. You know, it’s like the old Catholic doctrine of a little white lie is not really a lie: telling somebody that dinner was good when it really was awful. It’s OK in a lot of ways, because the intention is not to deceive. The intention is a noble one. ... I think the real problem is that nobody’s made an attempt after Bart (former commissioner Bart Giamatti) to really spell out the reason why a little bit of it is also very dangerous. And that’s the terrific challenge.

“We say a spitball is illegal and shouldn’t be thrown, yet umpires know pitchers are still loading up the ball.”

Sarris: Does a pitcher's command improve

Do one thing, over and over again, thousands of times. Repeat that action for years and years. Shouldn't you get better at it? Shouldn't a pitcher, for example, improve his command as he gets older? They've had enough practice, you'd figure their ability to do what they want with the ball would get better over time.

The truth is more complicated, as it always is.

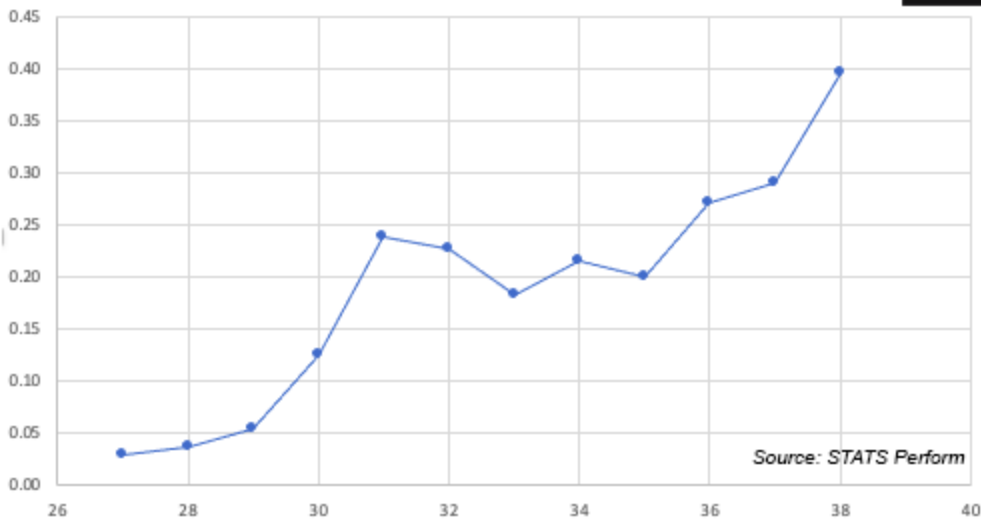
A few years ago, measuring command took a bit of a step forward with a new approach from STATS Perform called [Command+](#). Their stringers watch every pitch of every game and use a combination of the pitcher's scouting report, the hitter's scouting report, the game situation, the catcher's signs, and the catcher's targets in order to guess the pitcher's intention with the pitch. The distance from the intended target and actual result is then put on a scale where 100 = league average on that pitch type.

It's guesswork, but it's educated guesswork, and it could be an improvement over zone-based approaches — where a pitcher might get credit for hitting a corner that they didn't intend to hit, and the batter might enjoy pitches in that corner — and it also rewards pitchers for sliders off the plate when they meant to throw the slider off the plate. Command+ also captures the difference between command (the ability to do what you want with the pitch) and control (the ability to throw the ball into the strike zone) traditionally, too.

They've been recording that stat since 2011, and so we now have 10 seasons of data, and can say a little something about how the statistic changes as a player grows older. Using the Delta Method, where you compare players only to themselves and then aggregate those differences by age range, we've compiled an aging curve for Command+ (minimum 800 pitches in matched seasons).

How does command age?

Change in a pitcher's Command+ by ending age, via delta method



Bam. Command improves with age. Are we done here?

Not quite. For one, take a look at the scale on the left. Command+ last season varied from (minimum 100 pitches thrown) [Anthony Banda](#) with a 73 to [Zach Davies](#) with a 121. This chart implies that a pitcher might expect to improve their Command+ by one (1) point between the ages of 30 and 34.

“I am somewhat surprised it improves at all,” said one high-ranking player development executive. “Older pitchers throw more strikes but it looks a little like it’s the other way around when it comes to survivor bias.”

What they were referring to there is survivorship bias, the logic error of focusing only on the people or things that can make it past a certain difficult-to-reach threshold, which can complicate attempts to look at aging effects. Do pitchers really improve their ability to command their pitches, or are the only 36+ year olds left in the sample the pitchers that were able to improve their ability to command pitches? And is there anything interesting in the fact that survivorship bias here might suggest that it’s the pitchers with command that stick around more?

Take a look at Command+ by age last year (minimum 200 pitches thrown, not weighted by pitches thrown), an approach that doesn’t have the benefit of matching like to like, but does show you a little bit about the survivor effect. It does look like command helps with the longevity.

Average Command+ by Age

20	86.5
21	98.2
22	94.1
23	94.4
24	94.5
25	95.0
26	94.6
27	96.3
28	97.0
29	99.7
30	98.0
31	98.6
32	98.1
33	99.9
34	95.7
35	100.7
36	103.8
37	101.9
38	101.8

“Command guys absolutely last longer,” said Red Sox reliever [Adam Ottavino](#) upon seeing the graph. “I don’t think it’s too complicated in that if your stuff diminishes you have to be more accurate to get away with it. Don’t have as much room for error.”

“Some pitchers’ command improves with age, and those guys can stick around longer than if your command never improves,” said another pitcher, summing up the most you could take away from the graph.

Why isn’t the trend more drastic and more obvious? The answer is probably just that pitching is very, very complicated.

“Proprioception is ‘perception or awareness of the position and movement of the body,’” wrote Casey Mulholland, who runs KineticPro, a player development facility that’s flush with data and tech. “Basically our body is able to utilize motor units to make extremely quick last minute adjustments subconsciously to direct the baseball from a pitcher’s hand to the zone. Proprioception is developed in time with repetition.”

But that’s not the only thing changing over time.

“Things that can cause variance in proprioception can include injury and the reinvention of a pitch,” he continued. “Another thing to consider is pitch design and the impacts such range in movement profile on any pitch could have on command. As most pitchers age they lose velocity. Many end up having to design new pitches to maintain consistent success metrics and re-sign with further contracts. Rebuilding like this can at times showcase command issues.”

Consider [Yusei Kikuchi](#). He came over from Japan with a reputation for having decent command, and though he had a bad season, his Command+ of 93 wasn’t that far from league average. He totally revamped his pitch mix in 2020 by adding a hard slider and changing his curveball, giving him two breakers he could use like he does in the overlay below, where the yellow and red pitches are his new slider and his curve.

But it was a new mix. He couldn’t quite command it. His Command+ dropped to the worst among starters in 2020 (78).

“When you have completely new weapons, it takes time to establish feel, then normalize, then calibrate in zone and then stabilize location,” pointed out a player development executive about Kikuchi’s development.

Then there can be a mix of new pitches and command effects that make it hard to separate out which is which. After his worst season, a 2017 campaign in which hitters went from attacking early to waiting him out, Ottavino opened up a storefront in New York and went to work [designing a new pitch and improving his command](#). He worked on his landing foot, his focus at the plate, and developed a cutter that he could easily throw in the zone and that wouldn’t look like a fastball. His Command+ surged from 87 to 94, the ninth-best improvement among pitchers who threw more 1,000 pitches in both years. But which one had more of the effect? Adding a pitch he could command or improving his innate command?

“I think they both worked in 2018,” Ottavino said of the new pitch and the innate command improvement. “Since then the cutter has been harder to maintain because I need to throw it hard sometimes to get the desired effect, and have had trouble getting it to be above 88 and still move the way I want.”

So there’s some sort of “coaching effect” here in the mix, too, then. Either the coaches are helping the pitcher develop new pitches, which the pitcher may not be able to command as well, or they’re helping them target better areas, or they’re helping them avoid the worst spots.

“As you get older, you get better at limiting uncompetitive misses and narrow your bandwidth of buckshot,” said one player development executive. “Tighter clusters in poor locations could suggest underlying skill with strategic malpractice, suboptimal targeting or just using in poor counts.”

But the stat itself should be able to correct for some of this. For example, Tyler Glasnow came over from the Pirates to the Rays with a poor reputation for command and an accompanying

walk rate of over five per nine. He immediately took to their new approach for him — to avoid the corners and just focus on throwing high or low down the middle — and his walk rate plummeted. But his Command+ remained unchanged, a low-for-a-starter 90 in both 2018 and 2019 before falling to 87 in 2020.

That doesn't mean the stat is infallible.

"It's just really hard to put any specific pitch in a bucket since 'miss zone,'" said Dustin Pease, a pitching coach who espouses the value of command on Twitter. "Variables can be pretty vast, and the product of misses help determine a real-time report within the at-bat. If a pitcher's stuff is getting worse, but his performance is appearing the same, there's something to be said then about his knowledge of attack. As I said, hard to truly gauge intention of approach as well, especially over the long term."

Another pitcher mentioned that there are good misses and bad misses, and that just a straight unweighted distance from target might not catch that.

"Let's take your basic lefty, down and in is their sweet spot," [Max Scherzer](#) told me in 2017. "I know if I'm pitching in, I can't leave it down and in. I've got to ride this thing in on him. If I throw that thing away and up, that's not the end of the world, it's not necessarily a bad miss. But if I miss low, it's a home run. There are different types of command. You're trying to isolate areas. A human watching may not know that."

The human being tracking the game may know that, but it may not be included in the stat, and as a pitcher ages, they probably accumulate this sort of knowledge of how their pitches move and where the bad misses are. And that might have a larger effect than the graph or the table suggest.

Practice still makes the proprioception better, just like mom always said, so command probably does improve with age. Injuries, new pitches, declining stuff, and coaching effects make it hard to see in bold ink, and maybe command doesn't improve by leaps and bounds — which has some implications for scouting and player acquisition, considering an organization's potential for [improving a player's stuff with modern data and tech](#) — but generally, we get a little better at the things we do as we age. Phew.

On That Stuff (from 2009 but interesting conceptual thoughts)

By Jeremy Greenhouse

[Justin Verlander](#). [A.J. Burnett](#). [Ubaldo Jimenez](#). These are the names that make scouts salivate. Why? One word. Stuff.

Two components determine how nasty a pitcher's stuff truly is: velocity and movement. We've had radar guns to track the league's hardest throwers for some time (that would be [Joel Zumaya](#), of course) But now, with the help of pitchf/x data and a local regression technique picked up from Dave Allen, we can come pretty close to quantifying a pitcher's stuff. We can assign every single pitch an expected run value given its physical characteristics—be it velocity, movement, location, release point, or any other data point given by the pitchf/x data. For the purposes of measuring expected run value based on stuff (StuffRV), I used velocity, horizontal movement, and vertical movement as my three independent variables, and restricted my sample to only righties who released the ball from at least five feet off the ground, with a minimum of 1,000 pitches over the last three years. To the leaderboards.

Name	StuffRV
A.J. Burnett	-46
Felix Hernandez	-31
Zack Greinke	-26
Edwin Jackson	-26
Ubaldo Jimenez	-26
Chad Billingsley	-23
Brian Wilson	-22
Brandon Morrow	-21
Roy Halladay	-21
Matt Garza	-20
Dave Bush	15
Jeff Suppan	17
Braden Looper	19
Livan Hernandez	20
Greg Maddux	23

Really no surprises on this list, which at least gives some validity to this method for evaluating stuff. I probably could have guessed 10 of these names correctly given 20 tries. One pitcher with lightning stuff who often goes overlooked is [Gil Meche](#), who registered twelfth. One pitcher with deplorable stuff who does not go overlooked is [Livan Hernandez](#).

[Justin Verlander](#) showed up a bit lower down in the rankings than I would've thought, sandwiched between [Brett Myers](#) and [Jeremy Guthrie](#), and good for 30th out of 250 pitchers. But actually, Verlander's worse-than-expected ranking just goes to demonstrate that last year's off-putting performance was more than just random fluctuation. His [average fastball velocity](#) dipped below 94 miles per hour for the first time in his career last year, which was reflected in the [actual run value](#) of his fastball. However, his reputation as a flamethrower is well-deserved.

Limiting the sample to only the top quartile of a pitcher's stuff knocks [Ubaldo Jimenez](#) out of the top five in favor of Verlander, who, at his best, might be the league's best. Verlander has a very large difference between his best stuff and his worst stuff. By the numbers, it looks like [Scot Shields](#) owns the widest disparity between best and worst stuff. The difference in Verlander's fastball last year, which clocked in at 94 MPH with eight inches of run and ten inches of rise, and his fastball this year, which has the same average movement (to the nearest inch), but has picked up two miles per hour in velocity, is .4 runs per 100 pitches in expected value. The actual difference in Verlander's fastball, according to fangraphs, is even greater than that, at just over a full run per 100 pitches. That uptick in velocity has made a big difference.

How about the best stuff on a per-100-pitch basis?

Name	StuffRV/100
Brian Wilson	-1.08
Matt Lindstrom	-0.99
Jonathan Broxton	-0.97
Joel Zumaya	-0.96
Brandon Morrow	-0.87
Heath Bell	-0.85
Dennis Sarfate	-0.83
Grant Balfour	-0.78
Mariano Rivera	-0.78
A.J. Burnett	-0.73
Josh Geer	0.41
Edwar Ramirez	0.42
Livan Hernandez	0.48
Greg Maddux	0.53
Joe Nelson	0.56

Max-effort relievers and a couple of Yankees top the pitch-for-pitch list. Also, Dennis Sarfate has apparently followed the route of Daniel Cabrera—an Oriole with eyebrow-raising stuff who lost his velo and thus, likely his place in the Majors.

Greg Maddux really survived the latter part of his career on his pitching moxie. Even when I restrict the sample to the top 25% of his pitches, he continues to show below-average stuff. Nevertheless, he accumulated five [WAR](#) over the last couple years.

Come to think of it, setting a minimum of 1,000 pitches for this analysis might have been a mistake. Given the precision and granularity of the data, this technique could be used to assess a pitcher's stuff given only a handful of pitchers. For example, I had never heard of [Carlos Rosa](#) before conducting this analysis, but now, from a sample of just 50 pitches, I can't stop wondering why he's not in the Majors. Great stuff. Decent control. The only evident knocks

against him are his 2-8 Win-Loss record in AAA and 4.56 ERA. Maybe Dayton Moore knows something I don't, or perhaps Rosa brought it just for his brief appearance in the Majors, or it's possible GMDM is undervaluing a young talent who can get Major League hitters out. Actually, all three of these scenarios have probably taken place.

Who has made the most of his stuff? For this ranking, I subtracted the actual run value that each pitcher has been worth from the expected run value based on his stuff.

Name	StuffRV-RV
Roy Halladay	61
Brandon Webb	60
Derek Lowe	54
Dan Haren	51
Greg Maddux	46
Jake Peavy	45
Jonathan Papelbon	38
Justin Duchscherrer	37
Joakim Soria	35
Brad Penny	-28
Carlos Silva	-30
Adam Eaton	-32
Bronson Arroyo	-32
Miguel Batista	-36

This group consists of pitchers who can succeed without the strikeout. While Webb and Lowe both have heavy sinkers that are able to generate grounders like clockwork, the location of these pitches down in the zone has likely had more to do with their success than the tremendous movement on their pitches.

And at the bottom, there are two types of pitchers. The Batistas and Pennys are granted roster spots because their passable stuff at least gives them upside, but the Eatons and Silvas of the world, who have crummy stuff and can't even pitch up to their already limited abilities, well, those are the guys to whom you don't give multi-year deals.

APRIL 11, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Its great to be watching real baseball again, even if the Yankees are stumbling out of the gate.

Oldest player to lead MLB in home runs--38-year-old Darrell Evans (40 HR in 1985, the only year he ever led the Majors)

Since August 1 of last year Tampa Bay has the best home record in MLB.

Watching Yankees-TB game I was struck by a stat—2020 post season Randy Arozarena of the Rays hit .377, the rest of the team .189. Talk about carrying our team to the world series.

Padres No No, and lots More about No Hitters

Joe Musgrove threw the first no hitter in the 53-year history of the San Diego Padres. He blanked the Rangers across nine near-perfect innings with 10 strikeouts in a 3-0 victory at Globe Life Park. Some fun facts about the no-no from mlb.com.

- Every active franchise is now on the board, with the Padres now having a no-hitter. The Mets and Padres had been the final two, until Johan Santana threw a no-hitter for the Mets on June 1, 2012, leaving the Padres alone ... until Friday night. The Padres had gone 8,205 games without a no-hitter, the second-longest drought in Major League history behind the 1906-64 Phillies' 8,944-game drought without one -- but the Padres' streak was the longest before getting a team's first no-hitter.
- The Padres had thrown 30 one-hitters, with the first coming on July 6, 1969, and the most recent on May 15, 2018. The longest no-hit bids in Padres history had been 8 2/3 innings, by Steve Arlin on July 18, 1972, and a combined group of Padres pitchers on July 9, 2011.
- For the Rangers, it was the first time the club was no-hit since April 18, 2007, when Mark Buehrle held them hitless at now-Guaranteed Rate Field. That Rangers lineup featured Kenny Lofton, Ian Kinsler, Michael Young, Mark Teixeira, Sammy Sosa and Nelson Cruz, among others.
- Musgrove's no-hitter came the day after the 52nd anniversary of the first regular-season game in Padres history, which took place on April 8, 1969, against the Astros at San Diego (later Jack Murphy) Stadium. The Padres went 18,995 days without a no-hitter.

- Musgrove was born 20 miles away from Petco Park, in El Cajon, Calif., on Dec. 4, 1992. He was drafted by the Blue Jays 46th overall in the 2011 MLB Draft out of Grossmont High School in El Cajon.
- Musgrove is the sixth pitcher since 1990 to throw a no-hitter for a team from the state where he was born, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. He joins Jered Weaver (LAA), Kevin Gross (LAD), Nolan Ryan (two for TEX), Terry Mulholland (PHI) and Dave Stewart (OAK).
- Rangers general manager Chris Young, who pitched for the Padres from 2006-10, was two outs away from throwing San Diego's first no-hitter on Sept. 22, 2006, against the Pirates. Pittsburgh's Joe Randa broke it up with a solo homer in the ninth.
- Musgrove has now thrown 31 consecutive scoreless innings dating back to last season, a career high. Over that span, he's given up 10 hits, walked two and struck out 44.
- Catcher Victor Caratini guided Musgrove through his historic night and has now [caught the last two no-hitters](#) pitched in MLB, and with different clubs -- he caught Alec Mills' no-no against the Brewers in Milwaukee on Sept. 13, 2020, while with the Cubs. Caratini is the first starting catcher in MLB history to catch consecutive no-hitters MLB-wide for different teams, according to Elias. There are 10 other instances of a starting catcher catching consecutive no-hitters MLB-wide, but all of those were for the same team.
- This was just Musgrove's second start with the Padres, making him the eighth pitcher in the modern era (since 1900) with a no-hitter in one of his first two starts with a team, according to Elias. He's the first pitcher to do it since Clay Buchholz on Sept. 1, 2007, in his second start for the Red Sox.
 - Team that has now gone the longest since its last no-hitter--Cleveland (Len Barker, May 15, 1981, vs. Toronto, perfect game.)

More interesting no hitter facts:

- On April 7, 1969, in the ninth game in Expos/Nationals history, right-hander Bill Stoneman no-hit the Phillies at Connie Mack Stadium in just his fifth Major League start. The 25-year-old walked five and struck out eight in Montreal's 7-0 win.
- In Washington, the franchise's first no-hitter as the Nationals came on Sept. 28, 2014, nine years after the move from Montreal, when righty Jordan Zimmermann no-hit the Marlins on the final day of the regular season. He walked just one and fanned 10 on 104 pitches.
- The Angels also picked up their first no-hitter one year into franchise history. On May 5, 1962, lefty Bo Belinsky worked around four walks to no-hit the Orioles at Dodger Stadium, where the Angels shared a park with their neighbors while their own stadium was being built in Anaheim. Belinsky struck out nine in the 2-0 victory.

- For the franchise's first three seasons, the Astros were known as the Colt .45s, and it was one year into club history that Houston got its first no-hitter when on May 17, 1963, right-hander Don Nottebart blanked the Phillies in the hit department even though Philadelphia did score once in a 4-1 game. The contest was played at Colt Stadium, the temporary home of the expansion team until the Astrodome opened nearby in 1965. Nottebart gave up the unearned run, walked three and struck out eight.
- In their third year of existence, On May 11, 1996, left-hander Al Leiter brought the Marlins their first no-hitter when he dominated against the Rockies at Joe Robbie Stadium. Leiter walked two and struck out six on 103 pitches, shutting down a formidable Colorado lineup in an 11-0 Florida win.
- The Royals began play in 1969, and four years later came the franchise's first no-hitter when right-hander Steve Busby blanked the Tigers in Detroit. It was one of the more unusual no-hitters in the modern era -- Busby walked six batters but managed to etch his name in the history books with the first Royals no-no.
- It's only fitting that Randy Johnson, who won four straight National League Cy Young Awards with Arizona from 1999-2002, pitched the first no-hitter in D-backs history. It came in Atlanta on May 18, 2004, when the Big Unit overpowered the Braves in a 2-0 Arizona win. The Hall of Fame left-hander tossed a perfect game with 13 strikeouts on 117 pitches for the second no-hitter of his career.
- Randy Johnson's no-no with the D-backs in 2004 wasn't his first. His first came 14 years earlier, when the Big Unit tossed the first no-hitter in Mariners history at the Kingdome against the Tigers on June 2, 1990. Johnson was still dealing with control issues early in his career, and walked six batters. But he also struck out eight and in a glimpse of things to come for the flame-throwing lefty, he became the first Mariner to throw a no-hitter.
- Nope, it wasn't one of Nolan Ryan's record seven no-hitters that was the first in Rangers history. It came much earlier than that -- on July 30, 1973 at the Oakland Coliseum, Jim Bibby no-hit the defending World Series champion Athletics in a 6-0 Texas victory. The right-hander walked six and struck out 13.
- The Rays made a storybook run to the World Series in 2008, but it wasn't until two seasons later that Tampa Bay would have its first no-hitter. On July 26, 2010, right-hander Matt Garza was brilliant in a 5-0 win over the Tigers at Tropicana Field, no-hitting Detroit while walking one and striking out six on 120 pitches.
- After famously losing multiple no-hitters in the ninth inning, Blue Jays right-hander Dave Stieb finally got the job done on Sept. 2, 1990, when he no-hit Cleveland at Municipal

Stadium, throwing 123 pitches while walking four and fanning nine in a 3-0 Toronto victory. It is the only no hitter in Blue Jays history.

- While a Rockies pitcher has yet to throw a no-hitter at the most hitter-friendly park in the Majors, Colorado's Coors Field, they do have one on the road. That came on April 17, 2010, when right-hander Ubaldo Jiménez no-hit the Braves in Atlanta in a 4-0 Rockies win. He walked six and struck out seven on 128 pitches at Turner Field, the signature moment in his finest season, one in which he finished third in NL Cy Young Award voting.
- It took a while for the Brewers to get that first no-hitter, but when they did it in 1987, it was the only no-hitter in the Majors that year. It was Juan Nieves who would accomplish the rare feat, no-hitting the Orioles in Baltimore on April 15. Though he would only pitch three seasons in the Majors, Nieves wrote his name in the record books as the first Brewer to toss a no-no, walking five and fanning seven in a 7-0 victory.
- The Mets, had to wait half a century into their existence. But on June 1, 2012, at Citi Field, it finally happened: Left-hander Johan Santana no-hit the Cardinals. He walked five, struck out eight and needed 134 pitches, but he got the job done and the Mets finally had their long-awaited no-no.
- That's a list of teams' first no-hitters. Some last no hitters—Royals Bret Saberhagen 1991 against White Sox, Braves Kent Merker 1994 against Dodgers, Rangers Kenny Rogers 1994 against Angels, Yankees David Cone 1999 against Expos, Red Sox Jon Lester 2008 against Royals.
- Two no hitters in one season: Johnny Vander Meer for the 1938 Reds (only back to back no hitters in history), Allie Reynolds in 1951 Yankees, Virgil Trucks 1952 Tigers, Nolan Ryan 1973 Angels, Roy Halladay 2010 Phillies (a perfect game against Marlins in May and then a no hitter against the Reds in the NLDS), Max Scherzer 2015 Nationals.

Jayson Stark continues to dig up the most interesting stats

Dodgers first HR of the season was an inside the park HR by Zach McKinsty (because what should have been their first HR by Cody Bellinger was negated when Bellinger passed Justin Turner on the base paths). Since 1969 this was the 4th time a team's first HR was an inside the park. Eduardo Nunez did it for the 2018 Red Sox, Delino DeShields for the 1992 Expos and Amos Otis 1979 Royals. Last time it happened for defending world series champs was 1962 with Moose Skowren for the Yankees. Last time a defending champ did it in the NL was Jim Gilliam for the 1956 Dodgers.

This was the first homer of McKinstry's big-league career. No Dodger had gone inside-the-park for his first career home run in 73 years, since ... none other than *Duke Snider* did it on May 2, 1948.

You may have noticed that last week Shohei Ohtani threw a pitch over 101 mph and hit a HR with exit velocity over 115. (he actually threw 9 pitches at 100). the last AL pitcher to hit a home run in the first inning of any game, you have to go back more than half a century — to Dave McNally, who hit a first-inning slam for the Orioles on Aug. 26, 1968. That was five years before the introduction of the DH. Ohtani became the second pitcher to bat second since 1903.

Albert Pujols received an intentional walk on the 20th anniversary of his MLB debut, walked by his former manager Tony LaRusso. The only other player to be intentionally walked on 20th anniversary of his debut was Ron Fairly in 1978 by Whitey Herzog managing the Royals. Only one player received an intentional walk on an MLB debut anniversary after 20 years—Barry Bonds in his 21st season walked by manager Willie Randolph of the Mets in 2007.

José Abreu won the AL MVP award last year, while hitting zero grand slams. So naturally, in 2021, that's all he hits. Abreu headed into the White Sox' home opener Thursday with two home runs this year – *both* of them slams. No player in the history of baseball has hit a slam for his first *three* homers of any season.

Tyler Naquin of the Reds batting lead off. Had a 7 RBI game last week. **Led off back-to-back home games with a homer. Hit four home runs in his first four games as a leadoff man.**

More amazing de Grom stats. Jacob deGrom has made 77 starts over his last three seasons: Victories: 25 - 1.11 ERA. Games he did not win: 52 - 2.58 ERA (0-19). 58 starts in which deGrom went 0-19 – *but had a 2.58 ERA*. deGrom - 2.58 ERA in games he **didn't** win. Gerrit Cole - 2.60 ERA in all his games!

The Red Sox found themselves trailing in the ninth inning *and* the 11th inning *and* the 12th inning against the Rays on Tuesday. And somehow or other, they still won — thanks to a J.D. Martinez two-run double. Well, also thanks to the extra-inning ghost-runner-on-second thing — but whatever!

According to Elias, the Red Sox hadn't won a game in which they trailed in the ninth inning and multiple extra innings in almost 70 years. Last time they did it was Aug. 21, 1954 — when Whitey Ford got dragged into a game in relief and blew leads in the 10th and 12th!

Here's an extra-inning feat that's even harder than that one. That same night, the Rockies scored in the ninth inning *and* the 10th *and* the 12th *and* the 13th. Which was a pretty remarkable thing to do, extra-inning gimmick or no extra-inning gimmick — except for one thing:

They managed to do all that *and still lose*.

According to STATS, they're only the second team in the modern era to score in the ninth inning *and* three different extra innings and get nothing out of it but a loss. The other? Jerry Hairston Sr.'s 1974 White Sox. In a Sept. 10 game against the Twins, they scored in the ninth, 11th, 13th and 14th innings but blew three extra-inning leads — and then in marched Goose Gossage to give up the game-loser in the 15th.

That wasn't the Rockies' only innovative loss of the week, because Coors is a magical place. Last Friday, they headed into the seventh inning of their game against the Dodgers with zero hits against Trevor Bauer. And then ...

They hit four home runs in one inning!

All four of them off Cy Young winners!

There were two off Bauer to wipe out the Coors no-hitter plot line. Then came two more off David Price, in his first Dodgers relief appearance. So how wild was that?

According to STATS, there have been four other instances in history of teams hitting four home runs in one inning off Cy Young winners. But naturally, the other four were all off the *same* Cy Young winner.

1977 Red Sox off Catfish Hunter
2005 White Sox off Randy Johnson
2016 Indians off Justin Verlander
2016 Dodgers off Zack Greinke

There had never been another *game* in the history of Cy Young awards in which two different Cy Youngs gave up at least two home runs apiece for the same team. But then the Dodgers and Rockies crammed that feat into the same inning — and the team whomping all those found a way to lose anyway.

The Twins' Randy Dobnak spun off this attractive little relief outing Monday in Detroit, in a game his team led, 15-1, when he arrived on the mound in the seventh inning:

5 hits, 5 runs, 2 homers, 1 grand slam (*in 3 eventful IP*)

But you know the reason that action-packed outing showed up in this column? *Because Dobnak also got a save out of it!*

So yeah, that modern save rule might need some work. But that's not Randy Dobnak's fault. We're just grateful he furnished all of this Weird and Wild material:

Did you know that Alex Colomé — who is now the Twins' actual closer, in games that are slightly tighter than 15-1 — finished third in the AL in saves last year (with 12) and didn't give up that many runs or that many homers *all last season?*

Another challenging Randy Dobnak feat: Serving up a grand slam *with two outs in the ninth inning* (to the amazing Akil Baddoo) but still getting a save out of it. You'd think that never happens. But thanks to the fabulous work of Doug (Kernels) Kern, we learned it's somehow happened three other times in the half century since the dawn of the modern save rule. What's especially incredible is that Francisco Rodríguez was responsible for *two* of the other three — for two different teams (2005 Angels, 2017 Tigers). (Kevin Gregg had the other, for the 2007 Marlins.)

Meanwhile, this wasn't even the first five-run, two-homer save in history, either. But it was only the second since 1973. (Jerome Williams collected the other on July 30, 1912.)

Ah, but when you add up all of that — the five runs, the two homers *and* the grand slam — this *was* the first time ever that any reliever had coughed up that whole package but still had one of those "SV"s next to his name in the box score.

JOE POSNANSKI (lifted from a longer column)

To me (and just about all the baseball fans I know), baseball is a much better game when the starting pitcher is a focal point. The thrill of seeing Roy Halladay pitch to David Ortiz, or Greg Maddux pitch to Tony Gwynn, or Jim Palmer pitch to Reggie Jackson, or Bob Gibson pitch to Willie Mays, this is a timeless part of the game. It isn't the same thing watching Mike Trout or Mookie Betts step up against a nameless reliever, even if that reliever is throwing 100 mph, because it isn't exactly the action of baseball that thrills many of us. It's the story. It's the history. It's the buildup to the moment. When it's Clayton Kershaw facing Ronald Acuña Jr. with the bases loaded and the game on the line, a million emotions flood the mind — emotions about Kershaw's greatness and Acuña's unlimited talent, age versus youth, lefty versus righty, and I'm all-in.

But that never really happens anymore. Instead, Acuña is facing Jimmy Nelson or Victor González or Corey Knebel, and that might be the right move but it's much less interesting.

And it's less interesting when the team with the best starter in baseball is more likely to lose the game than win it. And I'm not sure what can be done about it — I'm not sure anything can be done about it. But I do know this: While other sports build around their biggest stars, baseball teams over the last couple of decades have gone pretty far to diminish the importance of the best starters in the game. That doesn't seem great.

BARRELS

Blasts that the Statcast folks call “barrels” — is not all that it takes to be a good player or even a good hitter.

To get into it a bit deeper, let's define what a “barrel” is. As you probably know, the good folks at Statcast get a dizzying amount of data from the camera-based system at every ballpark. With that system, they can measure a million things, including the speed and spin and precise location of every pitched ball, the reaction time of defenders, the pure speed of base runners, the launch angle and exit velocity of every batted ball and so much more.

A barrel is more or less the ideal blend of high exit velocity (at least 98 mph) and launch angle (which starts between 26 and 30 degrees and adjusts based on just how hard the ball is hit). The math can get slightly complicated, but the idea is simple and instinctive; we're talking about balls hit very hard and on a line. Barrels are not always hit, but every year batters have hit at least .500 on barrels and slugged at least 1.500. These are the hardest-hit balls.

Remember, just hitting barrels isn't enough — even the very best hitters will have only 65 or 70 barrels in a season. In other words, you have to find ways to be valuable even when you don't make perfect contact,

OHTANI

ANAHEIM -- Two-way [Shohei Ohtani](#) did it all in a historic showing on national television on Sunday night against the White Sox, striking out seven over 4 2/3 innings while reaching 100 mph nine times, smacking a 451-foot home run and getting involved in a scary play at home plate at the end of his outing.

But Ohtani is [fine after his collision with the White Sox's José Abreu](#) in the fifth inning and his record-setting night came in a [7-4 win](#) capped by a [walk-off three-run homer](#) from Jared Walsh at Angel Stadium. Ohtani hit and pitched for the first time in his Major League career, becoming the first pitcher to bat second in a game since 1903. And he made it worthwhile with a towering homer on the first pitch he saw in the first inning that left the bat at an astonishing 115.2 mph

to become the first AL starting pitcher to homer against an AL team since Roric Harrison on the final day of the 1972 season -- and the final regular-season day without a designated hitter in the junior circuit.

He now holds the hardest pitch thrown this season by any player at 100.6 mph and the hardest-hit homer by any player at 115.2 mph. And he's the first player to hit a ball at least 110 mph off the bat and throw a pitch at least 100 mph in the same game tracked by Statcast.

But it's a rare feat in the Majors. He was the first pitcher to bat second since Jack Dunleavy did so for the Cardinals on Sept. 7, 1903. And only two pitchers have hit for themselves with the designated hitter available since Ken Brett did it twice in 1976. Andy Sonnanstine hit for himself in 2009 because of a mistake on the lineup card, while Madison Bumgarner batted for himself in an Interleague start against the A's in 2016.

SONS From WSJ

"Junior this and junior that—where are they all coming from?"

Three-time All-Star Bret Boone was talking about second-generation baseball players. This year there will be more than twice as many second-generation big-leaguers as there were in the 1970s. The Padres' 22-year-old Fernando Tatis Jr. may be the game's most exciting young player. He could join the Dodgers' Cody Bellinger, the Royals' Adalberto Mondesi, the Pirates' Ke'Bryan Hayes and the Blue Jays' trio of Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette and Cavan Biggio in an All-Star lineup—all of them 25 or younger, all sons of major leaguers.

Athletes in other sports follow their fathers into the pros, too. This season there will be about 45 second-generation players on NFL teams, with their sprawling rosters, and 30 in the NBA, including the Warriors' Steph Curry, the Cavaliers' Kevin Love and the Pacers' Domantas Sabonis. But baseball tops the list with 50. "It's the culture of baseball," says Mr. Boone, a third-generation ballplayer who followed his father and grandfather to the majors—an MLB first. "Other sports are more about pure physical talent. Baseball's physical, too: a hitter needs a certain level of fast-twitch muscle fibers; a pitcher had better throw 90. But it's not *as* physical, and that lets other stuff in," he says.

Stuff like how to work counts and steal signs and the old chestnut about "knowing how to carry yourself." It stands to reason that youngsters who grow up around pro athletes pick up cues on how they behave. By the time they reach Little League they expect to excel, and when they step into a big-league clubhouse as professionals, they feel they belong. Last summer the Washington Nationals signed a shortstop out of Princeton: Jake Boone, Bret's son, who has a chance to become the first fourth-generation player in major league history.

Having a ballplayer for a father can even help athletes who grow up to play other sports. Patrick Mahomes, the Kansas City Chiefs' \$450-million quarterback, is the son of Pat Mahomes, a big-league pitcher for the Mets, Twins and four other teams. "Patrick grew up in baseball, watching his dad and his teammates," says Mike Rathwell, CEO of Driveline Baseball, the Seattle-based hub of the latest baseball science. "It makes you think about some of the throws he gets off under pressure—he looks like a shortstop."

According to sports economist Andrew Zimbalist, "The simplest explanation might be best: Baseball's a summer game. Kids are out of school, with more time to spend with Dad." But many sons of big-leaguers call that a common misperception, recalling that their fathers were busy with their own careers when they were small. Barry Bonds and Ken Griffey Jr., the best second-generation players so far, both denied that their dads coached them. "My father never taught me," Mr. Bonds once told me. "He was on the road."

What else could help explain the rise of big-league sons? "Baseball clubhouses have traditionally been more open to players' families. You don't see many children in NFL or NBA locker rooms," Dr. Zimbalist says. "Football players may also be discouraging their sons to play due to the injury risk."

Neurologists are working on another possible answer, having to do with brain cells known as mirror neurons. In 1991, researchers at the University of Parma in Italy showed that certain cells in the brains of macaque monkeys fire when a monkey eats a peanut or sees another monkey eating one. "Monkey see, monkey do" may be more than an old saying: The so-called mirror neurons in the macaques' brains make observation function like firsthand experience.

More recent research suggests that humans rely on such cells far more than monkeys do. Mirror neurons explain how infants only a few hours old know to stick out their tongues at adults who do the same to them. "We are mimicking machines," says Dr. Marco Iacoboni of the Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center at UCLA. "Observation is key to human learning." He believes that mirror neurons may also be a key to sports performance.

One of the starkest examples is golfer Phil Mickelson. As a tyke, young Phil spent hour after hour in a highchair opposite his father, watching his dad hit golf balls. When Phil began swinging a club, he swung left-handed to mirror his father's stroke, earning the nickname "Lefty," even though he is right-handed in everything but golf.

Whether or not ballplayers' sons get much direct coaching from their fathers, they do get vivid, up-close views of their dads and their dads' teammates—the best in the world at a particular set of skills. "Of course you and I can watch the same guys on TV or video, but the effect is not the same," Dr. Iacoboni says. "For reasons we don't fully understand, watching a screen doesn't activate our minds the same way. It's the difference between a face-to-face meeting and a Zoom call. Our brains are built for direct experience."

Nature and nurture give second-generation players a double advantage. “They have a leg up from the start,” says Mr. Rathwell. “Genetics for sure—these guys are the sons of some of the world’s best athletes.” Their mothers tend to be fit as well, “and their environment maps to all the right things.”

Mr. Rathwell expects to see more legacies and dynasties as training gets still more scientific. In a near future when every athlete has a nearly equal chance to max out his or her talents, “The only limit will be their genetic ceiling.” But baseball’s efforts to become an NBA-style international pastime may deepen the talent pool. “Will the next great player be Fernando Tatis III or somebody from Lithuania or China? We don’t know. In terms of sports science, we’re still in the bottom of the first.”

—Mr. Cook is the author of “The Dad Report: Fathers, Son and Baseball Families.”

MORE TIDBITS

The original baseball roundup column was written by Ray Fitzgerald of the Boston Globe. It has been a mainstay since at least 1970 and has been hosted by great Peter Gammons, Gordon Edes, Larry Whiteside and Nick Cafardo. Peter Abraham summarizes now. Here are some his comments today:

The Rule 5 Draft of veteran minor leaguers has produced some memorable finds over the years, **Roberto Clemente** being the most notable. It’s unlikely any future Hall of Famers were picked last Dec. 10, but the first seven picks of that draft broke camp with their new teams. That group includes 22-year-old outfielder **Akil Neomon Baddoo**, who was 5 of 11 with three extra-base hits and seven RBIs in his first four games for the Tigers, and righthander **Garrett Whitlock**, who has impressed the Red Sox at every turn since being picked from the Yankees organization ... MLB has informed teams that the amateur draft, which starts June 11, will be 20 rounds after being dropped to five last season as a cost-cutting measure. The Red Sox have five of the first 136 picks, starting with No. 4 ... **Francisco Lindor** will make \$43.3 million from the Mets this season — \$22.3 million in salary and a \$21 million signing bonus. He’s certainly well protected in the event of a work stoppage in 2022 ... **Madison Bumgarner** is 1-5 with a 7.28 ERA and 1.58 WHIP in 11 starts for the Diamondbacks and has \$60 million on his contract from 2022-24 ... With access to Canada still tightly controlled, the Blue Jays opened their home schedule Thursday with a 7-5 loss against the Angels at TD Ballpark in Dunedin, Fla. The Jays played their home games in Toronto in 2019 and in Buffalo last season. The last team to begin three consecutive seasons in different home ballparks were the 1914-16 Boston Braves. They played at the South End Grounds, Fenway Park, and then Braves Field. The Braves played the first half of the 1915 season at Fenway while Braves Field was being completed. The Blue Jays are expected to stay in Dunedin until June and shift their operations back to Buffalo to escape the heat and late afternoon rain that hits most days ... The Dodgers gave **David Price** a World Series ring even though he opted out of last season. Price plans to auction off the ring and donate the

proceeds to The Players Alliance. The ring has 232 diamonds, 53 sapphires, weighs 11 carats, and comes in a box that includes a spinning platform, an interior light, and an LCD screen that plays four minutes of season highlights, complete with sound ... The Yankees have used their farm system to make some creative moves. They gave the Red Sox 23-year-old righthander **Frank German** to take back **Adam Ottavino** and \$8,150,000 of his \$9 million salary for this season. Then they sent two prospects to Texas to get **Rougned Odor** as a lefty hitter off the bench. The Rangers are responsible for all but the prorated minimum of the \$27 million Odor has remaining on his contract ... **Bill Bryk**, a longtime scout, died Tuesday at the age of 70. He worked for several teams, including the Diamondbacks for the last 11 seasons, but was best known as a close confidante of the late **Kevin Towers** when he was running the Padres ... Happy birthday to Red Sox game planning coordinator **Jason Varitek**, who is 49. He remains the only player to play in the Little League World Series, College World Series, MLB World Series, the Olympics, and the World Baseball Classic. Another World Series champion, **Trot Nixon**, is 47. And **Bret Saberhagen** is 57. He was 26-17 with a 3.90 ERA for the Sox in his final 62 career starts from 1997-2001.

APRIL 11, 2021

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.

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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 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

YEAR	% of starts longer than 6 innings	% of starts 3 innings or less
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."

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APRIL 11, 2021

Good morning baseball fans.

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

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Max Scherzer entered Friday's matchup against the D-backs with 2,798 career strikeouts. He notched his eighth strikeout to lead off the seventh inning to tie Young at 2,806 punchouts for 22nd in Major League history. He caught the next batter, Eduardo Escobar, swinging for his ninth to move ahead.

Friday's performance leaves Scherzer just five K's behind Mike Mussina (2,813 strikeouts). He is second in strikeouts among active players, trailing only Justin Verlander (3,013).

Max Scherzer's 99 games with 10+ strikeouts is the most among active players. Boston's Chris Sale is second with 78

Fernando Valenzuela. He began the 1981 season with eight straight wins, seven complete games and five shutouts. In that stretch, he struck out 68 and allowed four earned runs in 72 innings for a mind-boggling 0.50 ERA.

When Valenzuela won the 1981 NL Cy Young and Rookie of the Year awards, which future Hall of Famers finished second in each vote?

The Reds' Tom Seaver was second in Cy Young voting, and the Expos' Tim Lincecum was second in the ROY vote

Mike Trout – on base pct of .526 with 4 HRs. He just keeps on rolling.

After Saturday's win Tyler Glasnow is 7-0 in his last 12 starts against the Yankees.

Weekly Jacob de Grom item – in 59% of his 78 starts since 2018 he has allowed zero or one earned run.

Saturday deGrom came within one of Tom Seaver's 51-year-old record for consecutive strikeouts, the Mets rallied late to give their ace his first win of the season in a 4-3 victory over the Rockies. He became the ninth pitcher in MLB history to strikeout 9 or more in a row. deGrom became the third player to strike out 14-plus batters at Coors Field, joining Hall of Famer Randy Johnson as the only visiting pitchers to do it. He also combined with closer Edwin Díaz, who struck out the side in the seventh, for 17 total punchouts for New York. The Mets recorded 81 percent of their outs on strikeouts, breaking the 2016 Red Sox's record for the highest percentage since 1900.

Tip of the cap to Hope Trautwein senior softball pitcher at North Texas State. Last week against Arkansas-Pine Bluff Hope faced 21 batters and struckout all 21. First “perfect perfect” game in NCAA Division I history.

Last week JD Martinez of the Rd Sox had his third career game with three homers or more -- and each has happened for a different team.

Martinez (Tigers, D-Backs, Red Sox) joins a distinguished club that includes just four other players who notched three-homer games for three teams. The others are Mark Teixeira, Dave Kingman, Alex Rodriguez and Johnny Mize.

Martinez’s 12 extra-base hits in his first eight games of the season are tied with Dante Bichette (1994 Rockies) as the most in the modern era (since 1900).

So, yes, in 122 seasons of baseball, Martinez has achieved something done just once before to start a season.

He joined A-Rod (2007) and Sandy Alomar (1997) as the only players to do that in the first eight games of a season.

His extra-base hit streak is actually nine, when you go back to the final game of last season, putting him in a tie with David Ortiz (2004), Bill Mueller (2003), Butch Hobson (1977) and Ted Williams (1939) as the only players in team history to do that.

MORE NO HITTERS

White Sox left-hander Carlos Rodon made it two no-nos in less than a week by blanking Cleveland 8-0 in Chicago on April 14. Rodon was two outs away from a perfecto but hit Cleveland catcher Roberto Perez on the foot with a breaking ball. Just five days earlier, on April 9, Joe Musgrove threw the first no-hitter in Padres history, zipping the Rangers 3-0. Like Rodon, the only Texas baserunner was a hit batsman (Joey Gallo, fourth inning). The last year with multiple no-hitters thrown in April was 1994 (Atlanta's Kent Mercker and Minnesota's Scott Erickson).

There have been more than 215,000 games in MLB history but there have been just over 300 no-hitters thrown, meaning the members of the no-hit club are among some pretty elite company. Since 1903 — the World Series era — there have been 21 perfect games. Roy Halladay (2010 NLDS against the Reds) and Don Larsen's perfect game against the Dodgers October 8, 1956 are the only two post season no-hitters.

Carlos Rodin threw a no-hitter for the White Sox against the Indians. So who was the first pitcher to throw a no-hitter for Rodón's new manager, Tony La Russa? It was his longtime Oakland ace, Dave Stewart, of course, back on June 29, 1990. How long ago was that? Dave Stewart is now 64 years old!

But also, that means La Russa has now managed individual no-hitters 31 years apart. And only one manager in history can top that. You won't be shocked to learn that manager is ... Connie Mack.

The Mack Man's no-hitters spanned an incredible 42 years, between Weldon Henley in 1905 and Bill McCahan in 1947, both for the old Philadelphia A's. But that's the whole group of guys who managed no-hitters 30-plus years apart. Just Connie and Tony. Rolling up their programs and making more history.

Meanwhile, the manager on the other end of this no-hitter, the Indians' Terry Francona, had piled up quite the astonishing streak himself. As MLB.com's ever-inquisitive Sarah Langs reports, this was Francona's 3,147th regular-season game as a manager — but the *first* in which his team was no-hit.

MOST GAMES MANAGED BEFORE FIRST NO-HITTER:

Bucky Harris: 3,661
Walter Alston*: 3,610
Terry Francona: 3,146
(*regular season only)

(Source: *Elias Sports Bureau*)

Weirdly, Francona actually hadn't seen a no-hitter thrown for or against one of his teams in 13 years! Last no-hitter pitched *for* him: Jon Lester, on May 19, 2008.

Would You Have Guessed

White Sox and Giants lead this century in no-hitters hrown with 5

two by Mark Buehrle, one each by Rodón, Lucas Giolito and Philip (Perfect Game) Humber. No franchise has more. And only one other team can say that: Tim Lincecum's Giants. They've had two from Lincecum, and one apiece from Matt Cain, Jonathan Sanchez and Chris Heston.

• **A PLUNK FROM PERFECTION** — Here's every individual no-hitter in modern history in which only an HBP separated the pitcher from appearing on a much more upbeat list, of guys who have thrown a perfect game.

July 4, 1908: Hooks Wiltse
June 18, 1960: Lew Burdette
June 10, 1997: Kevin Brown
June 20, 2015: Max Scherzer
April 9, 2021: Joe Musgrove
April 14, 2021: Carlos Rodón

But what have we learned from that list? If you look closely, you'll notice this is a thing that happened just three times in the previous 120 years — and then ... *twice in five days!*

Best No Hitter Follow-ups

1) Johnny Vander Meer, Reds -- June 15, 1938

No-hitter: June 11, 1938, vs. Boston Bees

Follow-up: No-hitter vs. Dodgers

The king of all no-hitter follow-ups: a second straight no-hitter. Vander Meer is the only pitcher in MLB history to throw back-to-back no-hitters. The first came against the Boston Bees on June 11, 1938, the second against the Dodgers on June 15. Vander Meer's feat might stand alone forever.

2) Jordan Zimmermann, Nationals -- 2014 NLDS Game 2

No-hitter: Sept. 28, 2014, vs. Marlins

Follow-up: 8 2/3 IP, 3 H, 1 R, 6 K vs. Giants

Zimmermann threw his no-hitter in his final start of the regular season in 2014, but the Nationals were in the playoffs, so there was a postseason follow-up. And what a follow-up. In Game 2 of the NLDS against the Giants, Zimmermann took a shutout into the ninth inning as Washington clung to a 1-0 lead, and he got the Nats to within the final out. But manager Matt Williams took him out for closer Drew Storen to try to seal the win, and Storen allowed the game-tying double to Pablo Sandoval. The Nationals would end up falling in 18 innings, one of the most crushing losses in franchise history, but that takes nothing away from Zimmermann's masterpiece.

3) Nolan Ryan, Astros -- Oct. 1, 1981

No-hitter: Sept. 26, 1981, vs. Dodgers

Follow-up: 9 IP, 7 H, 1 R, 9 K, CG vs. Reds

One of Ryan's best follow-ups came after the fifth of his record seven no-hitters, his only one with the Astros. In his last start of the year, Ryan tossed a one-run, nine-strikeout complete game to beat the Reds, who the Astros were fighting for the second-half NL West title in the strike-shortened 1981 season. Houston edged Cincinnati for a playoff spot by 1 1/2 games.

4) Clayton Kershaw, Dodgers -- June 24, 2014

No-hitter: June 18, 2014, vs. Rockies

Follow-up: 8 IP, 6 H, 0 R, 8 K vs. Royals

Kershaw threw maybe the most dominant no-hitter ever -- he struck out 15 and would have been perfect if not for a Hanley Ramirez error. The Dodgers ace followed up that game with eight scoreless innings of eight-strikeout baseball on the road against a Royals team that would go on to win the AL pennant.

5) Randy Johnson, Mariners -- June 7, 1990

No-hitter: June 2, 1990, vs. Tigers

Follow-up: 9 IP, 5 H, 1 R, 10 K, CG vs. White Sox

On June 2, 1990, the Big Unit threw the first no-hitter of his career and the first in Mariners history. But he was arguably even more dominant in his next start, a complete-game one-run win over the 94-win White Sox. Johnson struck out eight in his no-hitter ... in his next start, he struck out 10. In his no-hitter, he issued six walks ... in his next start, he only walked one.

6) Cy Young, Red Sox -- May 11, 1904

No-hitter: May 5, 1904, vs. Athletics

Follow-up: 15 IP, 5 H, 0 R, 5 K, SHO vs. Tigers

The man pitching's highest award is named for had one of the best no-hitter follow-ups ever all the way back in 1904. After no-hitting the Athletics on May 5, Young pitched a 15-inning shutout against the Tigers on May 11. It's among the longest shutout victories in the modern era. Imagine such a thing happening today.

7) Tim Lincecum, Giants -- July 1, 2014

No-hitter: June 25, 2014, vs. Padres

Follow-up: 8 IP, 4 H, 0 R, 6 K vs. Cardinals

The Giants fan favorite threw the second no-hitter of his career in 2014, and was nearly as untouchable in his following start, too. Facing a Cardinals team in a postseason preview -- the Giants would eliminate St. Louis in the NLCS on their way to a World Series championship -- Lincecum fired eight shutout innings, allowed only four hits and struck out six.

8) Sal Maglie, Dodgers -- Sept. 29, 1956

No-hitter: Sept. 25, 1956, vs. Phillies

Follow-up: 9 IP, 6 H, 2 R, 6 K, CG vs. Pirates

Maglie came up huge for the Dodgers to close out the 1956 season. In his second-to-last start, he no-hit the Phillies. In his last start, with two days left in the season and Brooklyn locked in a pennant race, he pitched a complete-game victory over the Pirates. The Dodgers took the lead in the standings that day and won the pennant by a game over the Braves.

9) Max Scherzer, Nationals -- June 26, 2015

No-hitter: June 20, 2015, vs. Pirates

Follow-up: 8 IP, 5 H, 2 R, 9 K vs. Phillies

Scherzer threw two no-hitters in 2015, but there was no follow-up to the second one since it was on the second-to-last day of the season. After the first one, though (the perfect game he lost on a hit-by-pitch with two outs in the ninth), he followed up with eight dominant innings against the division rival Phillies to notch his 100th career win.

10) Sandy Koufax, Dodgers -- May 15, 1963

No-hitter: May 11, 1963, vs. Giants

Follow-up: 12 IP, 11 H, 2 R, 12 K, CG vs. Phillies

After the second of his four career no-hitters -- a game in which he outdueled Juan Marichal -- Koufax took the mound at Dodger Stadium against the Phillies and fired a 12-inning, two-run, 12-strikeout complete-game victory.

11) Justin Verlander, Tigers -- May 13, 2011

No-hitter: May 7, 2011, vs. Blue Jays

Follow-up: 8 IP, 2 H, 1 R, 7 K vs. Royals

This was the follow-up to the second of Verlander's three no-hitters. It came during the 2011 season, when he won both the AL Cy Young and MVP Awards. The then-Tigers ace no-hit the Blue Jays on May 7, then held the Royals to two hits and one run in eight innings just six days later. He struck out seven -- three more than in his no-no.

12) Howard Ehmke, Red Sox -- Sept. 11, 1923

No-hitter: Sept. 7, 1923, vs. Athletics

Follow-up: One-hitter vs. Yankees

Ehmke came incredibly close to pitching back-to-back no-hitters. He followed up his no-no against the Philadelphia Athletics on Sept. 7, 1923, with a one-hitter against Babe Ruth and the future World Series-champion Yankees on Sept. 11. Ehmke allowed a single to the first batter he faced, then didn't allow another hit the rest of the game.

13) Sean Manaea, A's -- April 27, 2018

No-hitter: April 21, 2018, vs. Red Sox

Follow-up: 7 IP, 4 H, 1 R (0 ER), 7 K vs. Astros

Manaea no-hit the eventual World Series-champion Red Sox and then followed it up by shutting down the reigning World Series-champion Astros, throwing seven innings and allowing just an unearned run. By holding Houston hitless for the first three innings of that game, he set the A's franchise record for consecutive no-hit innings at 14, passing Blue Moon Odom.

14) Jake Arrieta, Cubs -- Sept. 5, 2015

No-hitter: Aug. 30, 2015, vs. Dodgers

Follow-up: 8 IP, 4 H, 0 R, 7 K vs. D-backs

Arrieta's crowning achievement on the way to the NL Cy Young Award was his 12-strikeout no-hitter against the Dodgers in Los Angeles, but the follow-up was also a gem: eight scoreless innings with seven K's against the D-backs. So was every game he pitched down the stretch -- Arrieta had a 0.86 ERA over his final 20 starts of that season.

15) Nolan Ryan, Angels -- May 19, 1973

No-hitter: May 15, 1973, vs. Royals

Follow-up: 9 IP, 4 H, 1 R, 12 K, CG vs. Rangers

The first no-hitter of Ryan's career came on May 15, 1973, a 12-strikeout no-no against the Royals. The start after that, he beat the Rangers with a four-hit, one-run, 12-strikeout complete game. Between the two games, Ryan threw 18 innings of one-run, four-hit, 24-strikeout ball.

16) Nolan Ryan, Angels -- July 19, 1973

No-hitter: July 15, 1973, vs. Tigers

Follow-up: 10 1/3 IP, 3 H, 2 R, 13 K vs. Orioles

It's hard to imagine doing some of the things Ryan did in modern baseball. On July 15, 1973, he pitched a 17-strikeout no-hitter against the Tigers. On July 19, he took the mound again against the Orioles and threw 10 1/3 more innings with 13 more strikeouts, allowing just three hits. That's 19 1/3 innings, three hits and 30 strikeouts in a span of four days.

17) Sandy Koufax, Dodgers -- July 4, 1962

No-hitter: June 30, 1962, vs. Mets

Follow-up: 9 IP, 5 H, 1 R, 10 K vs. Phillies

Koufax followed the first no-hitter of his legendary career with another gem, a complete-game, one-run, 10-strikeout victory over the Phillies, on the Fourth of July, no less.

18) Roy Halladay, Phillies -- June 4, 2010

No-hitter: May 29, 2010, vs. Marlins

Follow-up: 7 IP, 10 H, 2 R, 7 K vs. Padres

Halladay was a Hall of Famer in the middle of one of the best seasons of his career when he threw his perfect game on May 29, 2010. Back at Citizens Bank Park for his next start, the Phillies' new ace beat a strong Padres team, holding San Diego to two runs in seven innings with seven strikeouts in a one-run win. Doc went on to win the NL Cy Young Award that year and joined Don Larsen as the only pitchers in MLB history to toss a no-hitter in the postseason.

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19) Hoyt Wilhelm, Orioles -- Sept. 26, 1958

No-hitter: Sept. 20, 1958, vs. Yankees

Follow-up: 9 IP, 6 H, 1 R, 10 K vs. Yankees

Wilhelm had only been an Oriole for a month when he no-hit the eventual World Series-champion Yankees in his second-to-last start of the season. In his final start, he faced the Mickey Mantle-led Bronx Bombers again, and had to duel Whitey Ford on the mound. The Hall of Fame knuckleballer outpitched Ford and threw nine innings of one-run, 10-strikeout baseball in a game Baltimore went on to win in extra innings.

20) Warren Spahn, Braves -- May 3, 1961

No-hitter: April 28, 1961, vs. Giants

Follow-up: 9 IP, 2 H, 1 R, 9 K, CG vs. Dodgers

It was five days after Spahn's 40th birthday when he pitched the second no-hitter of his career at Milwaukee's County Stadium. Five days later, he followed that up with a two-hitter, allowing only one run and striking out nine against the Dodgers.

21) Ervin Santana, Angels -- Aug. 2, 2011

No-hitter: July 27, 2011, vs. Indians

Follow-up: 9 IP, 8 H, 1 R, 7 K vs. Twins

Santana pitched the Angels' first no-hitter since 1990 in his last start of July 2011. In his first start of August, he added a second straight complete game, allowing only one run to the Twins and striking out seven.

22) Mike Scott, Astros -- Oct. 2, 1986

No-hitter: Sept. 25, 1986, vs. Giants

Follow-up: 7 IP, 2 H, 1 R, 8 K vs. Giants

Scott closed out the 1986 season in dominant fashion. In his second-to-last start of the regular season, the Astros ace threw a 13-strikeout no-hitter against the Giants to clinch the NL West. In his last start, also against San Francisco, he threw seven innings of two-hit, one-run, eight-strikeout baseball. He also baffled the Mets in the NL Championship Series. Then he won the NL Cy Young Award.

23) Félix Hernández, Mariners -- Aug. 21, 2012

No-hitter: Aug. 15, 2012, vs. Rays

Follow-up: 7 2/3 IP, 7 H, 1 R, 5 K vs. Indians

King Félix was perfect on Aug. 15, 2012. In his next start, six days later, he was still great. The Mariners ace limited the Indians to one run in 7 2/3 innings, striking out five more to follow his 12-K perfecto.

24) Ubaldo Jimenez, Rockies -- April 22, 2010

No-hitter: April 17, 2010, vs. Braves

Follow-up: 7 1/3 IP, 5 H, 0 R, 5 K vs. Nationals

Ubaldo's start to the 2010 season was one of the most dominant ever -- he had a 0.78 ERA over 11 starts through the first two months of the season. The no-hitter came in the third of those

starts, and the follow-up for the Rockies ace was 7 1/3 more scoreless innings in his outing against the Nationals.

25) Dave Righetti, Yankees -- July 9, 1983

No-hitter: July 4, 1983, vs. Red Sox

Follow-up: 10 1/3 IP, 7 H, 2 R, 7 K vs. Royals

Righetti no-hit the rival Red Sox on the Fourth of July in 1983. In his next start against the Royals, nine dominant innings wasn't even enough. Righetti pitched 10 1/3 innings of two-run, seven-strikeout baseball against the Royals before handing off the ball to Goose Gossage -- only for the Yankees to lose on a walk-off throwing error by catcher Butch Wynegar on a steal.

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Hot First Weeks

Bryan Buxton Twins OF tied for AL lead with 5 HRs.

White Sox: Yermín Mercedes, C

By his fourth game, you were honestly surprised to see any pitcher get him out at all. He's hitting .536 with a .594 OBP and 1.451 OPS through seven games.

Rangers: Nate Lowe, 1B

He cooled a bit after his insane start (14 RBIs in the first five games)

Giants: Evan Longoria, 3B

Well, well, well, look who suddenly looks like his old MVP-contender self again? Longoria is hitting .333 with three homers and a 1.061 OPS through eight games.

ITS NOT HOW YOU START, ITS HOW YOU FINISH

For those of us tearing our hair out over the Yankees awful start. Since the start of the wild card era:

FIRST 25 GAMES

Division winners

9-16: 2015 Rangers (finished 88-74)

9-16: 2006 Twins (finished 96-66)

10-15: 2006 Padres (finished 88-74)

10-15: 2005 Yankees (finished 95-67)

Six division winners have started 11-14

Wild Card winners

8-17: 2001 Athletics (finished 102-60)

10-15: 2014 Pirates (finished 88-74)

10-15: 2009 Rockies (finished 92-70)

10-15: 2007 Rockies (finished 90-73)*

Six Wild Card winners have started 11-14

FIRST 50 GAMES**Division winners**

22-28: 2013 Dodgers (finished 92-70)

22-28: 2012 Athletics (finished 94-68)

22-28: 2007 Cubs (finished 85-77)

22-28: 1996 Cardinals (finished 88-74)

23-27: 2018 Dodgers (finished 92-71)*

23-27: 2015 Blue Jays (finished 93-69)

23-27: 2012 Tigers (finished 88-74)*

23-27: 2006 Twins (finished 96-66)

23-27: 2006 Athletics (finished 93-69)

Two division winners started 24-26

Wild Card winners

18-32: 2005 Astros (finished 89-73)*

19-31: 2019 Nationals (finished 93-69)#

20-30: 2009 Rockies (finished 92-70)

21-29: 2007 Yankees (finished 94-68)

21-29: 2003 Marlins (finished 91-71)#

21-29: 1995 Yankees (finished 79-65)

23-27: 2014 Pirates (finished 88-74)

23-27: 2008 Brewers (finished 90-72)

23-27: 2007 Rockies (finished 90-73)*

Two Wild Card winners started 24-26

FIRST 81 GAMES**Division winners**

38-43: 2013 Dodgers (finished 92-70)

38-43: 2008 Dodgers (finished 84-78)

39-42: 2012 Athletics (finished 94-68)

39-42: 2012 Tigers (finished 88-74)*
40-41: 2019 Cardinals (finished 91-71)
40-41: 2017 Cubs (finished 92-70)
40-41: 2004 Braves (finished 96-66)
40-41: 1997 Astros (finished 84-78)
40-41: 1995 Mariners (finished 79-66)
Eight division winners started 41-40

Wild Card winners

39-42: 2018 Rockies (finished 91-72)
39-42: 2007 Rockies (finished 90-73)*
39-42: 2005 Astros (finished 89-73)*
39-42: 2001 Athletics (finished 102-60)
40-41: 2007 Yankees (finished 94-68)
40-41: 2003 Marlins (finished 91-71)#
40-41: 2001 Cardinals (finished 93-69)
Five Wild Card winners started 41-40

BIGGEST PRE-WILD CARD ERA COMEBACKS

Since 1904

FIRST 25 GAMES

6-18 (plus a tie): 1914 Braves (finished 94-59)

FIRST 50 GAMES

18-32: 1974 Pirates (finished 88-74)

FIRST 81 GAMES

35-46: 1973 Mets (finished 82-79)

If you want the details on these comebacks check out https://www.mlb.com/news/slowest-starts-by-teams-that-made-playoffs?partnerId=zh-20210418-156906-MLB&qid=1026&bt_ee=i%2B5tpaovGYdnhtNENWPqzCGDTlgKuEtAg8%2BoVZ77jiaeG4UP3Q6kOoL%2FKT32SDy2&bt_ts=1618746247936

MIND THE GAP

The last time [Brent Honeywell Jr.](#) pitched in a Minor League game was on Sept. 19, 2017, when he picked up the win for the Durham Bulls in the Triple-A national championship game. Four

elbow surgeries and exactly 1,300 days later, Honeywell scaled the mound at Tropicana Field for his Major League debut.

Once one of baseball's top pitching prospects, Honeywell immediately showed why the Rays remain so excited about what he can do. Honeywell went 3 1/2 years in between meaningful competitive outings, but he didn't look that way. The right-hander retired all six Yankees hitters he faced and struck out two in his debut outing as an opener.

99 IS FINE

In Game 1 of their Tuesday doubleheader with the Phillies, the Mets' starting pitcher was No. 99 in your program, Taijuan Walker. In Game 2 of that doubleheader, the Mets' starting pitcher was No. 0, Marcus Stroman.

SHORT AND SWEET

Mets-Marlins game Sunday, which, much to his delight, lasted exactly two hitters and nine pitches before the proper authorities finally noticed there was a lagoon falling out of the sky.

So what was so historic about that? Only this: *It was the shortest suspended game ever!*

Yes, we'd never had a game get suspended after just one out before, according to Retrosheet's invaluable [suspended-game compendium](#). The previous record was six outs, in a June 16, 2001, Royals-Brewers game that was zipping along smoothly — for one inning, anyway — until a power failure struck the structure then known as Miller Park.

HOPE YOU GOT TO THE GAME ON TIME

Crazy first inning went down in Tuesday's Reds-Giants game in San Francisco:

- TOP OF THE FIRST: Joey Votto, two-run homer ... Mike Moustakas, two-run homer.
- BOTTOM OF THE FIRST: Mike Yastrzemski, two-run homer ... Brandon Crawford, two-run homer.

Which made that the first four-homer first inning in the history of Oracle/AT&T/Pac Bell Park — but that wasn't even the historic part.

If you're counting along at home, that's *four* multi-run homers in the first inning. And if you're thinking you've never seen that before, it's because you've *literally never seen that* before. According to our friends from Stathead, it's the first time — in any park, in any year of the modern era — that four multi-run homers were hit in the first inning of any game.

And it happened in a park that had never been the scene of four first-inning homers of *any* kind.

DON'T WALK THIS WAY

On Wednesday night, San Diego and Pittsburgh. The Padres walked 13 times, a franchise record for a nine-inning game. They also drew a walk in *each of the first eight innings*, which is hard to do. They had three more hitters reach base after getting drilled by Pirates pitchers.

And they lost!

According to STATS, no team had won a game while issuing as many walks and as many HBPs as the Pirates in 73 years.

PYRAMID

Good riddance to Bernie Madoff, jailed, disgraced financier. He took the Wilpon and Katz families who owned the Mets for hundreds of millions of dollars and undermined the team's finances that drove the sale to Steve Cohen.

As The New York Times wrote--The problem was not just about liquidity. The Mets rarely made money and they needed the investors to offset the annual losses (The team made money in 2009, its first year playing in Citi Field, but suffered huge yearly losses, sometimes as much as \$60 million per year, after that).

Ultimately, they sold 49 percent to the group of investors, but retained control. At the time, the valuation of the club was in the neighborhood of \$500 million. A decade later, Cohen bought 95 percent of the team (Fred Wilpon retained 5 percent) for a little over \$2.4 billion, which was a record for a North American sports team. Despite the annual losses, the value of the team soared, even after the Madoff scandal.

People close to the Wilpons say that the reason for the transaction was for estate planning — it was seen as the most equitable way to divide up the assets among many family members — and may have happened anyway, regardless of the Madoff losses.

But the Wilpons and Katz have left the scene, for the most part, and Madoff is dead. Only the Mets continue on.

DODGER STADIUM RENNOVATIONS—JANET MARIE SMITH

On Aug. 6, 2012, three months into the tenure of the [Dodgers'](#) new owners, the team made three transactions. The Dodgers cut outfielder Tony Gwynn Jr., called up outfielder Jerry Sands and signed executive Janet Marie Smith.

Gwynn never again played a full season in the major leagues. Sands never did. Smith is still here, and her latest masterpiece for the Dodgers is only the most recent example of why she should be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Smith is America's foremost ballpark designer. She first made her name in Baltimore, where Larry Lucchino, then president of the Orioles, envisioned an intimate neighborhood ballpark.

"This was at the same time the Blue Jays were building the eighth wonder of the world," Lucchino said in an interview.

The Toronto stadium known as Skydome opened to grand fanfare in 1989, with a retractable roof that inspired awe. The Blue Jays touted their new home as "The World's Greatest Entertainment Centre." They got the downtown location right, but the vast multipurpose concept all wrong, and now they want out.

Smith designed Camden Yards, which integrated a crumbling warehouse into its setting. Lucchino recalled a Baltimore columnist deriding the warehouse as "an empty, rat-infested fire trap," but it emerged as the signature design element, so beloved it inspired the San Diego Padres to incorporate the old Western Metal Supply Co. building into Petco Park.

Camden Yards opened in 1992, and suddenly every team wanted one just like it: not a copy of it, but a baseball-only facility with its own features and quirks.

"Ballparks in baseball are different than arenas in other sports," Lucchino said. "They each have a distinctive personality."

When the Atlanta Braves were handed that city's Olympic stadium in 1996, Smith got the assignment of downsizing it into a ballpark. When the Boston Red Sox looked to [renovate Fenway Park for a second century](#) of use, Smith got that assignment too, incorporating office

buildings, laundry facilities and even airspace above an adjacent street to expand a ballpark wedged into a city block.

“Janet’s middle name,” Lucchino said, “is preservation.”

That made her the perfect choice for the Dodgers’ new owners. The renovation the Dodgers unveiled Wednesday is her second major project for the team, and one that will make Dodgers fans smile — and exhale.

The concept of adding a Dodger Stadium entrance plaza in center field is not new. Our old friend [Frank McCourt pitched the idea](#) before he ran out of money: Fifteen acres of restaurants and shops and a Dodgers museum, with team offices and parking structures.

Smith’s version covers two and a half acres. It honors the sense of place.

Dodger Stadium is our oasis on a hill, an escape from the everyday world. We do not need Dodger Stadium to be a mall, or an entertainment center, or an urban village.

“Too much is too much,” Smith said. “You still want an intimacy. We’re still here to watch the game and celebrate the Dodgers.

“We weren’t looking to create a theme park. We were looking to create the kind of amenities that other ballparks have, but in a way that respected the original architecture of Dodger Stadium.”

There are concession stands and picnic tables, not sit-down restaurants. There is an Airstream trailer turned into a baseball cap stand, a vintage ice cream truck, and a Dodger blue fire truck with taps for lemonade and beer.

Smith amplified the stadium’s mid-century style, rather than obscuring it in the name of modernization. The rainbow colors in the club level seating area are back, signs are shaped in the classic hexagons of the Dodger Stadium scoreboards, and a Tommy Lasorda-inspired lounge evokes the decades before disco. Smith playfully used beach balls in a lighting motif, and she even planted two orange Union 76 balls on the grounds, as nostalgic surprises for fans that remember the old gas station in the stadium parking lot.

No sport binds the generations like baseball does. Instead of assembling artifacts in a building, the Dodgers leveraged their latest renovation to create what team President Stan Kasten called an “open-air baseball history museum.”

Kids can use play areas, stand behind center field and watch the Dodgers take batting practice, step into a cage for some batting practice of their own, and pose with a virtual image of their favorite player for a picture. Along the way, parents can share team history as they pass the Jackie Robinson statue, displays honoring Lasorda and Fernando Valenzuela, street signs from the Dodgers’ old spring home in Vero Beach, Fla., and broadcaster Joe Buck’s scorecards from the 2020 World Series.

In Baltimore, Smith reinvented ballpark architecture for the modern era. In Boston, and again in Los Angeles, her preservations and enhancements saved two of baseball's storied franchises from having to make a painful choice: stay in a revered but cramped ballpark, or move to a new one with contemporary amenities?

Architects so far inducted into the Hall of Fame are team architects, not ballpark architects. To Lucchino, and to Kasten, Smith deserves a call to the Hall.

"She's got mad skills," Kasten said. "Her body of work is extraordinary. More people are noticing it, and I'm sure the Hall of Fame will too."

Ballplayers come and go, but few have the lasting impact of Smith. When Cooperstown recognizes the decade in which a proud but bankrupt franchise was restored to glory, the inductees should be Clayton Kershaw and Janet Marie Smith.

The Great Peter Gammons: We're now in baseball's Substance Era

It is an era, like the Deadball and Lively Ball Eras that spanned the emergence of radio in America, like the Segregation Era that Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby broke, like the era of the 15-inch mound that Bob Gibson and friends lowered, and the Steroid Era that glamorized power, shattered records and eventually denied some players their place in history.

Now, we are in the *Substance Era*. Yes, some — perhaps many — pitchers have always used a little something extra. There was a time when spitters were prevalent. One killed Ray Chapman. Preacher Roe wrote a piece in *Sports Illustrated* detailing how he threw his. Gaylord Perry was a dominant star pitcher who made K-Y Jelly famous en route to 314 wins; MLB had umpires check what they could, but only once was Perry ejected from a game, on a seventh-inning 3-2 pitch with the bases loaded after Boston outfielder Reid Nichols asked umpire Dave Phillips to check a ball innings earlier when he was in left field "and a voice came to me that said 'no weapon formed against thee shall prosper.'" My conclusion that night was that the only rule Perry violated for all those years was Isaiah 54:17.

But never has it been as widespread, as consistent, as institutionalized, as explained in this [superb piece here on *The Athletic* by Eno Sarris](#) in which an experienced pitching coach stated that "almost everyone is using something."

Last week, I had all nine pitching coaches I talked with say virtually the same thing: "The word to underline in this is *something*," said one experienced coach. "The clubhouse guy in Anaheim may have had one recipe for a grip substance, but I'd guess there are about two hundred different recipes being used around the game right now. That's one of the reasons it's going to be so difficult to detect and break down."

[Trevor Bauer](#) has, one way or another, been at the center of all this. He called out the Houston Astros for their ability to suddenly and seemingly magically increase the spin rate and results of any pitcher who joined the club, which many also took as a shot at his UCLA teammate/rival Gerrit Cole. At the same time, Bauer's study, knowledge and curiosity about spin rates from 2018 through 2020 produced the largest increase in spin rate in the game. And last week, Bauer found himself in the spotlight after an *Athletic* report by Ken Rosenthal stated that [multiple suspicious baseballs from Bauer's April 8 start had been collected by the league for inspection](#). During the Dodger-Athletics game in question, the Oakland broadcasters remarked about a couple of Bauer-thrown balls that had been taken out for examination. One Dodger official noted, "Trevor doesn't help himself," referring to the pitcher's public pronouncements on Twitter and YouTube, railing against the media and the league.

There are two clouds converging on this issue.

The first is that in this era of high velocity and steadily rising fastball/curveball spin rates, up go the strikeouts and stretches of time in games — like the clinching game of the 2020 World Series — when the action is the game of catch between pitchers and catchers. Major League Baseball reads the demographics, and the demographics tell them in three years Hurling from Glasgow or cricket from New Delhi (Billy Beane now owns an Indian Cricket club) may have a more enthusiastic audience among those under 25. Don't laugh. Hurling is fast and wild, lacrosse on fast-forward with a whole lotta blood.

The other cloud is that many people in the game consider this explosion in the use of substances to be cheating. "In the end, the hitters were using steroids so they could lift, work out and recover," says one NL general manager. "We all condemned that as cheating. But now pitchers are running up ridiculous numbers by cheating. I don't see the difference, except that eventually we negotiated to get testing (in 2005) and figured out how to administer it. There are no clear answers as to the identification and detection processes. It's still cheating. It still impacts pennant races. It could end the careers of certain position players. There are players who struggle with high velocity that some pitchers can accelerate with whatever they have. It's incredible what can be used to limit detection."

At a media seminar I attended, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency explained how athletes discovered one way to disguise amphetamines in their bloodstream was the use of Visine. Athletes doing something they don't want to be detected will find a way.

What to make of all these developments, then? They are a product of a pitching culture that values raw measurables above all else, and that starts early.

The power/spin rate era, then, comes back to what one scouting director whose specialty has been pitching calls "the Driveline Bazooka method of pitching. The sell, especially with the proliferation of the showcases, is velocity, velocity, velocity, not pitching." In fact, one current pitching coach says, "I think this will change, probably soon. I'm not sure this obsession with

spin rates won't end up hurting a lot of arms, as they try to pronate to get the spin. I had one pitcher who hurt his arm because he worried too much about his spin rate."

"I think we're going to see a turn away from this concept," says one pitching coach. "First, there are too many young pitchers who are blowing out their arms. The second is that we can't continue to survive with pitchers throwing four or five innings a start."

The Astros and Yankees are projected to be two of the best teams in the American League, but in their first eight games Yankee starters pitched less than five innings five times, and the Astros had three starts — two by [Zack Greinke](#), one by [José Urquidy](#) — of six innings.

"I wonder how bullpens are going to hold up over a full season, especially when their team is in a pennant race," says one AL pitching coach. "For years, as we move forward with bullpenning, the overuse of the good ones shortens their careers."

Bullpenning may be a byproduct of the lack of starting pitching, but pitching coaches who pitched in the major leagues feel the paucity of starting pitching is a result of the tendency to rush young arms to the pen and not give them time to develop. Go back 10 years to 2011, the year Cole, Bauer, Dylan Bundy, José Fernández, Sonny Gray and Matt Barnes were all picked in the first round.

Liam Hendricks led American League relievers in pitching WAR in 2019 and 2020. The only other reliever to lead his league in that category in consecutive seasons in the last decade was the Dodgers' Kenley Jansen, in 2016-17. The last National League reliever to lead the league in saves in consecutive seasons was Craig Kimbrel from 2012-14, and the last American Leaguer was Baltimore's Jim Johnson in 2012-13.

The difference between pitchers peaking in 2012 and 2021 is that a decade ago, young pitchers were originally starters who had opportunities to fill that broader role. Buck Showalter saw that Zack Britton and Johnson each had turbo sinkers that worked at the end of games and put them in the pen. In 1995, he started Mariano Rivera up until the last game before the All-Star break, but put him in the bullpen in the second half ("He just didn't have a breaking ball," says Showalter) and the next spring Mariano came up with the cutter.

Whitey Herzog brought Ken Dayley and Todd Worrell to the big leagues as starters, but Whitey watched young pitchers in the clubhouse before starts "and when I saw them walk about six innings of energy off wandering around before they went to warm up, I thought they should go to the bullpen." Jerry Hunsicker's Astros drafted Billy Wagner and Brad Lidge to be relievers, but Hunsicker started them in the minors to help them develop secondary pitches and learn to get out of jams of their own making. When they were ready, they became star closers.

In December 2012, following a 69-93 season, Ben Cherington signed Koji Uehara, who had been released after mediocre starting seasons in Baltimore and Texas. Uehara, who threw an 85-87 mph fastball up in the zone and a 79 mph split, had a 1.09 earned run average in the regular season, then worked 13 post-season games with a 1.31 ERA and seven saves, including the final strikeout of the World Series.

“He was as good as anyone you could ever see in that postseason,” Craig Breslow once said. After two more strong years, Koji saved seven games in 2016, was released, saved two for the Cubs and went home.

“We don’t train starting pitchers anymore,” says Hall of Famer John Smoltz. “We train for power, for velocity, but not pitching. I was allowed to pitch, allowed to get my brains beaten in, overcome adversity and keep going, make adjustments, change. Greg Maddux and Tom Glavine were allowed to do the same. Maddux had learning times with the Cubs. Glavine had one rough year (7-17). I started 2-11 in 1991 and Bobby Cox stuck with me.”

He was 12-2 in the second half and threw seven shutout innings in the seventh game of the World Series.

“When I went to the bullpen (after surgery, from 2001 to 2004, when he logged 154 saves) I knew how to pitch out of trouble,” Smoltz says. He then went back to starting and twice finished in the top seven for the Cy Young, an award he won earlier in his career.

Dennis Eckersley was like Smoltz. He won 149 games as a starter, had one fourth place Cy Young vote (in 1978, when he won 20 games), then when he went to the A’s in 1997 was moved to the bullpen by Tony La Russa. He racked up 390 saves, won the Cy Young and MVP in 1992 and, like Smoltz, was a Cooperstown no-brainer.

Do not forget, when Smoltz was traded to the Braves for Doyle Alexander in 1987, he was 4-11 for the Tigers’ Double-A farm team in Glens Falls, N.Y. Then-Mets scout Paul Ricciari, who covered the Eastern League, told me, “forget the record, Smoltz is the best prospect in the league.” He went to Atlanta and was 2-7, 5.88 the rest of the year. “I’d have been a reliever for life if I did that today,” says Smoltz.

Maddux threw hard when he came up, but he was 8-18, 5.56 in 1986-87. Dallas Green stuck with him; in ’88, Maddux threw 249 innings, the first of 14 consecutive 200 inning seasons. Glavine went 7-17, 4.56 in his first full season in 1988, but then-GM Cox insisted he stay in the rotation. “They each had the touch and feel great starting pitchers have to have,” Cox later said. “They never stopped learning. They were very smart, extremely athletic, and were always trying things.”

“I spent a lot of time going to the bullpen, trying things between starts,” says Smoltz. “We all did. We all learned from our failures and our successes, we learned what we could and couldn’t do, and that allows a pitcher to be honest with himself, which is very important.” As someone

who covered Eckersley for close to 20 years, I can honestly say I have known few pitchers more honest about themselves. I once wrote that Eck's walk-in song should be Jackson Browne's "These Days," with the line "don't confront me with my failures, I have not forgotten them," because he accepted all responsibilities and nothing that ever happened to him was anyone else's fault.

Hall of Famers Maddux, Glavine and Smoltz are examples of how teams can rediscover how to develop starters. "When young pitchers struggle, give them time to develop other pitches or figure out what they want to do before they become one-inning pitchers and are expected to throw every pitch with maximum effort, which so often leads to injuries," says Smoltz. "Let them learn touch and feel."

There is no better current example than the touch-and-feel genius of Zack Greinke. "He can change shapes of the same pitch from inning to inning, game to game," says Astros pitching coach Brent Strom. "He reads hitters, he understands himself. He's a three-dimensional pitcher — in and out, up and down, front and back. He is a master of speed differential and can throw the ball wherever he wants." If you love looking at the radar gun readings on the scoreboard, Greinke's four-seam fastball averages 88.5 mph, his change-up 86.8.

Kyle Hendricks is the Cubs' best pitcher: 86.3 mph four-seam fastball, then cutter, curveball, changeup, sinker, slider. Ryan Yarbrough of the Rays averages 85.7 and changes speeds; to the hitter, his pitches seem to come out of his armpit and, by the way, Yarbrough yielded the lowest exit velocity of any American League starter in 2020. Joe Musgrove threw a total of 12 fastballs in his no-hitter. Hey, Clayton Kershaw's average fastball this season has been 90.6.

What do the touch-and-feel guys have in common? "They're all great athletes, and being athletic is a far more important part of being a successful pitcher than gun readings," says one National League executive who is unusually gifted in evaluating pitchers. We know Maddux is a scratch golfer who won 18 gold gloves. Glavine not only won two Cy Youngs, but won four Silver Sluggers, had six seasons in which he didn't make an error, and, oh yes, was drafted by the Los Angeles Kings the same year he was a second-round selection of the Braves. He can always claim he was drafted ahead of NHL Hall of Famers Brett Hull and Luc Robitaille.

"They all were in sync with their bodies," says the executive. "That is so important to a pitcher. They understand how their bodies work, and pitch accordingly. Then they can focus on their feel for the ball and what to do with it, throw with low effort and be able to use all four quadrants of the strike zone. That's pitching." One scout suggests one watch Jacob deGrom, who was a good college shortstop, and Max Fried — who his mentor Reggie Smith believed could have been an athletic major-league center fielder — to see great examples of pitchers synced with their bodies who can not only stay over the rubber effortlessly but move to the plate with power. Mike Mussina was a Patek Philippe timepiece. Jim Palmer is a classic example, a fluid, intellectual athlete who later in his career pitched a game against Boston in which, as pitching coach Ray Miller showed off with his pitching chart, he hit every speed on the radar gun from 68 to 92.

"I think what we need to do better in the lower minors is constantly remind pitchers to think out what they're trying to do," says the scouting director. "That, and work on how they watch hitters and learn how to see what the hitters want to do against them. Pedro Martinez and Maddux seemed to always know what the hitter was trying to do against them by reading their swings. You can't get that off a scouting report, or analytics. You can't get that when someone is calling the pitches from the dugout." Asked to name a high school or college pitcher who read hitters exceptionally, he came up with an unexpected choice: "Matt Wieters. He was a reliever at Georgia Tech, and he had exceptional feel and could read hitters. He would have been a very successful major-league pitcher." Wieters was the fifth pick in the country as a catcher, so the pitching never happened.

Along with punishing those who break the rules on substances used to better grip baseballs, and altering development to encourage *pitching* and allow young pitchers to throw learning experience minor-league innings, Jim Bowden on XM MLB Radio had a creative thought: Decide what substance is legal and in what amount, and allow it to be in a small bag next to the rosin bag on the mound. "That way," says Bowden, "everyone would have a level playing field."

We don't know how good Trevor Bauer would be if he, Kevin Gausman and Jon Gray all had the same spin rates, but one of his former pitching coaches says, "he'd always find a way to be exceptional because he is obsessed with greatness." Maybe he wouldn't be a Cy Young Award winner, but then, in a league with deGrom, he might not be one this season. He might not be better than Julio Urías, Walker Buehler or Dustin May this year, and he could still win the seventh game of the World Series.

What I do know is that a Red Sox clubhouse kid gave me a tube of K-Y jelly out of Perry's locker, that Eck once got caught with a nail file in a playoff game, that Don Drysdale loaded up more than a few balls in his time and that Elston Howard used to cut baseballs on his shinguards before returning them to Whitey Ford. And all those pitchers are in the Hall of Fame.

So let's standardize what pitchers use on their hands. Insist major-league teams work on the development of starting pitchers; limit the money these run, throw and thump showcases make, to the detriment of the game; and let kids play.

Yankees who have hit 3 HRs in a game

Babe Ruth

Tony Lazzeri 2x

Lou Gehrig 4x

Ben Chapman

Joe DiMaggio 3x

Bill Dickey

Charlie Keller

Johnny Mize

Mickey Mantle

Tom Tresh

Bobby Murcer 2x

Cliff Johnson

Mike Stanley

Paul O'Neil

Daryl Strawberry

Tino Martinez

Tony Clark

A-Rod 2x

Mark Teixeira

Curtis Granderson

Aaron Hicks

Gary Sanchez

Kyle Higashioka

APRIL 25, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Its great to be watching real baseball again, even if the Yankees are stumbling out of the gate.

Oldest player to lead MLB in home runs--38-year-old Darrell Evans (40 HR in 1985, the only year he ever led the Majors)

Since August 1 of last year Tampa Bay has the best home record in MLB.

Watching Yankees-TB game I was struck by a stat—2020 post season Randy Arozarena of the Rays hit .377, the rest of the team .189. Talk about carrying our team to the world series.

Padres No No, and lots More about No Hitters

Joe Musgrove threw the first no hitter in the 53-year history of the San Diego Padres. He blanked the Rangers across nine near-perfect innings with 10 strikeouts in a 3-0 victory at Globe Life Park. Some fun facts about the no-no from mlb.com.

- Every active franchise is now on the board, with the Padres now having a no-hitter. The Mets and Padres had been the final two, until Johan Santana threw a no-hitter for the Mets on June 1, 2012, leaving the Padres alone ... until Friday night. The Padres had gone 8,205 games without a no-hitter, the second-longest drought in Major League history behind the 1906-64 Phillies' 8,944-game drought without one -- but the Padres' streak was the longest before getting a team's first no-hitter.
- The Padres had thrown 30 one-hitters, with the first coming on July 6, 1969, and the most recent on May 15, 2018. The longest no-hit bids in Padres history had been 8 2/3 innings, by Steve Arlin on July 18, 1972, and a combined group of Padres pitchers on July 9, 2011.
- For the Rangers, it was the first time the club was no-hit since April 18, 2007, when Mark Buehrle held them hitless at now-Guaranteed Rate Field. That Rangers lineup featured Kenny Lofton, Ian Kinsler, Michael Young, Mark Teixeira, Sammy Sosa and Nelson Cruz, among others.
- Musgrove's no-hitter came the day after the 52nd anniversary of the first regular-season game in Padres history, which took place on April 8, 1969, against the Astros at San Diego (later Jack Murphy) Stadium. The Padres went 18,995 days without a no-hitter.

- Musgrove was born 20 miles away from Petco Park, in El Cajon, Calif., on Dec. 4, 1992. He was drafted by the Blue Jays 46th overall in the 2011 MLB Draft out of Grossmont High School in El Cajon.
- Musgrove is the sixth pitcher since 1990 to throw a no-hitter for a team from the state where he was born, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. He joins Jered Weaver (LAA), Kevin Gross (LAD), Nolan Ryan (two for TEX), Terry Mulholland (PHI) and Dave Stewart (OAK).
- Rangers general manager Chris Young, who pitched for the Padres from 2006-10, was two outs away from throwing San Diego's first no-hitter on Sept. 22, 2006, against the Pirates. Pittsburgh's Joe Randa broke it up with a solo homer in the ninth.
- Musgrove has now thrown 31 consecutive scoreless innings dating back to last season, a career high. Over that span, he's given up 10 hits, walked two and struck out 44.
- Catcher Victor Caratini guided Musgrove through his historic night and has now [caught the last two no-hitters](#) pitched in MLB, and with different clubs -- he caught Alec Mills' no-no against the Brewers in Milwaukee on Sept. 13, 2020, while with the Cubs. Caratini is the first starting catcher in MLB history to catch consecutive no-hitters MLB-wide for different teams, according to Elias. There are 10 other instances of a starting catcher catching consecutive no-hitters MLB-wide, but all of those were for the same team.
- This was just Musgrove's second start with the Padres, making him the eighth pitcher in the modern era (since 1900) with a no-hitter in one of his first two starts with a team, according to Elias. He's the first pitcher to do it since Clay Buchholz on Sept. 1, 2007, in his second start for the Red Sox.
 - Team that has now gone the longest since its last no-hitter--Cleveland (Len Barker, May 15, 1981, vs. Toronto, perfect game.)

More interesting no hitter facts:

- On April 7, 1969, in the ninth game in Expos/Nationals history, right-hander Bill Stoneman no-hit the Phillies at Connie Mack Stadium in just his fifth Major League start. The 25-year-old walked five and struck out eight in Montreal's 7-0 win.
- In Washington, the franchise's first no-hitter as the Nationals came on Sept. 28, 2014, nine years after the move from Montreal, when righty Jordan Zimmermann no-hit the Marlins on the final day of the regular season. He walked just one and fanned 10 on 104 pitches.
- The Angels also picked up their first no-hitter one year into franchise history. On May 5, 1962, lefty Bo Belinsky worked around four walks to no-hit the Orioles at Dodger Stadium, where the Angels shared a park with their neighbors while their own stadium was being built in Anaheim. Belinsky struck out nine in the 2-0 victory.

- For the franchise's first three seasons, the Astros were known as the Colt .45s, and it was one year into club history that Houston got its first no-hitter when on May 17, 1963, right-hander Don Nottebart blanked the Phillies in the hit department even though Philadelphia did score once in a 4-1 game. The contest was played at Colt Stadium, the temporary home of the expansion team until the Astrodome opened nearby in 1965. Nottebart gave up the unearned run, walked three and struck out eight.
- In their third year of existence, On May 11, 1996, left-hander Al Leiter brought the Marlins their first no-hitter when he dominated against the Rockies at Joe Robbie Stadium. Leiter walked two and struck out six on 103 pitches, shutting down a formidable Colorado lineup in an 11-0 Florida win.
- The Royals began play in 1969, and four years later came the franchise's first no-hitter when right-hander Steve Busby blanked the Tigers in Detroit. It was one of the more unusual no-hitters in the modern era -- Busby walked six batters but managed to etch his name in the history books with the first Royals no-no.
- It's only fitting that Randy Johnson, who won four straight National League Cy Young Awards with Arizona from 1999-2002, pitched the first no-hitter in D-backs history. It came in Atlanta on May 18, 2004, when the Big Unit overpowered the Braves in a 2-0 Arizona win. The Hall of Fame left-hander tossed a perfect game with 13 strikeouts on 117 pitches for the second no-hitter of his career.
- Randy Johnson's no-no with the D-backs in 2004 wasn't his first. His first came 14 years earlier, when the Big Unit tossed the first no-hitter in Mariners history at the Kingdome against the Tigers on June 2, 1990. Johnson was still dealing with control issues early in his career, and walked six batters. But he also struck out eight and in a glimpse of things to come for the flame-throwing lefty, he became the first Mariner to throw a no-hitter.
- Nope, it wasn't one of Nolan Ryan's record seven no-hitters that was the first in Rangers history. It came much earlier than that -- on July 30, 1973 at the Oakland Coliseum, Jim Bibby no-hit the defending World Series champion Athletics in a 6-0 Texas victory. The right-hander walked six and struck out 13.
- The Rays made a storybook run to the World Series in 2008, but it wasn't until two seasons later that Tampa Bay would have its first no-hitter. On July 26, 2010, right-hander Matt Garza was brilliant in a 5-0 win over the Tigers at Tropicana Field, no-hitting Detroit while walking one and striking out six on 120 pitches.
- After famously losing multiple no-hitters in the ninth inning, Blue Jays right-hander Dave Stieb finally got the job done on Sept. 2, 1990, when he no-hit Cleveland at Municipal

Stadium, throwing 123 pitches while walking four and fanning nine in a 3-0 Toronto victory. It is the only no hitter in Blue Jays history.

- While a Rockies pitcher has yet to throw a no-hitter at the most hitter-friendly park in the Majors, Colorado's Coors Field, they do have one on the road. That came on April 17, 2010, when right-hander Ubaldo Jiménez no-hit the Braves in Atlanta in a 4-0 Rockies win. He walked six and struck out seven on 128 pitches at Turner Field, the signature moment in his finest season, one in which he finished third in NL Cy Young Award voting.
- It took a while for the Brewers to get that first no-hitter, but when they did it in 1987, it was the only no-hitter in the Majors that year. It was Juan Nieves who would accomplish the rare feat, no-hitting the Orioles in Baltimore on April 15. Though he would only pitch three seasons in the Majors, Nieves wrote his name in the record books as the first Brewer to toss a no-no, walking five and fanning seven in a 7-0 victory.
- The Mets, had to wait half a century into their existence. But on June 1, 2012, at Citi Field, it finally happened: Left-hander Johan Santana no-hit the Cardinals. He walked five, struck out eight and needed 134 pitches, but he got the job done and the Mets finally had their long-awaited no-no.
- That's a list of teams' first no-hitters. Some last no hitters—Royals Bret Saberhagen 1991 against White Sox, Braves Kent Merker 1994 against Dodgers, Rangers Kenny Rogers 1994 against Angels, Yankees David Cone 1999 against Expos, Red Sox Jon Lester 2008 against Royals.
- Two no hitters in one season: Johnny Vander Meer for the 1938 Reds (only back to back no hitters in history), Allie Reynolds in 1951 Yankees, Virgil Trucks 1952 Tigers, Nolan Ryan 1973 Angels, Roy Halladay 2010 Phillies (a perfect game against Marlins in May and then a no hitter against the Reds in the NLDS), Max Scherzer 2015 Nationals.

Jayson Stark continues to dig up the most interesting stats

Dodgers first HR of the season was an inside the park HR by Zach McKinsty (because what should have been their first HR by Cody Bellinger was negated when Bellinger passed Justin Turner on the base paths). Since 1969 this was the 4th time a team's first HR was an inside the park. Eduardo Nunez did it for the 2018 Red Sox, Delino DeShields for the 1992 Expos and Amos Otis 1979 Royals. Last time it happened for defending world series champs was 1962 with Moose Skowren for the Yankees. Last time a defending champ did it in the NL was Jim Gilliam for the 1956 Dodgers.

This was the first homer of McKinstry's big-league career. No Dodger had gone inside-the-park for his first career home run in 73 years, since ... none other than *Duke Snider* did it on May 2, 1948.

You may have noticed that last week Shohei Ohtani threw a pitch over 101 mph and hit a HR with exit velocity over 115. (he actually threw 9 pitches at 100). the last AL pitcher to hit a home run in the first inning of any game, you have to go back more than half a century — to Dave McNally, who hit a first-inning slam for the Orioles on Aug. 26, 1968. That was five years before the introduction of the DH. Ohtani became the second pitcher to bat second since 1903.

Albert Pujols received an intentional walk on the 20th anniversary of his MLB debut, walked by his former manager Tony LaRusso. The only other player to be intentionally walked on 20th anniversary of his debut was Ron Fairly in 1978 by Whitey Herzog managing the Royals. Only one player received an intentional walk on an MLB debut anniversary after 20 years—Barry Bonds in his 21st season walked by manager Willie Randolph of the Mets in 2007.

José Abreu won the AL MVP award last year, while hitting zero grand slams. So naturally, in 2021, that's all he hits. Abreu headed into the White Sox' home opener Thursday with two home runs this year — *both* of them slams. No player in the history of baseball has hit a slam for his first *three* homers of any season.

Tyler Naquin of the Reds batting lead off. Had a 7 RBI game last week. **Led off back-to-back home games with a homer. Hit four home runs in his first four games as a leadoff man.**

More amazing de Grom stats. Jacob deGrom has made 77 starts over his last three seasons: Victories: 25 - 1.11 ERA. Games he did not win: 52 - 2.58 ERA (0-19). 58 starts in which deGrom went 0-19 — *but had a 2.58 ERA*. deGrom - 2.58 ERA in games he **didn't** win. Gerrit Cole - 2.60 ERA in all his games!

The Red Sox found themselves trailing in the ninth inning *and* the 11th inning *and* the 12th inning against the Rays on Tuesday. And somehow or other, they still won — thanks to a J.D. Martinez two-run double. Well, also thanks to the extra-inning ghost-runner-on-second thing — but whatever!

According to Elias, the Red Sox hadn't won a game in which they trailed in the ninth inning and multiple extra innings in almost 70 years. Last time they did it was Aug. 21, 1954 — when Whitey Ford got dragged into a game in relief and blew leads in the 10th and 12th!

Here's an extra-inning feat that's even harder than that one. That same night, the Rockies scored in the ninth inning *and* the 10th *and* the 12th *and* the 13th. Which was a pretty remarkable thing to do, extra-inning gimmick or no extra-inning gimmick — except for one thing:

They managed to do all that *and still lose*.

According to STATS, they're only the second team in the modern era to score in the ninth inning *and* three different extra innings and get nothing out of it but a loss. The other? Jerry Hairston Sr.'s 1974 White Sox. In a Sept. 10 game against the Twins, they scored in the ninth, 11th, 13th and 14th innings but blew three extra-inning leads — and then in marched Goose Gossage to give up the game-loser in the 15th.

That wasn't the Rockies' only innovative loss of the week, because Coors is a magical place. Last Friday, they headed into the seventh inning of their game against the Dodgers with zero hits against Trevor Bauer. And then ...

They hit four home runs in one inning!

All four of them off Cy Young winners!

There were two off Bauer to wipe out the Coors no-hitter plot line. Then came two more off David Price, in his first Dodgers relief appearance. So how wild was that?

According to STATS, there have been four other instances in history of teams hitting four home runs in one inning off Cy Young winners. But naturally, the other four were all off the *same* Cy Young winner.

1977 Red Sox off Catfish Hunter
2005 White Sox off Randy Johnson
2016 Indians off Justin Verlander
2016 Dodgers off Zack Greinke

There had never been another *game* in the history of Cy Young awards in which two different Cy Youngs gave up at least two home runs apiece for the same team. But then the Dodgers and Rockies crammed that feat into the same inning — and the team whomping all those found a way to lose anyway.

The Twins' Randy Dobnak spun off this attractive little relief outing Monday in Detroit, in a game his team led, 15-1, when he arrived on the mound in the seventh inning:

5 hits, 5 runs, 2 homers, 1 grand slam (*in 3 eventful IP*)

But you know the reason that action-packed outing showed up in this column? *Because Dobnak also got a save out of it!*

So yeah, that modern save rule might need some work. But that's not Randy Dobnak's fault. We're just grateful he furnished all of this Weird and Wild material:

Did you know that Alex Colomé — who is now the Twins' actual closer, in games that are slightly tighter than 15-1 — finished third in the AL in saves last year (with 12) and didn't give up that many runs or that many homers *all last season?*

Another challenging Randy Dobnak feat: Serving up a grand slam *with two outs in the ninth inning* (to the amazing Akil Baddoo) but still getting a save out of it. You'd think that never happens. But thanks to the fabulous work of Doug (Kernels) Kern, we learned it's somehow happened three other times in the half century since the dawn of the modern save rule. What's especially incredible is that Francisco Rodríguez was responsible for *two* of the other three — for two different teams (2005 Angels, 2017 Tigers). (Kevin Gregg had the other, for the 2007 Marlins.)

Meanwhile, this wasn't even the first five-run, two-homer save in history, either. But it was only the second since 1973. (Jerome Williams collected the other on July 30, 1912.)

Ah, but when you add up all of that — the five runs, the two homers *and* the grand slam — this *was* the first time ever that any reliever had coughed up that whole package but still had one of those "SV"s next to his name in the box score.

JOE POSNANSKI (lifted from a longer column)

To me (and just about all the baseball fans I know), baseball is a much better game when the starting pitcher is a focal point. The thrill of seeing Roy Halladay pitch to David Ortiz, or Greg Maddux pitch to Tony Gwynn, or Jim Palmer pitch to Reggie Jackson, or Bob Gibson pitch to Willie Mays, this is a timeless part of the game. It isn't the same thing watching Mike Trout or Mookie Betts step up against a nameless reliever, even if that reliever is throwing 100 mph, because it isn't exactly the action of baseball that thrills many of us. It's the story. It's the history. It's the buildup to the moment. When it's Clayton Kershaw facing Ronald Acuña Jr. with the bases loaded and the game on the line, a million emotions flood the mind — emotions about Kershaw's greatness and Acuña's unlimited talent, age versus youth, lefty versus righty, and I'm all-in.

But that never really happens anymore. Instead, Acuña is facing Jimmy Nelson or Victor González or Corey Knebel, and that might be the right move but it's much less interesting.

And it's less interesting when the team with the best starter in baseball is more likely to lose the game than win it. And I'm not sure what can be done about it — I'm not sure anything can be done about it. But I do know this: While other sports build around their biggest stars, baseball teams over the last couple of decades have gone pretty far to diminish the importance of the best starters in the game. That doesn't seem great.

BARRELS

Blasts that the Statcast folks call “barrels” — is not all that it takes to be a good player or even a good hitter.

To get into it a bit deeper, let's define what a “barrel” is. As you probably know, the good folks at Statcast get a dizzying amount of data from the camera-based system at every ballpark. With that system, they can measure a million things, including the speed and spin and precise location of every pitched ball, the reaction time of defenders, the pure speed of base runners, the launch angle and exit velocity of every batted ball and so much more.

A barrel is more or less the ideal blend of high exit velocity (at least 98 mph) and launch angle (which starts between 26 and 30 degrees and adjusts based on just how hard the ball is hit). The math can get slightly complicated, but the idea is simple and instinctive; we're talking about balls hit very hard and on a line. Barrels are not always hit, but every year batters have hit at least .500 on barrels and slugged at least 1.500. These are the hardest-hit balls.

Remember, just hitting barrels isn't enough — even the very best hitters will have only 65 or 70 barrels in a season. In other words, you have to find ways to be valuable even when you don't make perfect contact,

OHTANI

ANAHEIM -- Two-way [Shohei Ohtani](#) did it all in a historic showing on national television on Sunday night against the White Sox, striking out seven over 4 2/3 innings while reaching 100 mph nine times, smacking a 451-foot home run and getting involved in a scary play at home plate at the end of his outing.

But Ohtani is [fine after his collision with the White Sox's José Abreu](#) in the fifth inning and his record-setting night came in a [7-4 win](#) capped by a [walk-off three-run homer](#) from Jared Walsh at Angel Stadium. Ohtani hit and pitched for the first time in his Major League career, becoming the first pitcher to bat second in a game since 1903. And he made it worthwhile with a towering homer on the first pitch he saw in the first inning that left the bat at an astonishing 115.2 mph

to become the first AL starting pitcher to homer against an AL team since Roric Harrison on the final day of the 1972 season -- and the final regular-season day without a designated hitter in the junior circuit.

He now holds the hardest pitch thrown this season by any player at 100.6 mph and the hardest-hit homer by any player at 115.2 mph. And he's the first player to hit a ball at least 110 mph off the bat and throw a pitch at least 100 mph in the same game tracked by Statcast.

But it's a rare feat in the Majors. He was the first pitcher to bat second since Jack Dunleavy did so for the Cardinals on Sept. 7, 1903. And only two pitchers have hit for themselves with the designated hitter available since Ken Brett did it twice in 1976. Andy Sonnanstine hit for himself in 2009 because of a mistake on the lineup card, while Madison Bumgarner batted for himself in an Interleague start against the A's in 2016.

SONS From WSJ

"Junior this and junior that—where are they all coming from?"

Three-time All-Star Bret Boone was talking about second-generation baseball players. This year there will be more than twice as many second-generation big-leaguers as there were in the 1970s. The Padres' 22-year-old Fernando Tatis Jr. may be the game's most exciting young player. He could join the Dodgers' Cody Bellinger, the Royals' Adalberto Mondesi, the Pirates' Ke'Bryan Hayes and the Blue Jays' trio of Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette and Cavan Biggio in an All-Star lineup—all of them 25 or younger, all sons of major leaguers.

Athletes in other sports follow their fathers into the pros, too. This season there will be about 45 second-generation players on NFL teams, with their sprawling rosters, and 30 in the NBA, including the Warriors' Steph Curry, the Cavaliers' Kevin Love and the Pacers' Domantas Sabonis. But baseball tops the list with 50. "It's the culture of baseball," says Mr. Boone, a third-generation ballplayer who followed his father and grandfather to the majors—an MLB first. "Other sports are more about pure physical talent. Baseball's physical, too: a hitter needs a certain level of fast-twitch muscle fibers; a pitcher had better throw 90. But it's not *as* physical, and that lets other stuff in," he says.

Stuff like how to work counts and steal signs and the old chestnut about "knowing how to carry yourself." It stands to reason that youngsters who grow up around pro athletes pick up cues on how they behave. By the time they reach Little League they expect to excel, and when they step into a big-league clubhouse as professionals, they feel they belong. Last summer the Washington Nationals signed a shortstop out of Princeton: Jake Boone, Bret's son, who has a chance to become the first fourth-generation player in major league history.

Having a ballplayer for a father can even help athletes who grow up to play other sports. Patrick Mahomes, the Kansas City Chiefs' \$450-million quarterback, is the son of Pat Mahomes, a big-league pitcher for the Mets, Twins and four other teams. "Patrick grew up in baseball, watching his dad and his teammates," says Mike Rathwell, CEO of Driveline Baseball, the Seattle-based hub of the latest baseball science. "It makes you think about some of the throws he gets off under pressure—he looks like a shortstop."

According to sports economist Andrew Zimbalist, "The simplest explanation might be best: Baseball's a summer game. Kids are out of school, with more time to spend with Dad." But many sons of big-leaguers call that a common misperception, recalling that their fathers were busy with their own careers when they were small. Barry Bonds and Ken Griffey Jr., the best second-generation players so far, both denied that their dads coached them. "My father never taught me," Mr. Bonds once told me. "He was on the road."

What else could help explain the rise of big-league sons? "Baseball clubhouses have traditionally been more open to players' families. You don't see many children in NFL or NBA locker rooms," Dr. Zimbalist says. "Football players may also be discouraging their sons to play due to the injury risk."

Neurologists are working on another possible answer, having to do with brain cells known as mirror neurons. In 1991, researchers at the University of Parma in Italy showed that certain cells in the brains of macaque monkeys fire when a monkey eats a peanut or sees another monkey eating one. "Monkey see, monkey do" may be more than an old saying: The so-called mirror neurons in the macaques' brains make observation function like firsthand experience.

More recent research suggests that humans rely on such cells far more than monkeys do. Mirror neurons explain how infants only a few hours old know to stick out their tongues at adults who do the same to them. "We are mimicking machines," says Dr. Marco Iacoboni of the Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center at UCLA. "Observation is key to human learning." He believes that mirror neurons may also be a key to sports performance.

One of the starkest examples is golfer Phil Mickelson. As a tyke, young Phil spent hour after hour in a highchair opposite his father, watching his dad hit golf balls. When Phil began swinging a club, he swung left-handed to mirror his father's stroke, earning the nickname "Lefty," even though he is right-handed in everything but golf.

Whether or not ballplayers' sons get much direct coaching from their fathers, they do get vivid, up-close views of their dads and their dads' teammates—the best in the world at a particular set of skills. "Of course you and I can watch the same guys on TV or video, but the effect is not the same," Dr. Iacoboni says. "For reasons we don't fully understand, watching a screen doesn't activate our minds the same way. It's the difference between a face-to-face meeting and a Zoom call. Our brains are built for direct experience."

Nature and nurture give second-generation players a double advantage. “They have a leg up from the start,” says Mr. Rathwell. “Genetics for sure—these guys are the sons of some of the world’s best athletes.” Their mothers tend to be fit as well, “and their environment maps to all the right things.”

Mr. Rathwell expects to see more legacies and dynasties as training gets still more scientific. In a near future when every athlete has a nearly equal chance to max out his or her talents, “The only limit will be their genetic ceiling.” But baseball’s efforts to become an NBA-style international pastime may deepen the talent pool. “Will the next great player be Fernando Tatis III or somebody from Lithuania or China? We don’t know. In terms of sports science, we’re still in the bottom of the first.”

—Mr. Cook is the author of “The Dad Report: Fathers, Son and Baseball Families.”

MORE TIDBITS

The original baseball roundup column was written by Ray Fitzgerald of the Boston Globe. It has been a mainstay since at least 1970 and has been hosted by great Peter Gammons, Gordon Edes, Larry Whiteside and Nick Cafardo. Peter Abraham summarizes now. Here are some his comments today:

The Rule 5 Draft of veteran minor leaguers has produced some memorable finds over the years, **Roberto Clemente** being the most notable. It’s unlikely any future Hall of Famers were picked last Dec. 10, but the first seven picks of that draft broke camp with their new teams. That group includes 22-year-old outfielder **Akil Neomon Baddoo**, who was 5 of 11 with three extra-base hits and seven RBIs in his first four games for the Tigers, and righthander **Garrett Whitlock**, who has impressed the Red Sox at every turn since being picked from the Yankees organization ... MLB has informed teams that the amateur draft, which starts June 11, will be 20 rounds after being dropped to five last season as a cost-cutting measure. The Red Sox have five of the first 136 picks, starting with No. 4 ... **Francisco Lindor** will make \$43.3 million from the Mets this season — \$22.3 million in salary and a \$21 million signing bonus. He’s certainly well protected in the event of a work stoppage in 2022 ... **Madison Bumgarner** is 1-5 with a 7.28 ERA and 1.58 WHIP in 11 starts for the Diamondbacks and has \$60 million on his contract from 2022-24 ... With access to Canada still tightly controlled, the Blue Jays opened their home schedule Thursday with a 7-5 loss against the Angels at TD Ballpark in Dunedin, Fla. The Jays played their home games in Toronto in 2019 and in Buffalo last season. The last team to begin three consecutive seasons in different home ballparks were the 1914-16 Boston Braves. They played at the South End Grounds, Fenway Park, and then Braves Field. The Braves played the first half of the 1915 season at Fenway while Braves Field was being completed. The Blue Jays are expected to stay in Dunedin until June and shift their operations back to Buffalo to escape the heat and late afternoon rain that hits most days ... The Dodgers gave **David Price** a World Series ring even though he opted out of last season. Price plans to auction off the ring and donate the

proceeds to The Players Alliance. The ring has 232 diamonds, 53 sapphires, weighs 11 carats, and comes in a box that includes a spinning platform, an interior light, and an LCD screen that plays four minutes of season highlights, complete with sound ... The Yankees have used their farm system to make some creative moves. They gave the Red Sox 23-year-old righthander **Frank German** to take back **Adam Ottavino** and \$8,150,000 of his \$9 million salary for this season. Then they sent two prospects to Texas to get **Rougned Odor** as a lefty hitter off the bench. The Rangers are responsible for all but the prorated minimum of the \$27 million Odor has remaining on his contract ... **Bill Bryk**, a longtime scout, died Tuesday at the age of 70. He worked for several teams, including the Diamondbacks for the last 11 seasons, but was best known as a close confidante of the late **Kevin Towers** when he was running the Padres ... Happy birthday to Red Sox game planning coordinator **Jason Varitek**, who is 49. He remains the only player to play in the Little League World Series, College World Series, MLB World Series, the Olympics, and the World Baseball Classic. Another World Series champion, **Trot Nixon**, is 47. And **Bret Saberhagen** is 57. He was 26-17 with a 3.90 ERA for the Sox in his final 62 career starts from 1997-2001.